DIFFERENTIAL RESPONSE TO MARKET MOTIVATIONAL TECHNIQUES

John Harp

In order to understand or attempt to understand the behavior of the American consumer, one must view him in his societal context. A logical starting point would seem to be the salient structural characteristics of the society in which he lives.

Prevalent errors of both public and private action may occur from a failure to foresee the repercussions that often arise out of the total social system within which the particular acts take place. And often even a systematic analysis of various isolated parts of the social structure turns out to be highly unrealistic, if not simply fallacious, by reason of this same neglect of context.

Perhaps the best single description of American society is found in the use of the term, popular culture or mass culture. Unlike any other type of culture, popular culture was facilitated and perhaps necessitated by mass production. One has to look to the process of industrialization for the genesis of our popular culture. Industrialization or mass production has:

1. shortened work time and toil
2. lengthened leisure
3. increased income
4. increased mobility
5. lessened the role of primary groups and expanded the role of secondary groups
6. facilitated the use of mass media
7. contributed to mass education

With regard to the kinds of things consumed, the consumption patterns which distinguished the rich is attenuated. John Stuart Mill, nearly a hundred years ago, perceived this process of homogenization.

"The circumstances which surround different classes and individuals, and shape their characters, are daily becoming more assimilated. Formerly, different ranks, different neighborhoods, different trades and professions lived in what might be called different worlds; at present to a greater degree in the same. Comparatively speaking

John Harp is assistant professor of Economics and Sociology, Iowa State University.

they now read the same things, go to the same places, have their hopes and fears directed to the same objects, have the same rights and liberties, and the same means of asserting them."

Yet the homogenization which Mill cited 100 years ago is an unavoidable effect of the industrial system and its concomitant prosperity. Technological change and the altering patterns of demand also cause the products of each firm, as well as its methods of production and of marketing to change rapidly. 2/ Hence, the longevity of each skill we acquire, the demand for the work we do and the positions we have established are subject to change. Each of us will probably change more than once in his lifetime his residence and his occupation. In addition, the characteristics of the various groups and social classes, the attitudes they foster and the positions they occupy are themselves far from stable. All this is an integral part of our social system. A high degree of mobility is essential if one is to reap the rewards of the system.

In summary then:
1. "Industrialization has made more goods available to more people with less work and less individual craftsmanship.
2. The rise of scientific mentality, its spread through education and its technological applications, has rapidly uprooted group traditions and structures.
3. Groups have become more fluid and accessible, membership less permanent; feelings more equalitarian and undifferentiated; relationships discontinuous, temporary, and less intimate.
4. Personal, social and religious bonds have been extended, blurred and disassociated from each other and often weakened." 3/

It is within the societal context described above, that popular culture is sold or mass taste finds an environment so conducive to its propagation and growth.

2/ For an example of changes in agricultural markets, see Beal, George M. and Böhlen, Joe M. Unpublished research monographs. Department of Economics and Sociology, Iowa State University, 1960.

The relevance of the preceding discussion for consumer behavior research may be summarized as follows: Within an industrialized society, characterized by mass production, biological and non-biological needs are satisfied in accordance with group standards and norms operating within a framework of group values. Even goods that seem purely utilitarian include elements of nonutilitarian, of aesthetic and psychic appeal. The latter fact is often ignored by assuming primacy of our societal value on rationality. Indeed, the acceptance of the "economic man" is a necessary consequence of accepting our societal value on rationality. In addition to the assumption of rationality, the model infers that the consumer knows what his wants are and maintains an inventory of them in his mind to guide his purchasing; that he has knowledge of all available products and services which might meet his needs and that he can discern the want satisfying content of each product or service, at least in an ordinal sense, so that he can decide which items to buy in order to get the most satisfaction for his money.

Traditional economic assumptions have been challenged by results of research. A number of relevant findings of this kind have come from the University of Michigan's Survey Research Center, which is engaged in studying economic behavior in terms of social psychological variables. A study of purchase decisions for durable goods provided evidence that people are not always careful buyers, and that there are wide differences in buying behavior which cannot be explained in conventional economic terms. 4/ Another study from the Center indicated that people with the lower incomes, and presumably the greatest economic need for information to guide them in their purchases, are the least likely to look for it. The results of a national consumer panel show a number of instances of lower income families buying the higher rather than the lower priced brands within categories where little product differentiation exist.

