A Theoretical Approach To The Role Of Perception On The Consumer Buying Decision Process
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Abstract
The role of the human perception is one of the most important questions. If we would be able to understand how the human brain perceives information and operate it, and how do we make our decisions, we could more precisely make the future forecasts and increase our efficiency. We obtain information from the external world from our senses: taste, hearing, smell, touch, sight. Than we somehow integrate and analyze perceived information and make our decision. Decision is an “outcome of mental processes (cognitive process) leading to the selection of a course of action among several alternatives. Every decision making process produces a final choice”. How do we make a decision, or even better to ask what leads us to make a decision? All our decisions are directed by our instincts, unconsciously. The basic human instinct is self-preservation or, in other words, survival and reproduction. But the decisions, which we make according to our instincts, are different. In this study, we are going to learn what the role of perception on the consumer buying decision process is.

Key words: Consumer, Perception, Consumer perception, Buying

INTRODUCTION
Since the rise of experimental psychology in the late 19th Century, psychology's understanding of perception has progressed by combining a variety of techniques. Psychophysics measures the effect on perception of varying the physical qualities of the input. Sensory neuroscience studies the brain mechanisms underlying perception. Perceptual systems can also be studied computationally, in terms of the information they process. Perceptual issues in philosophy include the extent to which sensory qualities such as sounds, smells or colors exist in objective reality rather than the mind of the perceiver (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Perception, 2011). Customer’s satisfaction is the evaluation in obtaining the products and consuming experience; an expectation mood exists with previous consuming experience and then produce synthesized psychological condition. Customer’s satisfaction is also a kind of consuming status; customer’s satisfactory degree not only reflects emotional structure but also involves perception structure (Liu et al, 2009).

The Concept of Perception
According to the Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary (1913) perception is the quality, state, or capability, of being affected by something external; sensation; sensibility. Another definition is that is the process by which an organism attains awareness or understanding of its environment by organizing and interpreting sensory information. Perception means the adaption of reality. The process of selection is processing and interpretation of input data from the environment to make them purposeful (Stávková et al, 2008).

In general, perception is gathering information through our senses, which are seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, smelling and sensing. Through these senses we can perceive things, events or relations. But as there are so many different stimuli only a small portion of them are noticed and an even smaller amount can really reach our attention. And that's where it is necessary to talk about the difference between Sensation and perception. Although the distinction between sensation and perception is not that easy as it was believed in former times, a rough distinction can be made. Sensation is the immediate response of our sensory receptors to such basic stimuli as light, color, etc. Perception is the process by which these stimuli are selected, organized and interpreted. For example, one of these stimuli, color can

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serve as an important cue in consumer’s perceptions. Color is often used to evoke certain moods or feelings. Blue and green are seen as cool and elicit feelings of security, while red and yellow are viewed as warm and associated with cheerfulness. Consistent with this, advertisements for menthol cigarettes often rely quite heavily on blue and greens (Engel et al, 1990). A motivated person is ready to act, yet how that person actually acts is influenced by his or her perception of the situation. Perception is the process by which an individual selects, organizes, and interprets information inputs to create a meaningful picture of the world. Perception depends not only on physical stimuli, but also on the stimuli’s relation to the surrounding field and on conditions within the individual. The key word is individual. Individuals can have different perceptions of the same object because of three perceptual processes: selective attention, selective distortion, and selective retention (Kotler, 2020).

Selective Attention

People are exposed to a great number of stimuli every day. For example, the average person may be exposed to more than 1,500 ads a day. It is impossible for a person to pay attention to all these stimuli and some studies show people remembering only three or four. Selective attention - the tendency for people to screen out most of the information to which they are exposed - means that marketers have to work especially hard to attract the consumer’s attention. Their message will be lost on most people who are not in the market for the product. Moreover, even people who are in the market may not notice the message unless it stands out from the surrounding sea of other ads (Kotler et al, 1999).

Selective Distortion

It is changing or twisting currently received information; it occurs when a person receives information inconsistent with personal feelings or beliefs. For example, on seeing an advertisement promoting a disliked brand, a viewer may distort the information to make it more consistent with prior views. This distortion substantially lessens the effect of the advertisement on the individual (Pride et al, 2000).

Selective Retention

Not all stimuli that make it through the attention filters and the machinery of perception and understanding are remembered. Many stimuli are only transitory, hence one of the reasons for the repetition of advertising: if you did not notice it or remember it the first time round, you might pick it up on subsequent occasions. Jogging the memory, by repeating messages or by producing familiar stimuli that the consumer can recognize (such as brand names, packaging design, logos or colour schemes), is therefore an important marketing task to reduce the reliance on the consumer’s memory. People have the capacity to remember what they want to remember and to filter out anything else. The reasons for retaining a particular message may be because it touched them emotionally, or it was of immediate relevance, or it was especially entertaining, or it reinforced previously held views. The reasons are many, but the consumer is under no obligation to remember anything (Brassington et al, 2004).

