

CONSIDERATIONS ON THE STUDY OF CONSUMPTION AND CONSUMERS' BEHAVIOUR

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***Abstract:** This paper presents some considerations for identifying and quantifying the factors that trigger consumer behaviour for goods and services (according to motivational research, along with needs, there is a number of other internal variables that influence the manifestation of a certain type of consumer behaviour). Based on these main objectives, the study highlights the appropriate application forms and research methods.*

***Key words:** need, request, consumption, consumer behaviour, motivational research*

Human society today has as general economic aspects the following phenomena: the growth and diversification of goods and services, the distribution of demand (in space and time), population growth, increased urbanization process etc. New trends in lifestyle have also emerged: increasing quality demands, the persistence of a “wave of health”, making impulse purchases, fast changing of fashion trends etc.

On these general trends, businesses must substantiate an efficient economic activity, to apply marketing principles that have as main reference framework, the market. For effective use of marketing action it is required to merge all its elements: mix marketing mix, also known as “the 4 P”: product, place, promotion, price. These 4 elements (product, distribution, promotion and price) summarize all the factors by which any economic agent operates on the market and achieves their strategic objectives. The market completes and finalizes the economic activity, checks whether the goods and services accomplish to satisfy the clients' needs, in the social shape of “product demand”. Therefore, a complex analysis of the market is required, the knowledge, assessment and inclusion of all the facts and factors of its revelators, plus an analysis of the situation and position on the market of each economic agent (in relation to its objective and resources).

The main characteristics of a market are represented in image 1.

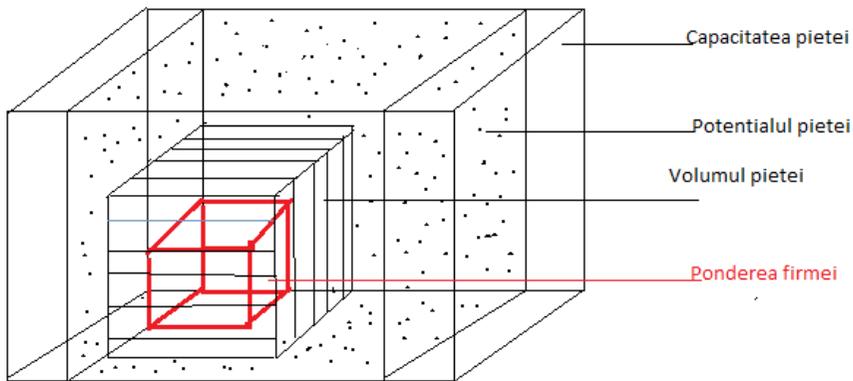
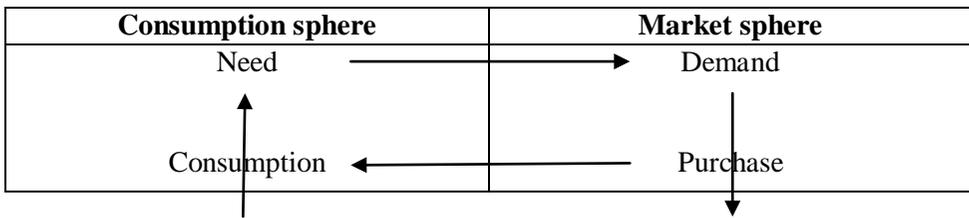


Image 1. Main characteristics of a market

The market represents, however, only a “zone” in the circuit that helps accomplish needs so that consumption can appear.



The field of marketing investigations and research does not include only the market sphere; it refers to the sources of demand, by penetrating the vast domain of needs, and to the tracking of the way “products” behave towards their users and final consumers.

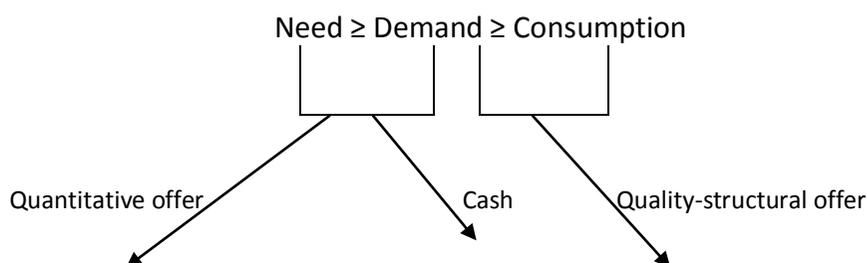
The whole of human needs refers to satisfying material demands and work force (connected to the social production), and also to satisfy material and spiritual needs for each individual. Marketing aims to tackle the human needs that can be virtually or potentially satisfied with the help of economic activity’s results. Enlarging the field of investigation (in the sphere of human needs and aspirations) without a direct economic correspondent is unjustifiable in terms of practical economic efficiency.

Consumption needs (as a consequence of society’s historical evolution) reflects the combination of the terms of social existence with individual way of understanding own needs. One should bear in mind that *«nevoia reprezintă rodul unei cheltuieli de „energie mintală” sau rezultanta unui*

sistem de „valori etice”, ce corespund unor stări, opinii sau unui anumit tip de experiență a oamenilor»¹ (trans. <<need is the result of an expenditure of “mental energy” or the result of “ethical values”, which correspond to certain states, opinions or experience of people>>).

