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Values and e-Consumer Behavior

Joan Morales Alcúdia and Marina Romeo Delgado

Abstract

e-Consumer behavior models prior attitudes to predict e-loyalty in front values or another internal factors of customers. Scientific literature relegates to a second term the importance of values in purchase online like a predictive factor of e-loyalty. The following chapter explains why values will be determinant in consumer behavior online and e-loyalty.

Keywords: consumer behavior, shopping online, utilitarian and hedonic values, e-loyalty, organizational values

1. Introduction

Values are concepts or beliefs about a final desirable state. Values cross-specific situations guiding the selection and evaluation of events and behaviors ordering them through a hierarchical structure [1]. In the operational definition of “values” we can distinguish three dimensions [2]:

- An ethical dimension strategic or of preferential election: in this case the value is like a conviction or a stable belief in the time that a determinate way of behavior, or an existential purpose is personal or socially preferable to his opposite way of behavior or to his contrary existential purpose. The values can be understood like strategic learnings and relatively stable in the time that allow us act orienting us to achieve ours outputs.
- An economic dimension or cost: this dimension does reference near at hand of the significance or to the importance of a thing. When we are making decisions, values are reference guides that allow us regarding people, objects or ideas. In that sense they can be considered as internal decision criteria.
- A psychological dimension: understood as in which it defines it as: “a moral quality that moves to tackle big companies and to face without big fear dangers.”

Beside these dimensions of this definition [2], it is possible to explain the fragmentation and subjectivity of a concept and sense and different uses across situations [3–5]. Regarding cultural meanings, ethical, human, and morals, values are considered like general and categorical concepts that influence in individual behavior with regard to what results are desirable and not desirable in relation to surroundings and determinate people to consider besides beliefs prescribed on what is well or what is bad [6–10].

Literature puts of self-evident that values are the most important factor that conform the bases of a culture and affect to the training of attitudes, being considered, therefore, like a product of a culture and the base on which form individual values that drive people by the way to taking socially desirable decisions. Therefore, values are formed between people that live in a determinate generation and go transmitting them to other generations through a socialization process, being able to be considered like a concept umbrella that includes elements such as values, beliefs, and norms shared by a collectively useful for distinguishing a determinate group of people from another. Regarding meanings referred specifically to consumers, values would be consider like internal guides that head to the individuals in relation to purchase behavior like consumers [3, 11–14].

2. Values and consumer behavior

Studies of values in consumer behavior try to establish the relations between concrete attributes of products, abstract attributes and consequences, and consumer values [15]. A second group of the studies about the values and behavior of consumer are those investigations that consider the values like an antecedent variable [16]. These investigations try to explain how values influence thoughts and motivations [17], purchase behavior [18, 19], or product elections, preferences, attitudes, or needs [20]. Finally, the third kind of studies has been using values to segment markets or to develop advertising strategies.

2.1 Personal values and consumer behavior

During the last decade, the study of personal values has been an object of a large attention by part of researchers. They have been multiple the disciplines as well as the approaches that have stood out the importance of the values. From sociology, going through psychology and economy, personal values in a direct or indirect way had been present in numerous studies. According to [12] there are two approaches to the study of values. The first approach treats to establish relations between the values and the consumer behavior. Like this, different authors have tried to relate values of the subject with consumption of products [21], motivations of purchase [17], retail election [22], choice of a certain kind of food [23, 24], culture [25, 26], or with consumer behavior in general [18, 19, 22, 27, 28].

The second approach studies values' influence on the behavior of consumption [1, 18, 20, 23, 25, 29–33]. The effect of the system of values in the process of decision of the consumer also has been very established in literature [8].

Personal values are principles that guide behaviors and that are strongly tied with motivations of individuals. The personal values and the perception of value would constitute the main managerial strength of the intention of purchase for products of luxury- especially in the Occident and in the east emergent markets [34]. In accordance with [22], the strength of the personal value would root in the perception of utility in relation with the image and the symbolism in association or dissociation with cultural referents and demographic partner. In relation to the consumption and the personal values, there are two orientations that have been collected through the literature: the utilitarian orientation and the hedonic orientation.