The inadequacies of the economic model or more specifically the rationality theory of consumer behavior led researchers at an early date to a study of buying motives. Copeland is alleged by many to have done the pioneering work in this field. 5/ His dichotomous classification of emotional and rational motives was based on a content analysis of consumer responses.


Similarities are evident when comparing Copeland's original list of emotional and rational buying motives with recent consumer behavior research which treats of values as the independent or predictor variables.  

The differences in motives given by purchasers of industrial goods as compared with purchasers of consumer goods have been observed and reported by Duncan, Copeland and others. Rational motives tended to predominate among the former group of purchasers. While no explanation is given by the authors of these studies, the findings can be interpreted by an examination of the value systems operating within the respective systems. In a corporate bureaucracy one might expect, by the very nature of its structure, to find a more "rational" orientation than within any given household.

The inadequacy of the list-of-motives approach has been noted by a few writers over the years. Arthur W. Kornhauser advocated its abandonment more than 30 years ago. McGregor pointed out, as had Kornhauser, that motives are terms of classification of observed behavior rather than forces which constitute explanations of behavior. The argument advanced by McGregor is not palatable to a student of the "classifying" science. I would concur, however, that phenotypic motives in and of themselves may predict but not explain. The research analyst must resort to a higher level of conceptualization, which is basic to his theoretical orientation. Granted we are plagued with a group Sorokin has so aptly described as the "New Columbuses," i.e., the penchant to coin new terms or concepts for processes and/or dimensions well established in the sociological literature. Kornhauser's and McGregor's abhorrence of naming and then attributing causal significance to names as a basis for theories of motivation is relevant when directed at the latter phenomenon.

---


Motives for behavior (in the market place and elsewhere) and similarly pre-dispositions to behave (attitudes) do constitute important variables useful in predictive schemes when: (1) they are related to general dimensions and (2) their genesis is found in social organization variables which form the logical basis for a study of roles: role performance, role clarity, role expectancies or behavior that is (a) shared by many individuals, (b) repeated in many successive situations and (c) definitely related to other patterns in the same social aggregate.  

An opportunity to utilize a categorization of motives and test hypothesized relationships to social organization variables was afforded the author during a study of urban attitudes toward consumer cooperatives. A few of the salient findings with regard to buying motives are now presented.

Product Differentiation and Buying Habits

Following the procedure of other market researchers, an attempt was made to ascertain consumers' patronage motives in buying groceries. Each consumer interviewed in the study was asked: "Why do you buy your groceries at this store?" The reasons given were ranked by respondents 1, 2, 3. A value of 3 was assigned to the first reason, 2 for the second and 1 for the third.

The results indicated that consumers patronize particular stores for specific reasons. In order to compare buying motives with buying habits (i.e., type of retail outlet chosen), categories of a more genotypic nature were sought. The dichotomy of emotional and rational, suggested by some marketing economists, was deemed unsatisfactory for the present data. An examination of the patronage motives given by respondents suggested that many were indicative of forms of product differentiation as defined by Chamberlain.

12/ Agricultural Experiment Station Project 1175. Joe M. Bohlen, project leader. Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa. 1958.
A general class of product is differentiated if any significant basis exists for distinguishing the goods (or services) of one seller from those of another. Such a basis may be real or fancied, so long as it is of any importance whatever to buyers, and leads to a preference for one variety of product over another. Where such a differentiation exists, buyers will be paired with sellers, not by chance and at random (as under pure competition), but according to their preferences."

Recent research on the role of the retail fertilizer dealer in Iowa offers some additional support for Chamberlain's hypothesis. The data suggest a selectivity of dealers and customers, in terms of social, personal and economic characteristics. Research evidence also indicates a differential demand for dealers to play a technical consultant role with respect to the sale of commercial fertilizer.\textsuperscript{15}

In addition, Chamberlain pointed out that differentiation may be based upon: (1) certain characteristics of the product itself or (2) the conditions surrounding its role. The illustration of the latter by Chamberlain is drawn from the retail trade and suggests some of the factors considered earlier as buying motives, namely: "...such factors as the convenience of the seller's location, the general tone or character of his establishment, his way of doing business, his reputation for fair dealing, courtesy, efficiency and all the personal links which attach customers either to himself or to those employed by him."

