Consumer Behaviors and a New Media Literacy

Kanchana Meesilapavikkai*

Abstract

Consumer behavior includes mental assessments, emotional responses and physical activities during the selection, purchase, use and disposal of products and services. Existing models of the purchasing process vary, but usually share at least four significant parts: 1) Consumer 2) Marketing Inputs 3) Psychological Inputs 4) Purchase Decisions.

Among the most important influences on this process are the media. In the 21st century, new media have advanced and expanded in an unprecedented way to become pervasive and penetrate every aspect of our society. A new media literacy plays an essential role for any citizen to participate fully in this society. But it is individual social skills and cultural competencies that create today's media environment for active digital participation.

In this rapidly changing situation, a positive consumer behavior leads to a purchase decision on the basis of factors including product, location, and brand choice. The decision to buy is often driven by demand that marketers have generated using new media. There is a mutual need for increased media literacy, by marketers to optimize promotion and by consumers as the receivers of marketing information. Potentially, brand 'trust' will make this New Media Literacy and Buyer Decision Process model simpler, but further research on the relative importance of different influences on consumer-decision making, related to culture, for some large purchases is suggested.

Keywords: Purchasing Behavior Models, Social Media, Influences, Decision Process Model, Cultural Approaches

Consumer Behavior and Process Models

Consumer behavior is the study of individuals, groups, or organizations in the selecting, purchasing, using, and disposing of goods and services to satisfy needs and desires. It examines not only what behaviors of consumer exhibit but also the reasons for those behaviors (Gibler & Nelson, 1998). Consumer behavior includes mental comparisons, emotional reactions and physical activity (Kotler, 1999).

Other researchers, Solomon et al. (2006, p.6) state that "consumer behavior is the study of the processes involved when

* Assistant Professor, Dr., Master of Communication Arts Program School of Communication Arts, Sripatum University, Thailand

individuals or groups select, purchase, use or dispose of products, services, ideas or experiences to satisfy needs and desires."

The general definitions above are similar and consumers purchase different products because they use different **buying decisions processes**. These processes consist of several steps. GilaniNia (2010) points out that purchasing some goods do not need to pass through all stages of the buying decision process but some purchases are so important that the consumer is forced to do all steps carefully and meticulously. These steps include:

1. Identifying the problem: The first stage of the decision-making process is that people can feel the difference between the current and desired situation to resolve the differences.

2. Data collection: The second stage; information can be internal as experiences and external as family, exhibits, etc.

3. Assessment options: The third stage: after gathering information, the consumer is ready to make a decision. At this point, he should be able to evaluate different options and choose products that meet his or her desires.

4. Purchase: The fourth stage, resulting from all marketing activities. The consumer selects a product that satisfies his need and buys it.

5. After purchase behavior: The last stage, where the consumer compares purchased products with ideas, products, competitors, perceptions and expectations of the product and satisfaction or dissatisfaction with different reasons (Jeddi et al., 2013).

However, Cohen (1991) proposes a Buyer Decision Process that consists of four significant parts as in Figure 1.
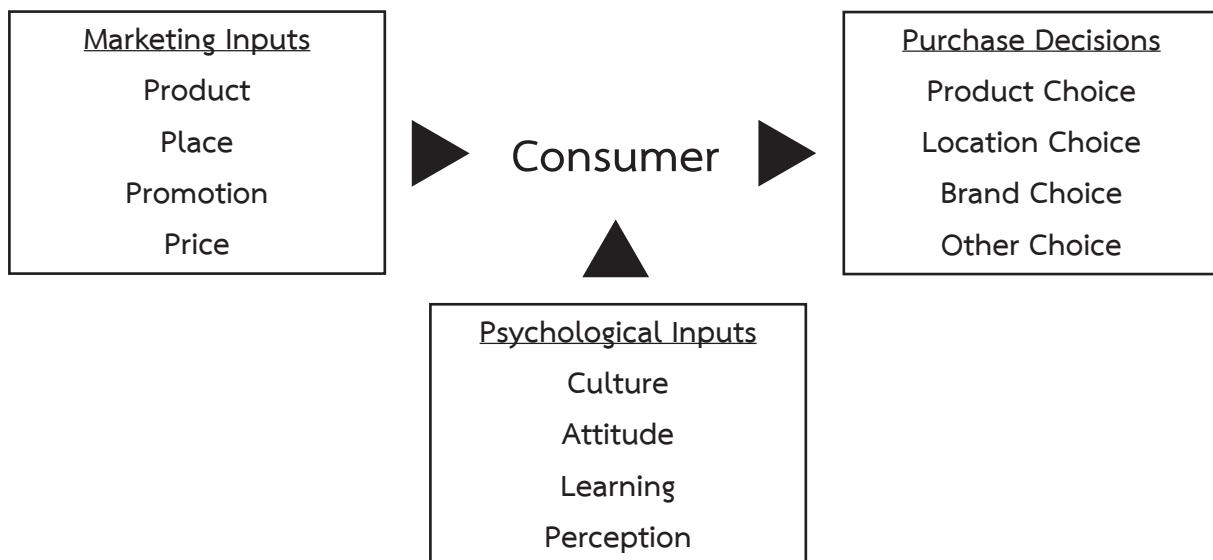

