

5.1.8: Perception vs. Expectation

Learning Objectives

- Define customer perception and customer expectation

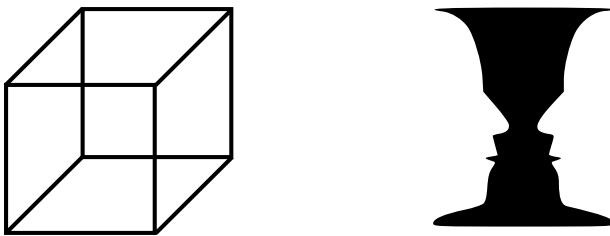
A person's perceptions, along with their beliefs, attitudes, and values can substantially influence his or her experience and involvement with products.

Perception

Perception can have various meanings but in marketing, it is often described as a process by which a consumer identifies, organizes, and interprets information to create meaning. A consumer will selectively perceive what they will ultimately classify as their needs and wants.

Perception is a psychological variable involved in the purchase decision process that is known to influence consumer behavior. Other variables included in this consumer process include: motivation, learning, attitude, personality, and lifestyle. All of these concepts are crucial in interpreting the consumer buying process and can also help guide marketing efforts.

In order to understand the subjectivity of one's perception, we might consider optical illusions where one image can look like two things at once.



Necker Cube and Rubin Vase: These are two optical illusions that illustrate how perception may differ from reality. On the left, we see a cube when in fact it is a flat image on our screen. On the right, the vase actually resembles two faces looking at each other.

For example, some people may see an image as a candlestick while another may see the same image as two people facing one another. Another example in advertising is known as **Selective Perception**, which is the process by which individuals perceive what they want to from media messages and they may disregard the rest.

Seymour Smith, a prominent advertising researcher, found evidence for Selective Perception in advertising research in the early 1960s, and he defined it as “a procedure by which people let in, or screen out, advertising material they have an opportunity to see or hear. They do so because of their attitudes, beliefs, usage preferences and habits, conditioning, etc.” People who like, buy, or are considering buying a brand are more likely to notice advertising than are those who are neutral toward the brand. This fact has repercussions within the field of advertising research because any post-advertising analysis that examines the differences in attitudes or buying behavior among those aware versus those unaware of advertising is flawed unless pre-existing differences are controlled for. In other words, understanding a person's preference for brands will influence their decisions.

Selective Perceptions are categorized under two types: a low level of perception, known as perceptual vigilance, and a higher level of perception, known as perceptual defense.

Customer Experience

In general, four main factors influence a consumers's experience, involvement, and satisfaction with a product:

- **Personal:** A person's perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, and values can substantially influence his or her experience and involvement with products. For example, certain cultures highly discourage women from exposing some of their body parts as part of their religious beliefs, which inevitably affects their

consumption of clothing. Other examples of cultural influences include language, myths, customs, rituals, and laws. Consumers tend to be more involved with products that they believe can fill their own needs, which in turn are regarded as holding importance and relevance in their lives. Personal or individual factors can also serve as strong influences, including gender, age, income level or social class, ethnicity, and sexual orientation.

- **Object:** The degree of information that a consumers have about a product, including how well they can distinguish its characteristics, can also effect their experience, involvement, and satisfaction. Typically, the higher a consumer's product knowledge, the more involved with it he or she will be. Deeper knowledge about a product also translates into higher involvement because the consumer perceives it as more important, especially if some of that knowledge pertains to characteristics that hold personal meaning.
- **Situational:** Products that can easily conform to and enrich a consumer's lifestyle tend to be consumed with more frequency and involvement. For example, a busy working mother might rely heavily on her smart phone to keep her organized and effective in an effortless manner.
- **Social:** Social influence can deeply affect consumer behavior, especially as related to the products they consider and consume. A consumer's social network has a strong influence on the products he or she uses, since individuals tend to rely on the opinions and advice of friends and family. Other social influences can include opinion leaders and reference groups.

Consumer Involvement

Consumer involvement tends to vary dramatically depending on the type of product and its relationship to the consumer. In general, consumer involvement tends to be higher for products that are very expensive (e.g., a home, a car) or are considered highly significant in the consumer's life (e.g., a newborn baby product).

Marketing strategy should take into account the level of involvement that a consumer has with a specific product, as this also dictates the type of information that the consumer needs to process in order to make a purchase decision.

The following levels of information processing are required, which can help dictate the marketing approach that should be used:

- Low-Involvement purchases tend to be made by habitual decisions (e.g., dish washing liquid, toothbrush). These require minimal information processing.
- Moderate-Involvement purchases tend to be made by simple decisions (e.g., orange juice, snacks). These often may require some evaluation of alternatives.
- High-Involvement purchases tend to be made by lengthy or more involved decisions (e.g., a car or a house). These are usually considered highly important to consumers and require extensive information processing.

Print advertising is considered high-involvement because newspapers and magazines provide information that can be processed clearly and can help shape attitudes and influence decisions. Television advertising is considered low-involvement because it presents information that is considered passive.

The four main types of buying behavior in consumer marketing depend on the level of consumer involvement:

High involvement & significant differences between brands (complex buying behavior):

- Example: Houses, kitchen renovation
- One-time sale
- Consumers need evaluation and pre-sale learning
- Selling activities are key

Low involvement & significant differences between brands (variety-seeking buying behavior):

- Example: Retail food stuff
- Consumers have added buying triggers

- Consumers want free samples, special deals

High involvement & few differences between brands (dissonance-reducing buying behavior):

- Example: Consumer electronics, top-line sport equipment
- Decision making is difficult both pre- and post-purchase

Low involvement & few differences between brands (habitual buying behavior):

- Example: Food, personal care products
- Brand familiarity and promotion with convenience is key
- Consumers look for price/sales promotions

? practice questions

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