

Editorial

Complexity of Understanding Consumer Behavior from the Marketing Perspective

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Received 18 November 2018; Accepted 19 November 2018; Published 8 January 2019

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1. Introduction

Technology has significantly changed consumers' lives and is likely to shape the future of business and marketing in particular. As an illustration, changes in technology have afforded marketers access to consumers and massive amounts of data on patterns of their behaviors that someone has to transform before they can be useful for decision-making. This rapid evolution in technology and its effect on the growth of the complexity of business environments are giving rise to both opportunities and challenges from a marketing perspective, deserving research attention. Therefore, researchers should make an effort to study how organizations can take advantage of these opportunities and face these challenges. In this context, advancing the analysis of nondeterministic marketing problems is imperative.

The distinction between simple, complicated, complex, and chaotic systems provides an excellent context for solving strategic marketing problems. Too often marketing strategies are based on simple and at best complicated systems in which the relationship between causes and effects requires analysis. When in actual fact marketing operates in complex systems such as markets, where cause and effect can only be perceived in retrospect, marketers need to embrace this complexity and evolve strategies for dealing better with these challenges. In order to develop effective marketing strategies, we need to better understand the new trends in consumer behavior which could enable companies to adapt and to make better decisions. The main complexity is dealing with the increasing product variety and changing consumer demands, which is forcing marketers to abandon undifferentiated marketing

strategies and even niche marketing strategies and to adopt a mass customization process interacting one-to-one with their customers. Today, new technologies and new sources of information about consumer behavior are emerging and can help managers to understand this in great detail: big data, neuromarketing, interactive communication media, and so forth.

This special issue gathers original and constructive contributions dealing with these questions in order to improve our knowledge of the complexity of marketing in understanding the new consumer. Therefore, the papers address the recent advances of marketing in meeting the new consumer trends and present effective marketing strategies to face the upcoming technological challenges. This special issue analyzes four major topics that show the complexity of consumer behavior from the marketing perspective: the adoption of new technologies, the value cocreation in virtual environments, the factors that influence purchasing behavior, and different elements of postpurchase behavior, such as satisfaction and word-of-mouth.

2. Adoption of New Technologies

In today's world, new products and new technologies are emerging every day. It is important to know the reasons why one technology is more successful than another [1]. Technology acceptance models, such as TAM [2] or UTAUT [3], make it possible to understand these reasons. This special issue includes two papers on this subject.

The first one, "Key Factors for In-Store Smartphone Use in an Omnichannel Experience: Millennials vs.

Nonmillennials” by A. Mosquera et al., aims to identify the key factors that influence customers’ intentions to use smartphones in-store along with their actual behavior, differentiating between millennials and nonmillennials, as millennials are considered digital natives and early adopters of new technologies. The results of this research indicate that habit, performance expectancy, and hedonic motivation are the strongest predictors of in-store smartphone use for both groups (millennials and nonmillennials). However, the study shows that the only differences between these two groups with regard to the use of smartphones in-store are the effects of behavioral intention and habit on use behavior. Managers should bear in mind that, although the mobile phone is revolutionizing the purchasing process, the physical store is still the preferred channel to make purchases. It is important for retailers to think of the physical store not only in terms of sales generation, but also as a means of enriching the user’s engagement with the consumer experience and the services that can only be offered in the physical channel.

In the second paper entitled “Complexity in the Acceptance of Sustainable Search Engines on the Internet: An Analysis of Unobserved Heterogeneity with FIMIX-PLS” by P. Palos-Sánchez et al., the authors present a technology acceptance model including trust as an external variable added to explain the use of Internet search engines. Based on a method to discover the heterogeneity not observed in the structural model, this research identifies three different user behaviors. This analysis shows how the complexity of the consumer of technological tools can be addressed in a more efficient way through advanced statistical techniques.

3. Value Cocreation in Virtual Environments

Companies have been developing strategies for co-creating value with their clients for some time [4, 5]. However, currently, its importance has grown thanks to the development of virtual communities on the Internet. In the article “Does Use of Different Platforms Influence the Relationship between Cocreation Value-in-Use and Participants’ Cocreation Behaviors? An Application in Third-Party Managed Virtual Communities,” N. Rubio et al. explore the relationship between perceived cocreation value-in-use and cocreation behaviors in a third-party managed virtual community founded in a theoretical model. On the basis of a structural equation model to assess customer perceptions, an important result of the research supports the conceptualization and dimensions of the value-in-use of the participants of third-party managed virtual communities. This paper illustrates how complex concepts associated with the online consumer behavior can be analyzed through their decomposition into dimensions, and how this task is assisted by modern modeling techniques.

4. Determinants of Consumer Purchasing Behavior

Understanding the motivations that lead a consumer to purchase a product, beyond the price, is a complex issue [6] that can vary significantly from one product to another [7]. This

special issue includes this problem for two different products: cars and gastronomic products. Cars are characterized as utilitarian and durable products, while gastronomic products have a greater hedonic component and are highly fungible.

On the one hand, Y. Tian et al. wrote the paper “Research on Supply Chain Stability Driven by Consumer’s Channel Preference Based on Complexity Theory” which studies the pricing problem in supply chain with one manufacturer who supplies an identical product as two retailers. The rapid development of Internet technology has led manufacturers to transfer from traditional retailing to the combination of traditional and electronic retailing, using a multichannel selling. The findings indicate that the competitions between retailers are helpful for the manufacturers. However, when the competition is fierce, the traditional and online channel can be replaced by each other, and the system will evolve into a chaotic state.

On the other hand, the paper “Relation of Country-of-Origin Effect, Culture, and Type of Product with the Consumer’s Shopping Intention: An Analysis for Small- and Medium-Sized Enterprises” by J. M. Berbel-Pineda et al. addresses the topic of tourists’ purchase intention of gastronomic products when they return to their home. The authors find that the gastronomic culture of the tourists and their evaluation when testing the products during the trip are the key elements that influence their intention to carry on buying these products. However, the country of origin of the gastronomic products also affects tourists’ purchase intention. The results provide strategies for those small gastronomic companies willing to compete in the international market.

5. Postpurchase Behavior

Finally, in the paper “Predicting Thalasso Tourist Delight: A Hybrid SEM—Artificial Intelligence Analysis”, A. J. Sánchez-Medina et al. study two important elements of postpurchase behavior [8]: the satisfaction and the word-of-mouth. Consumer satisfaction is a complex subject because it is necessary to analyze several dimensions to explain it accurately. In this sense, the authors study the influence of these variables on the global satisfaction perceived by thalassotherapy customers. They find a strong relationship between the dimensions and their satisfaction, and also between their level of satisfaction and their intention to generate word-of-mouth. To conclude, they identify the key elements to delight customers.

6. Conclusions

A set of papers revealing the complexity of analyzing consumer behavior from the marketing point of view has been collected over this issue. Beyond globalization, and of the billions of potential customers that companies can find on the Internet, today organizations have the opportunity to address smaller market segments and even to customize their offers. Therefore, companies face increasingly heterogeneous markets, where success is difficult. Entering the mind of consumers and understanding their purchasing behavior

constitute one of the greatest challenges in which researchers should be involved.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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