Figure 1: Buyer Decision Process
Based on Cohen (1991)

1. Consumer: Person who is the target in the marketing process.

2. Marketing Inputs: Marketing mixture; product, place, promotion and price are very important to consumers in making a decision.

3. Psychological Inputs: This perspective includes culture, attitude, learning and perception that influences the buying process.

4.Purchase Decisions: When consumer wants to buy a product, he/she makes the decision on the basis of: product choice, location choice, brand choice and other choices.

With the new social context, Perner (2010) points out the potential benefit of online research methods. The Internet reaches the great majority of households in the U.S., and thus, online research provides new opportunity and has increased in use. Social media are about much more than posting pictures and catching up with consumers, they are actively engaging with brands as a part of the purchasing decision. Social media are making a big impact as they emphasize the power of word-of-mouth, strengthen the relationship between businesses and consumers, keeps all stakeholders informed, and can turn a "want" into a "need" (Elmerraji, 2015). New media have the power to grab consumers' attention and cause them to take action.

Defining Literacy and New Media

Literacies are tools for learning and reading the world. For the consumer, new media literacy is the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and participate with messages in a variety of forms before making decisions. Jenkins et al. (2006) identified 'new media literacy skills' (NMLs) as Play, Performance, Simulation, Appropriation, Multitasking, Distributed Cognition, Collective Intelligence, Judgment, Trans-media Navigation, Networking, Negotiation, and Visualization.

The term 'new media' broadly refers to computer and communication technologies (Chen, Wu, & Wang, 2011), or a wide range of changes in media production, distribution and use. A majority of researchers tend to define new media by its technical characteristics including digitally: dispersal, virtually, modularity, multimodality, hybridity, interactivity, automation, and variability.

The development and diffusion of new media and digital technologies has profoundly affected the literacy experiences of today. Consumers are the end destination of marketing information. To fulfill the promise of digital citizenship, they acquire multimedia communication skills that include the ability to compose messages using language, graphic design, images, and sound, and know how to use these skills to engage in civic life.

Although, consumers are the end receivers of the marketing communication process and their behaviors are not passive and are usually active. New media literacy is very important for any consumers for learning and reading 'marketing games' from advertisers.

Combining Consumer Behavior with New Media

Marketers need to have a good knowledge of consumer behavior. They need to study the various factors that influence behavior of their target customers. Consumer behavior is not static. It undergoes change over a period of time, depending on the nature of products.

