

# 10

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## Individual Determinants

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There was a wise man whose constant prayer was that he may see today with the eyes of tomorrow.

*This chapter deals with individual determinates, and the goals of this chapter are to understand:*

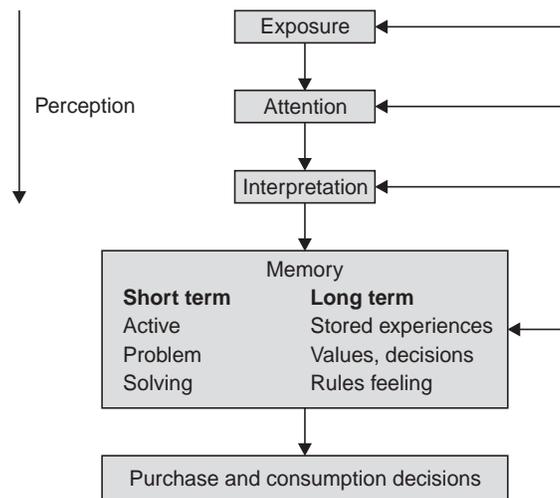
- *How information is processed*
- *How decisions are made*
- *Memory and product positioning*
- *Factors influencing learning*

## Individual Determinants

### ■ 10.1 Perception

Perception is the most important psychological factor that affects human behaviour. It is a process consisting of several sub-processes. These are stimulus, registration, interpretation, feedback and reaction. The first step is the presence of stimulus, or the situation which an individual faces. This is followed by registration which affects the psychological organs. Thus, the individual interprets (attaches meaning to the stimulus) and learns. Factors like learning help in the perceptual process. Feedback is the fourth element and, the final aspect is the resultant behaviour of the individual.

Our perception of the stimuli and the situation plays an important role on our behaviour. Perception is the critical activity that links the individual consumer to a group, situation and marketer influences.



**Fig. 10.1** Information processing for consumer decision-making

When a person is exposed to a stimuli, he may show interest in the exposure. His attention is drawn towards the object and the nerves transmit the sensation to the brain for process-

ing. Interpretation is the assignment of meaning to the received sensations. This is retained by the memory (only a part of the registered information may be retained by the memory). This leads to consumption behaviour which may have positive or negative feedback for the individual.

Figure 10.1 shows that the individual is exposed to the stimuli. His attention is attracted. He interprets the stimuli and the situation which goes to his memory and, the reaction is shown by means of purchases.

Much of the information may not be available to the memory when an individual decides to purchase something. So, when communicating to the consumers, the marketer has an uphill task, because an individual is exposed to a lot of information but, retains very little in the memory.

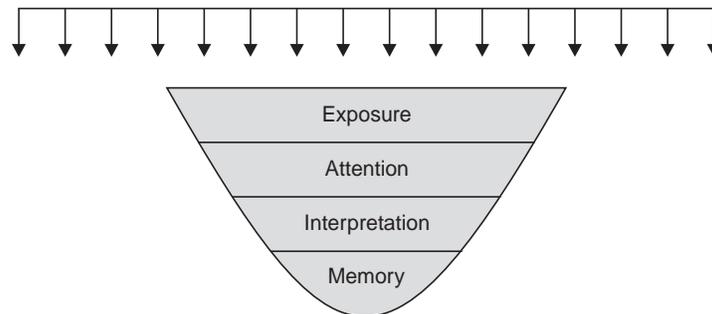


Fig. 10.2 Exposure and memory

The figure shows that there are very many exposures by the marketers. The individual or the consumer is exposed to only a part of the exposures, some of which is interpreted and little is retained in the memory.

### Exposure

When a stimuli comes under the range of sensory perceptors, nerve exposure occurs. Most of the stimuli to which an individual is exposed to, is self selected, *e.g.*, switching channels on TV, skipping pages of magazines, avoiding information that one is not interested in. We deliberately seek and avoid information of our interest. It is done to achieve the goals we aspire for. It is challenge for the marketer to hold the interest of the consumer on his commercials and exposures.

### Attention

This occurs when the sensory receptor nerves are activated by the stimuli and, the brain registers sensations for processing. The market offers a variety of goods. It may take us long to go through all of them. Therefore, we selectively choose and attend to products and messages. One may not attend to warnings on cigarette packets or, may see the model more than the clothes. The same individual may devote different levels of attention to the same stimulus in different situations. Attention is determined by three factors—*stimulus*, the *individual* and the *situation*. These together or individually play an important role in attracting the individual.

### Stimulus Factor

There are certain features in a product that can attract greater attention. This would be the size, the intensity, the colour and movement, position, format of the message, information quality, information overload.

By size we mean that if an advertisement is on a full page or in column. The intensity is the number of times a message is repeated in a newspaper or a magazine, TV or any other media. Further, both colour and movement attract attention. An advertisement may be black or white or in multi-colours. It can be shown stationary or in a moving state, which is more noticeable. Position refers to the placement of the object, whether it is placed in the centre or in a corner. Similarly, the right hand page advertisement may be more noticeable than the advertisement on the left hand side.

