

CONSUMER ATTITUDES: CAN THESE BE INFLUENCED?

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Abstract

Consumer attitudes are termed as one of the important factors towards deciding about the purchase of a particular product or availing of a service. The present era is dynamic and due to globalization new and innovative technology is available throughout the world. The paper in hand considers the consumer attitudes, their functions and ways to influence them. Companies have to change the perceptions of consumers.

Key Words: attitudes, beliefs, feelings, utility, ego, value expression, knowledge,

Introduction

Attitudes are one's feeling, emotions and reaction towards a particular situation, idea, opinion, matter etc. Attitude shows positive, negative or indifferent feelings of a person. Attitudes have the power to influence the way one thinks and behaves. This becomes therefore important for the marketers to study them and to understand consumer behaviour.

Louis L. Thurstone defines attitude as - "the sum total of a man's inclinations and feelings, prejudice, or bias, preconceived notions, ideas, fears, threats and convictions about a specific topic.

Katz D. defines – "attitude is the predisposition of the individual to evaluate some symbol or aspect of his work in a favourable or unfavourable man.

Consumer Attitudes

From the above we can state consumer attitude as the inner feelings of a consumer towards a particular product, producer and /or seller. These are the beliefs, feelings, reactions or intentions that consumer carries within himself.

Components of consumer attitudes

- Beliefs

The beliefs are very hard to change as these become the part and parcel of life. These develop from their personal experiences as well as advise of their nearer and dearer and above all the latest the so called social media. The consumer may be having simultaneously positive as well as negative beliefs about a certain product for example it is a common belief that taking of bitter gourd soup will ruin the taste but its health effects are numerous.

- Feelings

Feelings affect the consumer attitudes towards a particular product, brand, manufacturer, seller or even the store. If a consumer feels comfortable with a product he may be ready to purchase that product otherwise for which one has adverse feelings is normally rejected.

- Behavioural intentions or reaction

This is another aspect to be considered for studying consumer attitude. This shows the initial reaction or intentions of consumer towards some product, idea etc. e.g. if a sales person shows a particular product to a consumer which, in belief of the consumer, is not suitable to him, he will outrightly reject the same even after a number of attempts of convincing by the sales person.

Functions of attitudes

1. Utilitarian function:

This function denotes the utility of a particular product. Once a consumer is satisfied with the working of a particular product he will formulate positive attitude towards that product and will purchase the same brand in future need and even recommends the same to the persons in his circle. Contrary to this if he is not satisfied with the product, as the product does not perform as claimed by the seller, he will have negative opinion towards that particular product and will never purchase the product even it is available at discounted price. Companies are professing more and more utility functions of their products so as to influence positively the attitude of consumers especially in India for example every two wheeler company in India has been focusing on the mileage aspect of their product.

2. Ego defensive function

Ego is the most important trait of human being. It affects the decisions even if the person wants to do otherwise. The consumer will obviously prefer to purchase those products which satisfies his ego, enhance image in society etc. for example branded fashion products, soaps, beauty products and cosmetics especially deodorants and perfumes are day by day becoming the vehicles to enhance the image in society.

3. Value expressive function:

Every consumer wants to purchase that product which enhances his value, personality, lifestyle etc. People purchase costly mobiles, vehicles, watches and many more things not for their functions but also for showing their value and impressing upon others. Companies are advertising their specific brands as high class brands so that the consumers feel proud of having such product. For the purpose the companies are providing even zero interest finance facility in case of consumer durable products

4. Knowledge function:

Knowledge about the product is also one attribute which forms the attitude of the consumer about the product. The curiosity of the consumer about the working, utility, value, suitability etc. forces the companies to provide new and innovative products and have an edge over competition. Today because of availability of internet facility consumers form their attitudes, positive or negative, towards the products after comparing their configuration, knowing about compatibility, considering the reviews of persons using such products etc.

What to do to change consumer attitudes?

Beliefs are the major player in the formation of consumer attitudes. If the companies are able to tackle these beliefs intelligently then these can be changed or diverted towards their products or services. As discussed earlier attitudes follow the four functions viz. Utilitarian function, Ego defensive function, Value expressive function and Knowledge function so in order to get the best these functions must be focused. In this regard following suggestions may also be kept in mind:

- Demonstrate your product

- Advertise your product
- Show the uniqueness of your product
- Propagate cost benefits
- Impress the consumer by adding more beliefs
- Free samples and finance facility
- Discounts and other promotional offers
- Assurance of availability of spares and after sales services
- Feed back and action

Conclusion

From the above discussion we can conclude that the consumer attitudes can be diverted by the marketers if they are having skill of impressing the existing as well as prospective consumers. They are able to demonstrate the utility and functions of their product, their advertisement is impressive, more sales promotion offers are being given than the competitors. If the product satisfies the utility, ego, value expression and above all fits in the frame work of their knowledge (after comparison with rival products and reviews of existing users), no one can stop the consumers to change their loyalty and attitudes. Attitudes are not static, no doubt beliefs are hard to change, but for keeping the favour of consumers towards their product, the companies must always keep in mind the foremost element i.e. Consumer satisfaction.

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