The utilitarian orientation in consumption has been described like a tendency to emphasize the perception of functional value or his future provision [22]. Traditionally, functional value has been considered the primary conductive strength in elections of consumers [22] and the more easily adopted by consumers

with traditional lifestyles. In this sense, consumers with utilitarian values tend to have simple lifestyles, considering the consumption like necessary for the survival but without any purpose of entertainment. Consistently, they tend to be more conscious of the value and have more positive perceptions of this value in relation to the price that they have to pay.

The hedonic term recognizes different behaviors in consumers basing them in mental criteria. Mental criteria include entertainment and appearances of excitement with the experience about the product and/or service. Entertainment reflects sensory dimensions (sight, hearing, taste, and touch) of a perceived experience. Sometimes these experiences cannot be reedited in back experiences. For example, customer experience generates directly emotional excitation, evoking emotions like pleasure, envy, fury, or anger. We can observe it when somebody goes to the restaurant and does not value neither the price or the quality of the foods, being for him or her more important, the decoration of the restaurant or the musical thread.

Study of the hedonic values initiates to finals of the 1970s [35, 36] from the investigation about consumer motivations and their relationship with products symbolism [37]. Even so, it is not until years later that some studies recognize in the products the existence of symbolic values, going further to traditional utilitarian values [38]. From here the acts of consumption are based not in what the consumers think that is real but in what they wish that it was [36]. The election of a product or a mark bases frequently in the congruence of the lifestyle and the values of consumption, as well as the symbolic perception or the meaning of the product or of the mark [36, 37]. Like this, the consumers with strong hedonic values choose his products or the marks basing more in his symbolic or expressive values that in his functional values.

2.2 Perceived values and consumer behavior

Perceived values are an imperative strategy for organizations [39] giving to customers an upper input about organizations and adopting an important paper in all activities of marketing [40–42] of business success. In the actuality comes accepting the idea that successful companies do not deliver products in return of a gain but rather value in return of utility. The value perceived is defined like the result of the comparison by part of the consumer of the profits perceived and the sacrifices made [43, 44]. According to this definition, we are faced with a concept of subjective nature characterized by a certain ambiguity [45]. This fact prevents a uniform interpretation according to the term. Certain confusion in the term “perceived values” creates difficulties to compare distinct empirical studies and inconsistency in the procedures of measurement of the value perceived [46]. In this way there is consensus regarding the multidimensional of the concept of value [39] accepting the existence of several factors that should explain and measure the value perceived.

Perceived value is therefore a subjective construct in several senses: it varies between customers [47], between cultures [48], and in different temporary situations [49]. This last assessment conceives the perceived value like a dynamic factor that consumer experiences before the purchase, in the moment of the purchase, in the moment of his use, and after his use. For each one of these moments, the assessment made is different [50]. Of this form, in the moment of the purchase, the attributes of the product and the price are determinants, whereas during the use and after the same, the consequences and results obtained are the most valued elements by the customer. Therefore, to understand the process by which determinate values can generate the loyalty in the consumers, it will be necessary to define more clearly their perceived value [51].

2.3 Perceived values, preferences, and intentions of purchase

The existing literature signals a perceived value like an indicator of the intention of purchase [42] relating it besides with the attitude, the preferences, the purchase behavior, and the loyalty. That is to say, the buyer wishes the function or the service that the product is susceptible to loan and not the product in himself the same [52]. The training of preferences conceives perceived value like a development of affective states that correspond with the results of evaluation and ordination of alternatives about the available purchase made only in function of his qualities and without any consideration of costs and sacrifices associated. We speak as of a process of evaluation that takes place in absence of restrictions of cost and budgetary, as if of free and free products treated [53]. However, against profits that can contribute the product, all consumers have to bear a cost. The cost is not only economic, it also includes the time of research and the risks associated to the on-line purchase for the e-consumer. Hence the cost is one of the measures with which the consumer evaluates the sum of the profits and the satisfaction associated that expects to obtain from the purchase and the consumption of the product. From this point of view, the price is not but what the consumer offers or is had to offer in return of the quality that is received or trusts to receive. The consumer estimates the expectations and the degree of profit or the advantages that expects to receive in shape of reward when purchasing a product/service from the efforts and sacrifices that necessarily will have to make when he is choosing a product/service. Perceived value affects the purchase intention of clients. This is a result between the perceived quality of the product and the corresponding sacrifice associated with obtaining it. It coincides with what usually knows like the relation of quality/price between what is expected to be received–quality and what in return is necessary to give–price. From all of the above, we can conclude that the purchase intention is the result of an evaluation process in terms of costs and benefits [53]. From here, unlike what occurs with the preferences, the intentions of purchase reveal like predictors reasonable in the final behavior of consumer.

