Goal-Directed Behaviors in Marketing: Cognitive and Emotional Perspectives

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Buying and selling are often goal-directed activities, but until recently little effort has been devoted to the specification of how decision makers select and strive for goals. The articles in this issue explore a number of specific ways that goals enter market behavior.

One way concerns how goals are formed and decisions made. In the first article, Gutman shows how the laddering technique can be used to generate a means–end chain of goals comprised of action goals concerning the self, outcome goals linked to actions, and consequences stemming from outcomes. Peterman then examines the effects of goals on information acquisition, encoding, and evaluation.

The third article, by Park, Sohi, and Marquardt, develops a theory of how goals influence the choice of vendor by organizational buyers. Next, Lynn and Harris propose a scale that measures the extent to which consumers hold as personal goals the acquisition and possession of unique products or services. Finally, Verbeke tests a theory of emotional contagion and finds that the achievement of performance goals by salespeople depends on their ability to infect customers with their own emotions, as well as their ability to be receptive to the emotions given off by the customers.

SUMMARY OF ARTICLES

Means–end chains are the subject of inquiry by Professor Gutman, who conceives of these chains as hierarchies of goals held by consumers. Gutman asks to what extent people actually conceive of

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higher-level goals as the object of the actions initiating a means–end chain, and to what extent people believe that performance of the actions will result in higher-level goal achievement. The means–end chain he investigates concerns "drinking a beverage while studying for a test." The questions eliciting the means–end chain follow a specific sequence and structure: asking the particular physical or mental benefit sought by drinking the beverage, then how this increases effectiveness of study, next what test goal is achieved, and so on. The findings showed that the laddering procedure takes people beyond the intended goals of the initial action in question, although Gutman concedes that the higher-level goals may well constitute reasons for pursuing the most distal goals. He terms these *values,* and feels they answer the question of why we want the goals.

The role of consumer goals in information processing is an understudied area. Professor Peterman investigates the impact of consumer goals on three areas of information processing: information search, encoding, and judgment formation. In particular she examines two goals: concrete and abstract purchase goals. An experiment was run using a process-tracing system (Mouselab) within the context of a missing information framework. Goal type (concrete or abstract) was a within-subjects factor, and judgment order (initial judgment of missing attribute, then overall evaluation; or vice versa) and type of information matrix (high within brand and low across brand vs the reverse) were between-subjects factors. The findings show that level of abstraction affects the breadth and directionality of product information acquisition. For concrete goals, information search occurs across brands along particular attributes; for abstract goals, within-brand processing occurs during information search. Further, concrete-goal processing during information search tends to result in storage of information at the attribute level, whereas abstract-goal processing during information search leads to encoding at a more conceptual level. Finally, the nature of information acquisition as a function of goal orientation shapes later judgments.

Leading approaches to organizational buying behavior describe the stages decision makers go through (e.g., awareness of suppliers → emergence of a consideration set → formation of a choice set → selection of a vendor) but do not explain well why and how decisions are made. Park et al. develop a model of vendor selection that introduces motivational factors into decision making. Building on the idea of motivated reasoning from cognitive psychology, the authors specify two classes of cognitively mediated motivations that intervene between characteristics of the purchase task on the one hand and formation of a consideration set on the other hand: accuracy goals, where the motive is to arrive at correct solutions; and directional goals, where the motive is to arrive at a particular, predisposed solution. Park et al. develop a number of propositions based upon motivated reasoning goals

and their relationship to task importance and familiarity. For example, they hypothesize that, regardless of task familiarity, high perceived importance of a purchase task will result in motivation by goal accuracy, and low perceived importance of a purchase task will result in motivation by directional goals. By contrast, when a task is moderately important but involves low familiarity, directional goals should be the motivators, and likewise moderately important but highly familiar tasks should be characterized by directional goals. However, moderately important and moderately familiar tasks are hypothesized to promote accuracy goals. Hence, an inverted-U relationship is anticipated between familiarity and motivation, under moderate task importance. Overall, Park et al. inject a strong cognitive basis for decision making into organizational buying.

Consumers differ in their preferences for unique products. As Lynn and Harris point out, these preferences stem from a general need for personal uniqueness, a desire for dominance or leadership in a social hierarchy, or a need to acquire or possess objects in a materialistic sense. The preference for unique products is expressed in the "tendency to acquire and use products that are scarce, innovative, customized, and/or outmoded as well as an increased tendency to shop at small, unique retail outlets" (Lynn & Harris, this issue). No scale exists for measuring consumer preferences for unique products, and the closest analogue is the Snyder and Fromkin (1977) need-for-uniqueness scale. However, this latter scale fails to measure consumption needs, emphasizes only socially risky displays of uniqueness, and is multidimensional. Lynn and Harris develop an 8-item scale, termed the desire for unique consumer products (DUCP) scale, that was shown to be unidimensional, to achieve high reliability, to generalize across diverse groups of respondents, to exhibit discriminant and criterion-related validity, and to be unrelated to social desirability tendencies. The DUCP was also formed to differentiate patrons of foreign and artistic films from patrons of second-run films in a field study. The DUCP scale should prove useful in identifying consumers of unusual or new innovative products.

Verbeke studies the role of emotions in salesperson–customer interactions and emotions' effects on goal performance and burnout. Beginning with the emotional contagion theory, which posits that people automatically mimic and coordinate their facial and other emotional reactions to others with whom they interact, Verbeke proposes a typology based on the crossing of high and low proneness to transmit and high and low proneness to receive emotions in a relationship. Thus people are classified as charismatics (high in both the ability to infect and be infected by others), empathetics (low in ability to infect but high in capability to be infected), expansives (high in ability to infect but low in capability to be infected), and bland (low in both abilities). Verbeke used an emotional contagion scale and a facial expressiveness

scale to categorize people as charismatics, empathetics, expansives, or blands. The findings revealed that charismatic and empathetic salespeople generally performed better than expansives and blands, but empathy (a characteristic of both charismatics and empathetics) tends to lead to burnout. Overall, expansives were the poorest performers and had high burnout levels. The findings imply a trade-off and dilemma for managers: Emotionally sensitive sales people are desirable for their performance potential, but the risk is that they will burn out prematurely.

CONCLUSION

Each of the articles in this issue enrich our understanding of why consumers or marketers behave the way they do. We learn that information processing activities are constituted, or at least complemented, by processes of goal setting and goal striving, as well as motivational and emotional responses. We are likely to see more research along these lines in the years ahead. Much room exists for researchers willing to explore the cognitive and affective processes underlying the bases for goal formation, and especially the implementation of decisions stimulated by goal choice.

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