The Perceptual Process

Perception is the most important psychological factor that affects human behavior. It is a process consisting of several sub-processes (Khan, 2006). Perceptions are built depending upon the role of an individual in conceiving and understanding communication (Rajagopal, 2007). One person’s perceptions may be faulty or idiosyncratic (Andreasen, 2002). For this reason, marketers should take this into account. Perception influences the evaluation of a sport experience through acquiring, interpreting, selecting, and organizing sensory information. Perception occurs when an individual interprets information through the sensory system (vision, smell, sound, touch, taste) and a cognitive filter that selects certain information from a vast array of stimuli. Perception depends upon the person, situation, and the object and sport consumers are constantly interpreting cues about sport products and services (e.g., attributes, benefits, risk of an activity or purchase). Sport consumers evaluate situational characteristics of the sport event environment through sensory arousal or pleasure (Funk, 2008).

From Sensation to Perception

Sensation refers to the immediate response of our sensory receptors (e.g., eyes, ears, nose, mouth, fingers) to such basic stimuli as light, color and sound. Perception is the process by which these stimuli are selected, organized and interpreted. It also involves classifying the incoming signals into meaningful categories, forming patterns, and assigning names or images to them. Perception is the assignment of
meaning to stimuli received through the senses (Burnett, 2008). We process raw data (sensation); however, the study of perception focuses on what we add to or take away from these sensations as we assign meaning to them. The subjective nature of perception is demonstrated by a controversial advertisement developed for Benetton. Because a black man and a white man were handcuffed together, the ad was the target of many complaints about racism after it appeared in magazines and on hoardings, even though the company has a reputation for promoting racial tolerance. People interpreted it to mean that the black man had been arrested by a white man. Even though both men are dressed identically; people’s prior assumptions shaped the ad’s meaning. Of course, the company’s goal was exactly that: to expose us to our own perceptual prejudice through the ambiguity of the photo. Such interpretations or assumptions stem from schemas, or organized collections of beliefs and feelings. That is, we tend to group the objects we see as having similar characteristics, and the schema to which an object is assigned is a crucial determinant of how we choose to evaluate this object at a later time. The perceptual process can be illustrated by the purchase of a new aftershave. We have learned to equate aftershave with romantic appeal, so we search for cues that (we believe) will increase our attractiveness. We make our selection by considering such factors as the image associated with each alternative and the design of the bottle, as well as the actual scent. We thus access a small portion of the raw data available and process it to be consistent with our wants. These expectations are largely affected by our cultural background. For example, a male consumer self-conscious about his masculinity may react negatively to an overtly feminine brand name, even though other men may respond differently (Solomon et al, 2006). (see Figure 1).

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Insert figure 1 about here
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The Significant Role Of Perception In Marketing

Perception is representative of how a consumer processes and interprets information. It is directly related to consumer behavior (McNeal, 2007). This is the way people build up a view of the world. Essentially, this process of selection or analysis means that each person has an incomplete picture of the world; the brain therefore fills in the gaps by a process of synthesis using hearsay, previous experience, imagination, etc. Marketers are able to fill some of the gaps through the communication process, but will come up against the problem of breaking through the selection and analysis process (Blythe, 2008). You could describe perception as the way that consumers see the world around them — the world that includes your products and services. Perceptions are unique and determine purchasing behavior in every consumer differently. Perception is important to you because it represents the way the consumer views your product or service. You can influence the perception of your consumer by understanding the current perception consumers have of your product and making changes so your product is recognized, interpreted, and stored in their memory (rather than simply ignored) for the basics on consumer perception. Familiarize yourself with perception, sensory thresholds, and the process that consumers go through to construct their perception. You can then use this information to tailor your marketing stimulus — such as ads, packaging, and pricing — for each particular segment that you’re trying to attract. Perception is such an important part of getting consumers to purchase your product or service that I’ve dedicated to explaining how you can influence perception of whatever it is that you’re selling while educating consumers about your particular offering (Lake, 2009). How well the consumer pays attention will depend on the stimulus, and also the consumer’s interest and need for that product. The consumer interprets the information in two ways: the literal meaning or the semantic meaning and the psychological meaning. Hence we are guided by our learning as well as the semantic meaning of a word. A consumer also interprets the symbols and other physical features of the product on the basis of his experience and cultural beliefs. This is called semiotics (http://www.icmrindia.org/courseware/Consumer%20Behavior/CBC05.htm, 2011). Many customers are dissatisfied with the service they receive, describing it as indifferent or routine. By acting professionally, marketers can directly influence customers’ perception (Berenbaum, et al, 2007).

CONCLUSION
Marketing is dynamic because customers are dynamic. When talking about perception we always have to keep in mind that we perceive the world not as it is, but as we think it is. That means that there are innumerable perceived worlds out there. This statement is based on the fact that every human being relates the observed world to its past experiences, its values, etc. Perception is more than just gathering information about a certain event at a certain time. It involves, recognizing stimuli, processing and storing them. The major challenge for the marketer is to identify the target customer and to find out, how this customer perceives the world. That will help to adjust all marketing activities to the target customer. Marketers make use of perception to formulate marketing strategies. The marketers use a perceptual map, wherein they find out the attributes or the characteristics that the consumer associates with the product and they create the product accordingly. Thus, development of a brand or the logo of the product, packaging of the product, etc., have to be made keeping the consumer's perception in mind. Consumers' perceptions are crucial in their purchasing behaviors and hence marketers need to understand their costumer's perception well.

REFERENCES
Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary (1913).
Figure 1 (http://stephsthoughtsntalks.blogspot.com/2010/11/perception.html, 2011)