Needs are characterized by dynamism, always a step ahead society’s capacity of satisfying them (there is no coincidence in the occurrence of a need and its manifestation as a market demand); they stay for a while in the sphere of aspirations.

Consumption is just a part of needs, i.e. “solvent needs”. The gap between them is kept permanently, this being an actual engine of progress. Consequently, demand expresses the needs only to the extent of a real possibility to satisfy them. On the one hand, a certain offer of “products” is assumed (thus on object for demand), on the other hand there is an adequate purchasing power (a solvency demand). Demand connects the needs of people and actual consumption; it proceeds (naturally) the moment of consumption, representing a potential consumption. Therefore, there is a relationship as follows:



Offer is the main element of economic growth and raises issues regarding the means used to achieve the mass of products necessary for the society and the possibilities of transforming these products into means of satisfying consumption needs.

Fundamentally, a product is everything a seller provides the buyer in exchange. The product is defined as „a set of tangible and intangible attributes that a seller offers to potential client and his needs or desires”².

¹ Anzien, E-Psychologie du consommateur, Paris, Ed. Technique Commerciale, 1973.

² Lush, R.F. și Lush, V.N. – Principles of Marketing, Kent Publishing Co, 1987.

“Product” stands for a physical good or a service; most times there is a connection between the two. A good has a physical form and can be seen or touched (it is tangible and one paid for the buyer becomes its owner). A service is an activity for the benefit of the buyer (is intangible - a buyer cannot inspect or test the service before purchase).

Between demand (or consumption) of goods and services there are tight interdependence relationships. In many cases the goods and services are aiming, on the one hand, the same needs and, on the other hand, the same sources of income; so, between the two forms of demand substitution relationships exist, broadening one takes place at the expense of the other. For example: people can call on public laundries or cleaners and give up on buying washing machines; the demand for public transport services can move towards demand for own cars, and along with it the demand for petrol, lubricants, spare parts etc. (the ration between the price of goods and services prices is an important factor that determines the extent and direction of these movements).

In light of these realities one of the directions that must be addressed is the study of the consumer: what he represents, what are the real and first needs and, what are the elements that can make his consumer behaviour predictable, how can it be influenced from the exterior to behave favourably towards products from the offer (goods and services) etc. Consumer research raises a few questions that need answers.

Consumers must be characterized in a complex way, when and where they usually buy, how they use the product, why they buy it, what do they think about its quality and utility. Therefore, it is an imperative to know the system of consumption and the factors that can influence a consumer's decision to buy (the influence of the factors “can” and “want”), image no. 2.