2.4 Perceived values and attitudes in behavior of purchase and loyalty

The concept of attitude refers to the learnt predisposition to answer in a consistent form to an object favorable or not favorable. According to the theory of reasoned action, the attitude of the consumer influences on the behavior of the purchase of the same. According to this theory, behavior is determined by intentions and influenced by attitudes and subjective norms. The relation between attitude and behavior intentions has been widely examined and supported empirically [54]. Since the attitudes are learnt, these seem affected by the information and the experiences. The value perceived can influence the attitude of the customer. At the same time, perceived value is important because of the influences in the confidence of consumer [39].

The existing research about how values influence behavior to go shopping and the preferences is not very common. There are not too many empirical studies that demonstrate the relationship between the values and the intention of purchases or the buying behavior [55, 56].

3. Values and e-consumer behavior

3.1 Values online

Investigations around values online have prospered at the same time that purchase online has been common [57]. New ways of investigation have opened

from the instant that the retailers did not comprise the reasons about why customers used this channel, how it is used, and the requests that were necessary for his use. Keeney [16] creates a series of objective and specific categories like influence factors in the intention of purchase in the Internet. Besides, it gave a definition of value associated to the trade in the Internet like “the value of the network in terms of profits and costs of both in relation to a product and his processes of research, request, and reception of the same.” In accordance with [58], the value online present in the activities that offers the Internet should be generated into the following process: research, evaluation, solution of the problem, and transaction. From here that for the companies that operate through the Internet, the value was one of the key elements since it offers a competitive advantage to the companies that develop his organizational activities orienting them and focusing to his customers [58], across perceived value a key to generate to consumer satisfaction and loyalty. In e-commerce, perceived values affect the intention to adopt the channel of purchase [59, 60] as well as the attitude to use it and in the intention of repurchase online [61].

Pahnla and Warsta [57] had proposed a model of consumer behavior online where hedonic and utilitarian values were antecedents of purchase behavior prioritizing values in front of the attitudes and focusing their efforts in analyzing purchase behavior online. Besides the exploration of the paper of perceived values and consumer behavior in relation of e-commerce, they propose a structural model in which they hypothesize that utilitarian and hedonic values have a direct impact on the affections of e-consumers and acting like an indirect way on the behaviors of purchase in the virtual surroundings. On the other hand, they analyze the importance of the habit in e-consumers behavior relating it to his time with e-commerce. The results obtained by these authors confirm the incidence in an indirect way of hedonic and utilitarian values in affections and indirectly on the behavior in relation to the e-commerce.

In a virtual purchase, [62] proposes two dimensions of value: like an achieve component (profits that buyer obtains of the offer to the seller) and like a concede component (monetary costs and not monetary costs in which it incurs in the acquisition of the offer). In this sense, the importance of perceived value in the electronic business comes from, between other causes, the ease that offers to the consumer to compare the characteristics of products and/or services online in relation to his prices. When the perceived value is low, the customers will bend for changing to companies and will weaken his loyalty. In other words, the customers satisfied will not be faithful to a virtual establishment if they feel that they are not obtaining the greater value perceived. Approach of [62] is predominantly economic. The economic approach is the first identified approach in brand management, and several authors pointed out that the elements of the economic approach serve as a prerequisite for most planning and execution of brand management still today. Nevertheless, this approximation does not consider neither the influence that can have the individual characteristics in the perceptive process that the consumer carries out when he interacts with the virtual surroundings from their personal values. The impulsive purchase results to be a product of wishes, longings, and motivations in the unconscious level of the consumer being and conditioned by the relation of surroundings and his individual characteristics.

