CONSUMER PURCHASING BEHAVIOR: A CONSIDERATION OF THE COMBINED INFLUENCE OF CULTURE & CONFORMITY ON CONSUMER DECISIONS
Namisha Balagopal (Ian Skurnik)
Department of Marketing

Formerly, management has been able to understand their consumers simply through the experience of selling and purchasing. However, current growth trends of various industries, firms, and world markets have removed decisions makers from having direct contact with consumers. Firms now highly depend on statistical analysis and behavioral theories. As a result, large amounts of money are spent to understand consumer’s attitudes (Kotler, 1965). An analysis's of consumer behavior is vital to understanding approaches that must be taken in order to provide a personalized consumer experiences and therefore allow firms to thrive.

Cognitive psychological approaches focus on an individual’s ability to conduct information processing. The application of these approaches can create a successful foundation for consumer purchasing and behavior models. These models can be used for marketing purposes to provide an understanding of the underlying motivations and attitudes of consumers.

There is no generally accepted model of buying behavior. A marketing strategist instead recognizes important areas of various models to create a unique model based on a firm. Different products, variables, and behavioral mechanisms may be considered important based on different firms (Kotler, 1965).

Conformity to gain acceptance into social groups plays an influential role in the consumption choices individuals make regardless of industry, it is the concept of changing ones behavior to fit within a group. Social pressures compel individuals into accepted norms to conform to hierarchical cultures. A variety of attitudes are covered such as the need to please group members to gain acceptance, the need to make an accurate decision, and the embracing of behaviors due to group membership. The combination of these desires makes individuals susceptible to influences of those who surround them (Jefferson, 2012).

When consumers make their choices, they can vary in the direction they choose to pursue. They can conform to behaviors and attitudes of the members of their group by making the same purchases, or they can make purchases that are vastly different to seek distinctiveness from their group. The choice that an individual makes depends on if there is a need to feel inclusion with a group. If this feeling has been satisfied or there is a negative interaction with the group, individuals are more likely to make distinctive purchase (Henry, 1976).

It is important to understand consumption choices as they will vary based on an individual’s attitude, beliefs, and morals. Eastern and Western cultures are known to have different views, attitudes, and conforming behaviors. The Eastern culture values conforming behaviors, while the Western culture values uniqueness. Values are represented in the purchases individuals make so they are accepted into their culture and theoretically achieve a utility of happiness (Henry, 1976).
Models such as the Marshallian Economic Model created the foundation for consumer buying theories such as the Theory of Buying Behavior, the Engell-Blackwell-Miniard Model, the Engel-Kollat-Blackwell Model, and the Hawkins-Best-Coney Model. The Consumer Decision Making Model, the Decision Making Model, and the Hierarchy of Effects Model take into consideration the steps in the decision-making consumers go through. This paper will outline the mentioned models, an overview on the influence of conforming behavior, and finally the cultural differences between Western and Eastern consumers.