A further note on Chamberlain's typology is offered by Grether, who refers to the second type (the conditions surrounding its role) as enterprise differentiation.

"Variations in location, store fittings, the variety and assortment of goods, basic merchandising policies, and in ancillary services are the primary means of "enterprise differentiation" in the distributive trades. In the case of small dealers, personality influences and friendships may be important also."\textsuperscript{16}

The other types defined by Grether are basic product differentiation and external product differentiation.

\textsuperscript{15} Agricultural Experiment Station Project No. 1352. Unpublished data. Iowa State University. 1960.

In order to test a hypothesis which treats of patronage habits and motives, the former were analyzed as a dichotomy composed of consumers patronizing one retail establishment for all grocery needs, while the second group patronized more than one retail store. The suggestion gleaned from past research is that the significant level of competition at the retail level appears to be the whole store (factors indicating enterprise differentiation), the whole complex of factors that caused shoppers to patronize one store rather than another. Halton stated that, "...having made a decision at this level, shoppers seemed indifferent to even large differences in prices of individual commodities among stores." 17/

Research studies of the agricultural market conducted at Iowa State University have shown significant differences in farm size when compared on the basis of farmers patronizing one retail establishment and those patronizing more than one for their commercial fertilizers and agricultural chemicals. The difference is in the expected direction, with larger farm size associated with patronage of more than one retail dealer for the commodities under study.

The hypothesis is suggested, therefore, that consumers who patronize one retail store for grocery needs do so for reasons which may be classified as enterprise differentiation, while consumers patronizing more than one retail establishment display a less proportion of enterprise differentiation motives. The chi square test is significant beyond the .01 level. The hypothesis is supported.

Research in the agricultural market on commodities characterized by a low degree of product differentiation also illustrates the substitution of enterprise differentiation motives for product differentiation. When asked why they purchased a particular brand (of fertilizers or chemicals) a significant majority of farmers replied that it was the brand their dealer carried. When the hypothetical situation of changing dealers or changing brands was offered them, again a significant majority indicated they would change brands.

Following the previous suggestion that competition at the retail level appears to be the whole store, and since consumers have specific patronage motives which reflect basic needs, the hypothesis is suggested that the type of retail store chosen will be related to the patronage motives given by consumers. The chi square test is significant at the .01 level. The hypothesis is supported.

Patronage Habits and Reference Groups

Since patronage motives were found to be related to type of retail store patronized, but were not significantly related to income classes, one might

hypothesize that the holding of certain patronage motives, as reflected by
the type of retail store patronized, was a function of common attitudes and
need dispositions characteristic of certain reference groups. It has long
been recognized that men act in a social frame of reference yielded by the
groups of which they are a part. While the use of the reference group
concept in the present paper is concerned with membership group orienta-
tions, the theory has been generalized to the point where it can account for
both membership and nonmembership group orientations. To begin with the
most general proposition, one may state that the behavior, attitudes, beliefs
and values of the individual are all firmly grounded in the groups to which
he belongs. 18/

The specific hypothesis involving patronage habits and reference groups is
as follows:

Rural migrants to the city will patronize chains less frequently, and inde-
dependents and neighborhood stores more frequently than urban born residents.
The study of consumer cooperatives in Superior reported a more favorable
attitude toward consumer cooperatives on the part of rural migrants, when
compared with urban residents. 19/ In addition, similarity of environment
has been shown by Axelrod to be a factor in the assimilation of the rural
migrant in his urban setting. 20/ The suggestion is made that chain stores
are a retail structure which is not as familiar to the rural migrant as it is
to the urban resident. It is not, however, familiarity alone, but rather the
differences between the role of the chain store, and that of the independent,
within the context of the community social system, which warrant further
investigation. The chi square test is significant at the .05 level. The
original hypothesis is supported.

