

4.14: Putting It Together- Identifying and Understanding Customer Behavior

You started this module considering a customer faced with a multitude of options in the yogurt section, watching as they made their choice. And, you considered, what made them pick the selection they did? Was it brand, flavor, or price? Health credentials? Maybe advertising? Their previous experience or an impulse, a desire to try something new? Could it have been based on a recommendation or by accident? Were they motivated by all of these things? Or, none of them?

After working through this module, you should have developed an appreciation for the multiple factors that influence a customer's decision.

Certainly, it's important to recognize that customers can have conflicting needs. These needs can be spoken or unsaid and come from rational or emotional motives. They can be broken down into stated, real, unstated, unexpected, and secret, as well as categorized based on which needs on Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which includes:

- Physiology
- Security
- Social Belonging
- Esteem
- Self-actualization
- Self-transcendence

Above all, however, consumers seek value reflected across all interactions, including in exchange, use, and experience.

For their part, marketers add another layer of complexity by attempting to influence consumers by improving the positioning of products and brands, so that how they satisfy needs is magnified and weaknesses are minimized. The multi-attribute attitude model helps with this pursuit by measuring and assessing consumer attitudes. The model has three components, attributes, beliefs, and weights. Attributes are the characteristics of the product or brand or firm, beliefs reflect how much a consumer believes that the product or brand or firm will deliver the attribute, and weights are the significance of the attribute.

$$\text{Attribute as Differentiator} = \text{Beliefs (1 – 10 Scale)} \times \text{Weight (1- 10 Scale)}$$

By weighting beliefs and weights for each attribute, the multi-attribute attitude model can help marketers understand how to position the attributes of their product or brand or firm more effectively to differentiate for a given market segment. Typically, this is an outcome of segmentation, targeting and positioning.

Segmentation helps marketers understand the population, the size and market potential of each segment. Then, in selecting a segment to target, the firm identifies where it will focus its marketing activity. Finally, in positioning a product for the target, the firm makes decisions that inform the marketing mix (the 4 Ps). This is critical for several reasons. For one, consumers are unique, informed by individual experiences and perspective. Secondly, products and brands and firms cannot be all things to all people. Thus, they must target specific segments within the population whose needs they are best able to satisfy. And third, targeting specific segments allows for firms to most effectively deploy their marketing resources to meet consumer needs

Consumer needs, motivations, assumptions, beliefs and biases are unique, informed by individual experiences and perspective. Thus, it's critical that marketers work hard to understand the buying process and competing consumer needs, In doing so, they can be best prepared to provide value to their customer target.

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