Analysis of Supporting Communication as a Correlate of Online Consumer Decision Process in Municipal Local government of Kano State, Nigeria

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Abstract
Consumer decision making process is an important aspect of business management, both managers and academicians strive to study and understand the conscious processes that underline the decision to purchase a product or service by consumers. This paper is an attempt to study the correlation between supporting communications and how they affect the on-line consumer decision making process in Kano Municipal local government of Kano State. The paper made use of both primary sources of data through the use of researcher designed questionnaires and secondary sources in form of books, journals and articles from the internet. Findings show that such technological advancements are timely, but effort be made to entice users into adoption and use of them; hence recommending further awareness and consideration of Porter's five forces.
Keywords: Consumer behavior, supporting communication, drives, motives.

1. Introduction

In today's competitive market, there are many products and service providers in the market; therefore the consumer has a variety of products to choose from. However, the choice is not abstract or spontaneous. The consumer knowingly or unknowingly goes through a decision making process before deciding to buy or not to buy which is critical to the seller. However, the decision making process is deep rooted into the consumers behavior and is in most cases supported by some form of information or communication. This support communication is very essential for Online shopping which is the focus of this paper.

The consumer decision process represents the states that consumers go through before, during and after making purchases. The action a person takes in purchasing and using products and services, including the mental and social processes that come before and after these actions are called consumer behavior Kevin, Hartley, and Rudelies (2011). Marketers often find it very difficult to understand how consumers make their purchasing decisions. For the consumers to take decision, they need information from the suppliers/traders/manufacturers to enable them take decision. This information could be offered on line or offline. This coupled with other factors have an influence on the decision to or not to buy.

Consumer behavior describes how consumers make purchase decisions and how they use and dispose of purchased goods or services Lamb, Hair, and Mc Daniel (2004). These actions a person takes on purchasing and using products and services include the mental and social processes that precede and follow these actions Karin, Berkowitz, Hartley and Rudelis (2003). Consumer decision process is affected by many factors among which are the communication infrastructures. Supporting communication such as TV, radio, and the internet have registered significant role in facilitating communication. This study was guided by a specific objective as to: i) evaluate the use of supporting communications mediums; ii) examine the consumer decision process; and iii) establish their relationship.
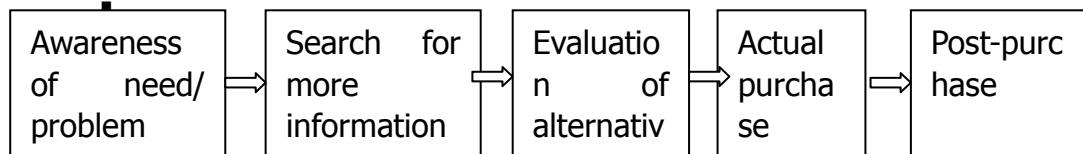
2. Literature Review

Consumer Purchase Decision Process

Behind the visible act of making a purchase are important decision processes and consumer experiences that must be investigated. The consumer decision process represents the state that consumers go through before,

during and after making purchases. Kevin, Hetley and Rudelis (2011) outline the stages a buyer passes through in making choices, about which products and services to buy which is known as the purchase decision process. This process has five stages;-

The Purchasing Decision Process**:**

| Awareness of need/ problem | Search for more information | Evaluation of alternativ | Actual purchase | Post-purc hase |

Problem recognition stage: This is the initial stage in the purchase decision; it perceives a difference between a person's ideal and actual situations, big enough to trigger a decision. This can be as simple as finding an empty milk carton in the refrigerator or realizing that your notebook computer may not be working properly.

Information searching: Seeking value after recognizing a problem, a consumer begins to search for information, the next stage on the purchase decision process first you may scan your memory for privacies experiencing with products or brands. This process is called external searching for frequently purchased items such as shampoo and conditioner, this may be enough. A consumer may undertake external search for information. This is needed when past experience or knowledge is in sufficient, the risk of making wrong decisions is high and the cost of gathering information is low. A potential consumer may seek information from Personal sources, such as relatives and friends; Public sources, including various television consumer programmes government services; and Market dominated sources such as information from sellers including advertising, company websites, and sales peoples.

Alternative Evaluation

The information search stage clarifies the problem for the consumer by: Suggesting criteria's to use for the purpose; Yielding brand names that might meet the criteria; Developing consumer value perceptions and Consumers often have several criteria for evaluating brands, knowing these companies seek to identify the most important evaluating criteria that consumers use when judging brands.

Purchase Decision: Buying Value

Having examined the alternatives in the consideration set, consumer is almost ready to make a purchase decision. Here the consumer has to make two choices. ie From whom to buy and When to buy. For a product like a smart phone, the information search process probably involved using retail stores, seeing different brands in catalogues, and using a smart phone on a seller's website. The choice of which seller to buy from will depend on such consideration as the terms of the sale, past experience buying from the seller, and the return policy. Often, a purchase decision involves simultaneously evaluating both product attributes and sellers characteristics.

Deciding when to buy is determined by a number of factors for instance, one might buy sooner if one of the favorite prepared brands is on sale or its manufacturer offers a rebate. Other factors such as store atmosphere, pleasantness or ease of shopping experience, sales person assistance time pressure and financial circumstances (Mullins, and Walker Jr.2010). Use of the internet to gather information, evaluate activities and make buying decisions adds a technological dimension to the consumer purchase decision process, and the buying experiences.

Post purchase behavior; Value Consumption in use.