While no relationship was found between income classes and patronage
motives, or income classes and type of store patronized, within income
classes the rural-urban dichotomy displays some interesting differences in
the selection of retail stores. One observes that as income increases the


19/ John Harp. A Discriminant Analysis of Urban Attitudes Toward
Consumer Cooperatives. Unpublished Ph.D. thesis. Iowa State University,

rural group displays a greater affinity for chain stores. Unfortunately no data were available on length of urban residence, in order to test the relationship between purchase patterns and urbanization, within income classes. The limitations of sample size prevented the implementation of other controls.

**Implications for Future Research**

In the light of the above findings it would seem logical to suggest that future research explore the relationships between social organization variables and purchasing patterns and motives within income classes. Data would be required on ethnic group membership, social class membership in the sense of homogenous sub-cultural classes.

The preceding research results were presented as a crude example of how social organization variables may be utilized to explore the genesis of patronage motives. While the latter step should be of inestimable assistance to market researchers as an aid in delineating marketing publics, it does not represent a terminus for the sociologist studying consumer behavior. Lazarsfeld has referred to the initial area of inquiry as buying behavior determinants of the first degree. In this category he included conscious factors about which people were willing to talk, such as product attributes, influences on buying action such as advertising and the advice of friends, the circumstances under which the decision for purchase was made and the use for which the purchased item was intended. The reasons for and origins of the first degree emotional likes and dislikes, Lazarsfeld classed as biographical determinants.

Since Lazarsfeld made the above statement (1935) a great deal of market research has been initiated and completed. Consumer behavior has been related to opinions, attitudes, aspirations and these in turn have been correlated with relevant social organization variables such as social class, ethnic groups, age categories, sex, etc.

The basic need in consumer research which Lazarsfeld alluded to 25 years ago is for a coherent theory of values in relation to consumer action. The purchase of a consumer good is merely the last in a long chain of events in the consumer's life experience—hence, the low level of predictability in much of consumer behavior. We are in need of a systematic method of anticipating change in consumer action. This requires us to probe to the roots of motivation for large aggregates of people who as individuals may

---

be quite different in psychological background and other characteristics. What are the common links that affect their behavior as consumers? We need to know how these value systems relate to given products. It is within this value framework that the study of consumer behavior takes on additional meaning.

There seems to be some confusion in the researching of values. Many researchers imply that value is a preference. The latter is only one element of a value. A value is not just a preference, but a preference which is felt and/or considered to be justified—"morally"—or by reasoning or by aesthetic judgments, usually by two or by all three of these. Even if a value remains implicit, behavior with reference to this complex suggests an implication of the desirable—not just the desired. The desirable is what is felt proper to want and demands some social consensus. Values are ideas formulating action commitments. The research analyst observes certain kinds of patterned behavior. He cannot explain these regularities unless he subsumes certain aspects of the processes that determine concrete acts under the concept "value." While there are, of course, more general and more specific values, conception implies reference to a class of events which may encompass a variety of content and differ considerably in detail. Example: "Eating spinach is a value for Smith, because Smith likes spinach or prefers spinach to broccoli is to confuse the desired with the desirable. This practice negates one of the few constant differentia of values. It is much more convenient to separate value and preference, restricting preference to those selections which are neutral (i.e., do not require justification or reference to sanctions) from the point of view of the individual and/or the culture. Of course, if Smith justified his preference for spinach in rational or pseudo-rational terms of vitamins, minerals, etc., it then becomes by definition one of his values. If, however, he simply says, "I like spinach better than broccoli," it remains a mere preference.

With regard to the social implications of technological change, examples are numerous and more especially in the area of agricultural adjustment. The social impact of scientific discovery, and technological innovation made possible by a definite and unusual cultural context, has been discussed. The major trend has been one of extremely rapid advances in the application of scientific knowledge to the manipulation of physical and biological environment. The social resultants of these developments include the demographic


revolution, the mechanization and specialization of work, the mobility and anonymity of urban life and possible indirect repercussions upon primary value orientations. It is in this societal context that the student of consumer behavior must work and the study of human behavior derives greater meaning and utility.