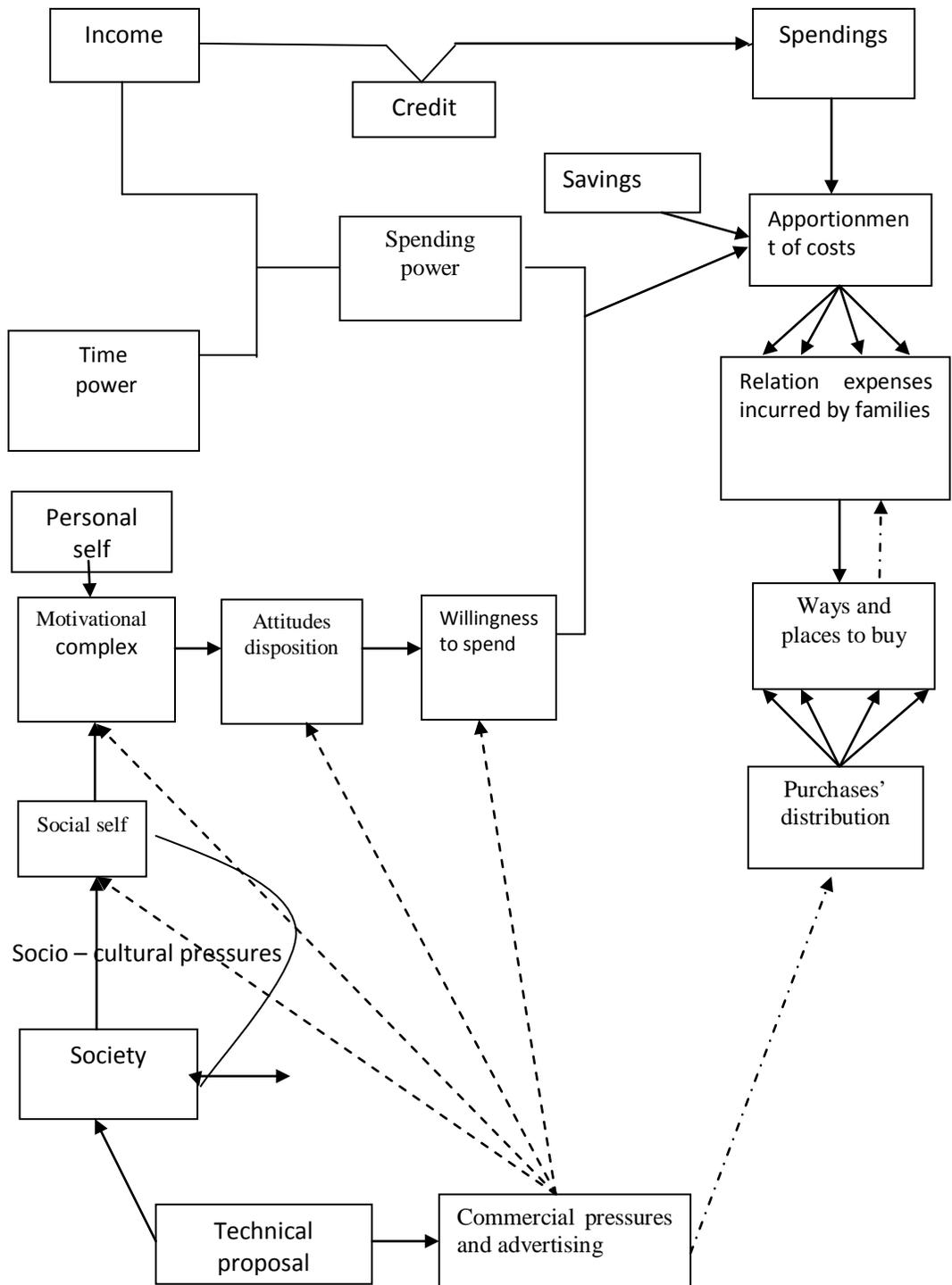


Image 2. System and factors affecting consumer buying decision

It is noted that in the structure of consumption the key factors are: income, credit, time power (play an important role in the distribution of costs); fundamental needs, personal self (natural tendencies, deeply known and stable) and social self (tendencies acquired relatively superficial and unstable); socio – cultural pressures (the individual receives from society in general and from his social group, in particular, information, education exercising some of the different pressures), technical proposal (new products that go towards advertising the commercial pressures and consumer perception), consumers' disposition of attitudes etc.

The truth is that consumers do not perceive all the influences and pressures they are subjected to. Thus, according to contemporary psychology thesis, that human personality is a “self-regulating system” and researchers tried to identify, besides needs, other internal variables that trigger consumer behavior. This is why motivational research appeared (M.R.), their initiation being linked to the name of E. Dichter.³

In a motivational complex rational-type reasons coexist (confidence, economy, durability and ease of use of the product, price, aesthetics, existence of spare parts, punctuality in delivery etc.), next to those affective/emotional-type (social status, prestige, pride, health, conformism, laziness, ambition, self-approval, artistic refinement, passions, vices, love of children, the family, the opposite sex etc.).

In any consumer behaviour we can identify both types of motivation, their share is not the same, but the role of trigger buying decision (or rejection) can be played by each. With this approach the nature of consumer motivation, the old saying „spune-mi cât câștigi și eu îți voi spune cum vei cheltui” (trans. “tell me your earnings and I will tell you your spending”), which was based on the argument that their distribution costs is only based on income, must be replaced with one that better reflects reality: „spune-mi ce ești și eu îți voi spune ce cheltuieli vei face” (trans. “tell me what you are and I will tell you what you spend”).⁴

Consumer motivation is determined mostly by factors specific for social groups ideation and behaviour, such as: opinions, prejudices, beliefs, customs and traditions, socio-cultural patterns of behavior, attitudes innovative or conservative, etc. It should be noted that for each element there

³ Dichter, E., *La stratégie du dêsire*, Paris, Fayard, 1961.

⁴ Pitroiu A., Matalon, B., *L'analyse de la consommation*, in „L'economique et les sciences humaines”, Paris, Dunod, 1967.

is a combination, in a manner difficult to describe, of very different variations depending on their area, on their geographical range and on their scope in time (political, rational, affective, ethical etc.).

Based on these considerations, the study of demand for goods and services has as the main objective to: identify and quantify factors that contribute to the formation and manifestation of demand, intensity and specificity their action; characterize different segments of buyers and consumers: capturing the so-called “local colour” of consumer behaviour; determine the overall volume of demand and consumption; aspects of marketing activity (distribution channels, forms of sales prices, promotional means used, etc.). To this end, the study of demand must include two approaches (which are mutually interrelated): **indirect research** is useful (it is based on “office” information sources offered by dynamic series of statistical records, accounting and operational), supplemented with **direct methods of studying** the application and turn it in purchase and consumption (they allow obtaining “in the field” information through psycho-sociological surveys, polls, tests answers, experiments, exhibitions etc.).

In order to choose the most appropriate forms and methods of research (taking into account the multitude of phenomena to be studied), several principles are enforced: research should be performed in **all** groups of goods and services each raises a different issue); studies should be carried out **continuously**, due to the great mobility of consumer behaviour; research results should be **known** and **used** with great efficiency, since there is always the risk of depreciation or aging.

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