The new media literacy and buyer decision process model proposed below integrates the concepts of Cohen (1991), and new media literacy as the destination of communication/consumer. Today, technology is changing through continuous innovation. In the same way, the marketing process has to adapt to use new media for consumers to achieve specific marketing goals. Consumers in the 21st century have changed their behavior to receive content from new media. So a new media literacy and buyer decision process model is proposed (Figure 2).
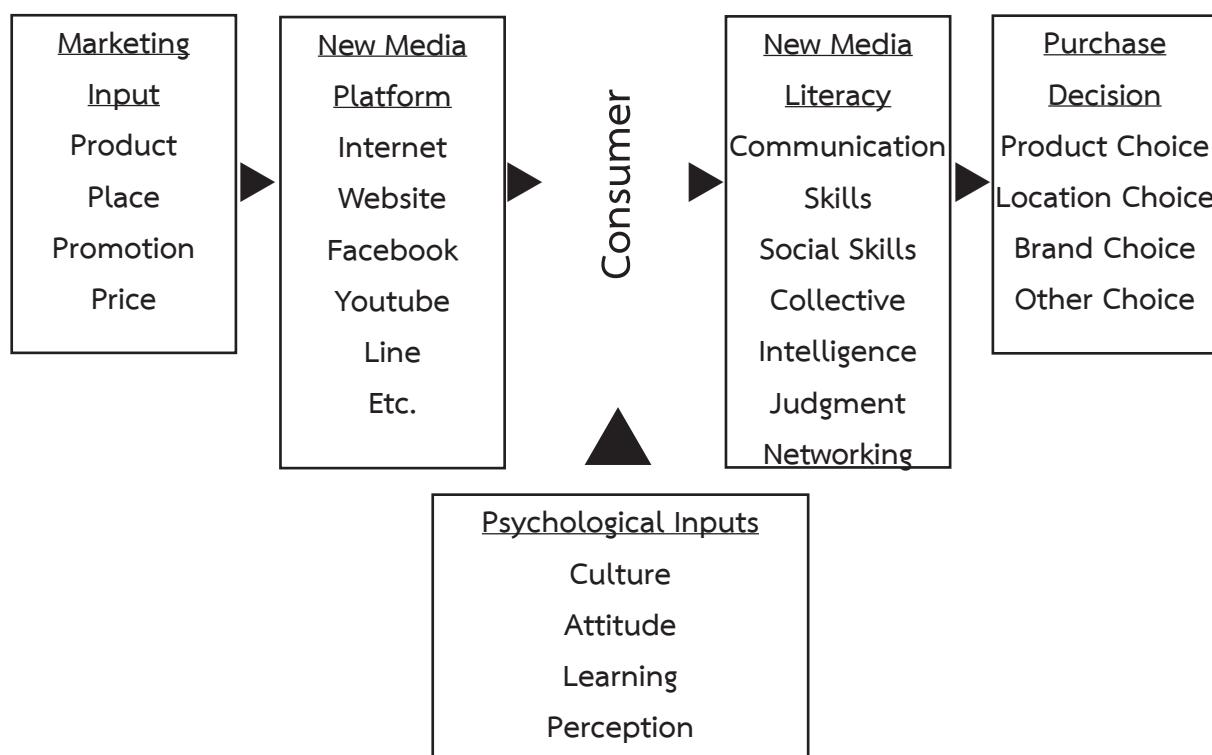

Figure 2: An integrative New Media Literacy
and Buyer Decision Process Model

The components are as follows:

1. Consumer: the individual or group who is the target of marketing.

2. Marketing Inputs: mixed information of product, place, promotion and price are most important to consumers. Marketer plans for optional presentation.

3. New Media Platform: New media are the marketing objects which use digital computer technology for brand distribution and exhibition as Internet, Websites, Facebook, YouTube, and Line, for examples.

4. Psychological Inputs: This perspective includes culture, attitude, learning and perceptions that influence the buying process.

5. New Media Literacy: Communication Skills, consumers are in the process of decoding messages. They have to integrate new media context and content about mixed marketing, from persuasive advertising to how much to believe. Effective communication is most important. Therefore, new media literacy of consumers reflects the ability to effectively analyze. Social Skills; consumers realize in Collective Intelligence as the ability to pool knowledge and compare competitive brands under their marketing process; Judgment: the ability to evaluate the reliability and credibility of different information sources of products or services; and Networking: the ability to search for, synthesize information of brands.

6. Purchase Decisions: Consumers make decision for purchasing by concern with product choice, location choice, brand choice, and other choices.

Understanding consumer behavior is a vital aspect of marketing and critical to understand how potential customers will respond to a new product or service. However, marketers also need to give more consideration to different cultural approaches-especially in relation to large or long-term product categories.

Behavioral and other differences, between 'Western' and 'Asian' cultures have been debated for many years (Servaes, 1999; Hofstede, 2000; Weaver, 2000). Despite acknowledged local variability and the impacts of international processes, such as globalization, it is clear that there are significant differences in approach between Asian and other cultures-which would logically extend to consumer behaviors. For example, recent studies of business negotiation strategies showed that Asian negotiators thought in the longer term and were more concerned with team or group benefits over timerather than immediate individual gains (Su, Cheng & Zhan, 2014; Chen, Zhan & Su, 2015). The decision-making process for a large, long-term purchase (e.g. car, house, business) is also a negotiation process and may be subject to stronger cultural influences, than current general purchasing models allow for. An Asian consumer may place for more importance on current, or predicted, needs for the broader family than a non-Asian consumer.