3.2 Predict models of consumer behavior and values online

Multiple predict models about values online show the incidence of utilitarian and hedonic values in a positive affection about e-shop [63] and on e-loyalty

and the experience of purchase in e-shops [64] or their relationship with *fashion* marks. Hedonic and utilitarian values have been studied as market segmentation criteria, as a background of consumer satisfaction and as influencing factors in the purchase intention in the online store. Also it has verified their empirical relation with certain dimensions of the online store, with the catalogue of products, with the intention of being sponsoring, with the adoption of devices of virtual purchase, with the antecedents of the attitude and the wish of purchase to the on-line retail trade, with the use of Internet as a shopping channel, and with preferences of customer about shopping online. Likewise, it has linked to the hedonic personal values and utilitarian personal values with factors like flow online with intention about the use of electronic devices [60] with the gender and the perception of utility [65] and with the perception of profits to buy in virtual shops [66].

Based on the theoretical foundation some of postulates present in the cognitive theories of social psychology (theories of the attribution, theory of the cognitive dissonance and theory of the expectation-value), [67] it is possible to assume that the e-loyalty to a determinate online shop depends of the degree of adjust/unfit between personal values of consumer and organizational values perceived in the on-line shop where the consumer develops his behaviors of purchase. In this way e-loyalty can be affected in a positive or negative way in function of the degree of conflict or the existence of congruence between organizational values perceived by the consumer in the e-shop and his own personal values in each experience of purchase online. A higher degree of congruence between personal values and organizational values perceived by the consumer in e-shop can be considered by e-buyers like as a positive result to repeat their e-purchases in a certain online store. This positive result increased the probability that in the future the consumer buys another time in the same e-shop. In this regard, congruence and/or conflict between organizational values perceived and personal values could be produced during any one of the three phases that constitute purchase process (research of information, purchase, and post-purchase process) and always from the relations of interaction generated between subject and the organization in the e-shop. The apparition of relations of conflict between personal values and organizational values perceived, understanding in this case the conflict like the degree of incongruence generated in the interactive way between personal values and the perceived values across the mark in the e-shop, would affect in a negative way to the intention of purchase as to the purchase, without offering possibilities to develop any type of loyalty to a determinate business B2C by two components: like a future preferential election of the e-shop and like a repetition of purchase [67].

Morales [67], in his predicted model of e-loyalty, found a clear differentiation between categories of utilitarian and hedonic values and a strong Pearson correlation index between utilitarian personal values and utilitarian organizational values and a weak Pearson correlation index between personal hedonic values and organizational hedonic values. Results confirm, in accordance with the existent literature [45, 69], the coexistence of two types of personal values (utilitarian and hedonic) when the consumers develop their behaviors of on-line purchase [68, 69]. The results obtained confirm the relationship between personal values and organizational values and the relationship between personal values and some dimensions of store online like virtual design, product assortment, aftersales service and virtual store information [67].

4. Conclusions

The scientific literature referred to predictive models of consumer behavior on-line has centered their efforts in treating to analyze the intention of on-line

purchase, being scarce the studies that do reference so much to the behavior of purchase as to the e-loyalty. In all of them, one of the most studied personal factors has been attitude. Regarding values, in spite of having been a variable collected in diverse global models like explanatory elements of e-loyalty, the attention loaned to this variable by part of the researchers has been rather scarce. In spite of models [70], e-values will be considered like an explanatory element of e-purchase intention and e-loyalty online as well as attitudes. In the same way, the predictive models referred to the behavior of the on-line consumer mostly have opted for including the attitude like one of the explanatory internal factors of behavior of purchase and the on-line loyalty, to the detriment of the values. Including online values in predict models of e-behavior online will be a gain to future research for explain better the confidence deposited by consumers in this new channel.

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