Isolation is separating an object from other objects. In isolation, an object may stimulate and draw more attention. Similarly, the format of the message. How it is presented, what words and structure is used? A simple format can draw greater attention than a complicated message. The messages targeted at a specific audience can also be very effective. Compressed messages which say more in fewer words can make a good impact. Information quality should be balanced or optimum. All consumers have limited capacity to process information. If a lot of information is given, it may confuse the individual and, he is not able to make a choice. This is known as *information overload*. With too much information consumers get confused and become frustrated. They may also experience pre-purchase dissonance. Marketeers give relevant information on packages and labels. Information can also be given in brochures, pamphlets, etc.

### Individual Factors

Individual factors affect the decision-making process. The individual is governed by the interest or the need. Interest also reflects the lifestyle of an individual and, the long-term goals (achieving a specific position in life like becoming a senior manager or something). The short term goals are influenced by situations. Individual also differ in their ability to gather and assimilate information. The information sought reflects their needs. An academician is in the pursuit of knowledge and books and, a sportsman will be attentive to advertisement regarding energy foods and health builders. A patient of diabetes gets interested in the medical information regarding the subject.

### Situational Factors

Decision-making is also influenced by situational factors like time pressure or cleanliness or crowded places. Noise, atmosphere ambience can stimulate the individual, favourably or adversely in situations. People pressed for time are not able to pay attention to stimuli as well as those who have leisure.

### Programme Involvement

In a TV programme, a number of advertisements appear which some individuals watch or some skip them (fast forward) or take a break. The nature of the programme will influence the nature of response received. The attention can be focussed that is deliberate exposure to stimuli. It can also be without deliberate or conscious focussing of attention.

## Interpretation

The same message can be interpreted in different ways. It is how we assign meaning to sensations. Interpretation involves a competitive or factual component and, an effective or emotional response by cognitive or factual component. The stimuli is placed in different categories of meaning. If a firm floats a new brand at a lower price, it can be interpreted that the product is of low quality. This, however may not be true, as the firm may have more efficient means of production and marketing facilities and may be wanting to add another variety or, to extend the brand. The interpretation can also be affected by the semantic and psychological meanings attached to a stimuli. Semantic meaning is the conventional meaning. Whereas, the psychological meaning is the meaning attached by individuals or groups by their experience on the basis of a situation. The word sale may mean that the goods are on reduced price. It can be psychologically interpreted that these goods are going to be out of style soon.

Effective interpretation is an emotional response to an advertisement. The same advertisement or a picture may attract or repel different individuals. Some may feel happy to see a snowfall, others may dread the cold—some may be happy to see wrestling advertisements, others want to avoid any kind of physical fight.

## ■ 10.2 Misinterpretation of Marketing Messages

The marketers wishing to communicate about their products, must be very careful and present their messages so that they are not misinterpreted, but interpreted accurately. A large number of audiences do not understand the real meaning behind the messages. This may also be due to demographic variables or, their casual approach towards the advertisement.

*Memory* is the storage factor which could be of long term or short term. Memory can be activated. The marketers do it by repetition of messages. When buying items, one tries to recall the past experiences with that item. How pleasant it had been. This affects the decision-making process.

### Perception and Marketing Strategies

Marketing strategy consists of direction the 4 Ps on the target market.



Fig. 10.3

When we talk of perception and marketing strategy, we direct the 4 Ps for proper exposure, attention, interpretation and action.

Thus, the *product*, its brand name, style, packaging and other features should all be such that a proper image or meaning is perceived by the individual.

*Price* decides the value of goods. A high or a low price may be perceived in different ways. Some may think of a high price as a good quality product from a big company or a prestigious product and brand. Others may think of a high price as a gimmick, whereas, the other lower priced products compare well with the brand in question. Similarly, a low price may be interpreted as a low quality product or, as an opportunity given by the company to make its product popular.

### Promotion

The selection of the media is important and it should be correlated with the audience one is trying to reach. We can have different media for rural and urban areas. We may also have different media for younger people, as compared to elder people.

Media for men, women, high income, or low income groups may also be different. The advertisements must capture attention and convey meaning. The consumers take an interest in the ads when they are in need of the product, not otherwise. Various strategies of capturing the attention of the consumers can be used, *i.e.*, by giving big ads or the ads of celebrities who can capture the attention. Sometimes, garment sellers put an attractive woman, different shades of colours can make the product popular and the sale may increase. A lot of advertisements give importance to sex appeal, *e.g.*, showing an attractive woman with the product in the hand or in use. Branded jewellery advertised with the help of beautiful film actresses or models captures the attention of the audience.

### Distribution

Retail shops are well decorated. Interior designing and arrangements of product displays. Point of purchase displays. Visible shelves, lighted with proper background attracts the customer. The ambience and the atmosphere of the shop with proper music, air-conditioning and shining floors and walls, all attract the customers and can increase the traffic in the store, and consequently, register greater sales.

A successful advertisement must accomplish 4 basic tasks:

**Exposure:** It must be exposed to reach the consumer.

**Attention:** Should be able to attract the customer and make him interested in the product.

**Interpretation:** The meaning attached should be consistent with the projected meaning.

**Memory:** Must be stored in the memory so that retrieval is possible.