Summary

The basic interactions leading to consumer decisions are well understood, although it needs to be acknowledged that some influences, such as context or

individual circumstances vary with time and are difficult estimate. Positive consumer behavior leads to a purchase decision on the basis of different motives of: product option, location, brand, and other factors. This decision often results from demand that marketers have increased by matching new media and consumers.

The rapid development and expansion of new communication technologies, with their potential for more insistent marketing, poses challenges for both marketers and customers. On the one hand marketers need to influence consumers to increase their purchases. On the other hand, access and use of the new media requires consumers to be more literate to filter and utilize information provided. Potentially, brand will make this New Media Literacy and Buyer Decision Process model shorter because of 'Trust' in the product and organization. Given the known differences between 'Western' and 'Asian' cultures, more research on the relative importance of cultural influences on consumers-especially relating to large or long-term purchase-is recommended.

Bibliography

Chen, D.T., Wu, J., & Wang, Y. M. (2011). Unpacking New Media Literacy. *Journal on Systemic, Cybernetics and Informatics*, *9*(2), 84-88.

Chen, J., Zhan, W., & Su, Y. (2015). From Relationality, Behavioral Dynamics to Dynamic Relationality: a New Perspective on Cross-cultural Negotiations. In Camillo, A.A. (Ed.), *Global Enterprise Management (Volume 1): New Perspectives on Challenges and Future Developments* (pp. 171-188). NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Cohen. (1991). *Buyer Decision Process.* Retrieved from http://www.marketingteacher.com/consumer-buyer-behaviour/

Elmerraji, K. (2015). *Top Ways that Social Media Influences Consumer Behavior.* Retrieved from http://tcapushnpull.com/social-media-2/top-ways-that-social-media-influences-consumer-behavior/

Gibler, K. M., & Nelson, S. L. (1998). Consumer Behavior Applications to Real Estate. *In the American Real Estate Society Meeting* (pp. 1-21). GA: Mercer University.

GilaniNia, SH. (2010). *Introduction to industrial marketing*. Rasht: Kadvsan.

Hofstede, G. (2000). The cultural relatively of the quality of life concept. In Weaver, G.R. (Ed.), *Culture, Communication and Conflict* (pp. 138-148). Boston: Pearson Publishing.

Jeddi, S., Atefi, Z., Jalali, M., Poureisa, A., & Haghi, H. (2013). Consumer behavior and consumer buying decision process. *International Journal of Business and Behavioral Sciences, 3*(5), 20-23.

Jenkins, H., Clinton, K., Purushatma, R., Robison, A., & Weigel, M. (2006). *Confronting the Challenges of a Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century.* Retrieved from http://digitallearning.macfound.org/atf/cf/%7B7E45C7E0-A3E0-4B89-AC9C-E807E1B0AE4E%7D/JENKINS_WHITE_PAPER.PDF

Kotler, P. (1999). *Kotler on Marketing: How to Create, Win, and Dominate Markets.* NY: Free Press.

Perner, L. (2010). *Consumer Behavior: The Psychology of Marketing* (Research report). CA: University of Southern California.

Perrlau, F. (copyright 2016). *The 4 Factors Influencing Consumer Behavior*. Retrieved from http://theconsumerfactor.com/en/4-factors-influencing-consumer-behavior/

Servaes, J. (1999). *Communication for Development: One World, Multiple Cultures, Cresskill.* NJ: Hampton Press.

Solomon, M., Bamossy, G.T., Askegaard, S. & Hogg, M.K. (2006). *Consumer Behavior: A European* Perspective (3rd ed.). Harlow: Prentice Hall.

Su, Y., Cheng, J., & Zhan, W. (2014). The Study of Relational Behavior Adaptation Process in International Business Negotiations. *Asia-Pacific Economic Review, 182*(1), 46-52.

Weaver, G. R. (2000). Contrasting and comparing cultures. In Weaver, G. R. (Ed.), *Culture, Communication and Conflict: Readings in Intercultural Relations* (pp.72-77). Boston: Pearson Publishing.