After buying a product, the consumer compares it with his or her expectation and is either satisfied or dissatisfied, if the consumer is dissatisfied, marketer must determine whether the product was different or consumer expectation were too high, product deficiency may require a decision change if expectations are too high, perhaps the company's advertising or the sales person oversold the products features and benefits. This process therefore attempts to predict/explain what consumers purchase, where, when, how much and why they buy.

Support Communication

Support communication can be direct communication from sales representatives, telemarketing, direct marketing or it can be indirect communication through different media**.** Support communication is borne by the seller. This is always in an attempt to inform, persuade and influence the buyer to purchase the product of the manufacture. In marketing, this support communication will take form of marketing communication. Consumers learn about the sellers from different sources which may be on line or off line.

On line support communication

There are different forms of online support communication. They includes among others:

■   Banners: Display promotional message in a rectangular box at top or bottom of computer screen
■   Pop-ups: Appear on screen without user calling for them

■ Pop-unders: Open underneath user's active browser window and do not appear until user closes active window

Online Advertising Placement Methods

■ Banner swapping: Arrangements among firms allow each firm to have its banners displayed on other affiliate sites for no cost

■ Banner exchanges: Arrange for banner swapping among firms

■ Advertising networks: Act as brokers between advertisers and publishers, placing ads and tracking all activity related to the ad

Sponsorships and Affiliate

■ Sponsorship: Paid effort to tie an advertiser's name to particular information, event, and venue in way that reinforces brand in a positive, yet not overtly commercial manner. For example advertorial Affiliate relationship: Permits a firm to put its logo or banner ad on another firm's Web site from which users of that site can click through to the affiliate's site. It is sometimes called tenancy deals.

Direct E-mail Marketing and the Spam Explosion

■ Direct e-mail marketing: E-mail marketing messages sent directly to interested consumers who "opt-in" or have not "opted-out"

■ Spam: Unsolicited commercial e-mail

■ Online catalog: Provide equivalent of paper-based catalog

■ Online chat: Provides equivalent of help from sales representative

■ Public relations: Involves communicating with target audiences, or publics, using methods other than advertising

Mixing Offline and Online Marketing Communications

As much as the online marketing communication is accessed by internet users, mixes of the offline and online with have greater effect of influencing purchase decision making.

■ Traditional offline consumer-oriented industries have learned to use Web to extend brand images and sales campaigns

■ Online companies have learned how to use traditional marketing communications to drive sales to Web site

■ Most successful marketing campaigns incorporate both online and offline tactics

According to Keneth (2004), the consumer decision process is supported by market communication. This may be offline or online communication. At each stage of decision making, there is some form of support communication available to the consumer to support the decision making process.

A Model of Online Consumer Decision Making Process

The model adds two new factors:

▪ Web site capabilities – the content, design and functionality of a site

▪ Consumer click stream behavior – the transaction log that consumers establish as they move about the Web

The website marketing efforts (support communication) affects the consumer's decision. If the company offers goods online and supports with advertising on TVs and radio, this enables the consumer know what product, where to get it, how to secure it. Just knowing how to use the internet is not a guarantee for a consumer to buy unless there are efforts to convince them to buy. However it is important to note that the support communication is a catalyst but not enough to influence the online decision making. The social culture and psychological factors play an important role in the decision making process of online purchase.

Social culture and online purchasing decision

The social culture has an influence on the online consumer decision making. Allan & William (2003) identified social influence of Family, Friends, Social class, Age, group and economy on online purchasing decision. Those who have families and friends who buy online are likely to be influenced to buy on line while those who come from higher social class are likely to buy online simply because they are most likely to own a computer with internet access and are likely to have the financial means to make online purchases. Those from lower classes are less likely to purchase on line due to lack of access to computer services and may not have the financial means to purchase on line.

On the other hand the age factor may influence the decision making. Older people who never had access to computer in their daily lives are less likely to use neither a computer nor taking a risk of ordering on the line. The young adults who routinely use a computer are more likely to purchase on as they may be drawn more to convenience and time saving aspects. They further have the means to buy online and the technical skills to do so. The younger people may have the skills and technical knowledge to buy on line but do not have the means to purchase. The socio-cultural influences may affect the decision making process. In places of fear of

insecurity, persons with computer may decide to purchase on line. On the other hand, people from developing countries do not have computers and less likely to purchase on line.

The psychological factors and online purchase decision making

Before the consumers goes out to buy they decide on how much to buy, the prices and s whether to shop on line or not and whether to continue such mode of purchase given the convenience and time saving.   With just a mere click consumers can find out about the product they need thus.   However the responses to these questions are based on the psychological factors of personality motivation, perception and attitudes towards as identified by Allan & William (2003). Online purchases and the two constructs will result into a response of whether to purchase or not and whether to continues purchasing or not.   When a need is not satisfied, it may lead to a drive. The need for water leads to thirst for example. A drive is a strong stimulus that encourages action to reduce a need. Drives are internal they are the reasons behind certain behavior patterns. In marketing a product purchase results from a drive to satisfy some need. It should be noted that even when the consumer can make many clicks in searching for information and making evaluation, the consumer is likely to remain loyal to a company that they have developed a trust relationship as observed by (Fry, 2001 in Smith, 2002).

3.   Methodology

The methodology adopted for this research was explanatory research. Data was collected using document analysis.

4.   Findings

The researchers found that establishment of online services does not guarantee adoption and use for better services. It becomes imperative for the business initiators to go extra mile to educate and entice users into using their innovation.

5.   Conclusion

The researchers concluded that technological advancements such as online purchase are vital today, but effort suffices in persuading the general population into adoption; such parameters like superiority, communicability, usability and compatibility stand to credit consumer behavior online; hence recommend further training, hosting familiar services and consideration of Porter's Five forces.

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