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Consumer Behavior and Some Consequences for  
Marketers and Marketing Researchers

著者	Franz Bocker
journal or publication title	關西大學商學論集
volume	34
number	4
page range	652-660
year	1989-10-25
URL	<a href="http://hdl.handle.net/10112/00020514">http://hdl.handle.net/10112/00020514</a>

## 【資料】

# Polarization and Individualization of Consumer Behavior and Some Consequences for Marketers and Marketing Researchers

Franz Böcker

The following is the manuscript of the lecture by Prof. Dr. Franz Böcker of University of Regensburg (Universität Regensburg BRD) at the Kansai University on June 15th of this year (editor).

## 1. Synopsis

Some years ago consumers in western countries followed general trends in buyer behavior as part of a high sociological process more or less homogeneously. Not only clothings have been subject of these changes but furnitures, cars, entertainment music etc. Since about five years there is not any more one uniform trend but a variety of trends which are partly mutually contradictory. In addition to that individuals seem to behave more and more inconsistent as demonstrating different behavioral schemes in similar occasions. Evidence for these facts is given and some conclusions are drawn.

## 2. The new consumer—an innovative as well as an adaptive consumer

Trends in clothings are an old phenomenon; there has been

even something like a dictatorship of the trends; one could just buy those garments which were in trend. Today, boutiques and department stores are offering very different styles—either textile, leather, furs, plastics, or else—and all offerings are bought—either being conservative, aggressive, childish, or else. There is not any more a fashion monopoly (Paris); many centers have changed the monocentric to a polycentric world of fashion. It seems that a vague of liberalism is sweeping over the consumers' world.

Everyone has its own trend, but one is even not following that trend all the time: Ladies are wearing at the same time jeans and furs, are driving downtown in a Porsche to buy at a discount store to merchandise prices; white-collar employees take at lunch a burger at McDonald's and celebrate a dinner at a first class restaurant; one single room in just one household offers a mix of classical Louis XVI as well as cash & carry furnitures.

Consumers are not any more homogeneous and the individuals are even inconsistent in their behavior; at minimum some of them are following several trends at the same time.

Consumers are demonstrating a variety of behavioral schemes

**Exh. 1: Indicators for trends towards hedonism and functionalism**

Adventures and enjoyment!	— cigarettes "HB"	} trend towards hedonism (ads from "Stern" 1986/7)
Enjoy the taste!	— cigarettes "Krone"	
Take it easy and enjoy!	— Stockmeyer-Food	
Enjoy the life!	— Ballantines-Whisky	
More quality of life!	— Mazda cars	
More liberty!	— Volvo cars	
The art to life!	— Lancia cars	
Retailers' specials without interruption (DM 9.99-prices)	—	} trend towards functionalism
Actions	—	

which are partly inconsistent, but traditional advertising appeals are still effective. The headlines are still reflecting an overall trend towards hedonism; some other marketing activities (predominantly price policy) reflecting a clear trend towards functionalism, however (exh. 1).

At a first glance we constate that there are different trends at the same time in western societies; a trend towards more heterogeneity between consumer segments as well as a trend towards less consistency of behavior within one consumer segment.

### **3. Some statistical evidence for a growing consumer heterogeneity**

A hypothesis analog to the hypothesis of a trend towards more heterogeneity in behavior is the subsequent one; the percentage of individuals sharing some average behavior is decreasing. In order to be able to scrutinize such a question one has to measure the referent variables identically over time. For some central values, some product class interests and some leisure time activities the findings are given in the exhibits 2 to 4. The data are taken from two representative cross-country studies performed in West Germany end 1980/early 1981 and end 1984/early 1985. The sample has been composed of about 9000 and about 10000 individuals. The values, product interests and activities chosen for presentation are all constructs under study which have been measured identically 1980/81 and 1984/85. They have been measured using statements such as "I am interested in..." and four levels to answer (completely agree, ..., completely disagree). Those levels of outcome have been judged as extreme which are based on a "completely"-statement.

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**Exh. 2: Percentage of respondents which show extreme levels of outcomes as regards values 1980/81 and 1984/85.**

Values	extremes (+/-) (%)		increase (%)
	1980/81	1984/85	
(1) I am very concerned on my health!	29.8	33.0	+11.1
(2) It's fun to have a look at me in the mirror!	35.2	37.4	+6.3
(3) It's important to look attractively!	38.5	39.2	+2.5
(4) I like to cook quick dishes!	39.9	39.9	0.0
(5) Running the household nobody is better!	41.4	40.7	-1.7
(6) Running the household is women's job!	40.9	41.2	+0.7
(7) A wife has to devote herself to husband and children, that's her profession!	37.8	39.6	+2.1
(8) The husband has to decide when it comes to important decisions!	39.6	40.2	+1.5

Source: MK, VA

**Exh. 3: Percentage of respondents which show extreme levels of outcomes as regards product interests 1980/81 and 1984/85.**

productinterest	extremes (+/-) (%)		increase (%)
	1980/81	1984/85	
schoco bars	71.1	73.5	+3.4
nuts to nibble	41.5	43.6	+5.1
fruit juices	55.7	61.8	+11.0
mineral water	42.7	52.4	+22.7
make-up, day time creme	38.7	67.5	+74.4
perfumes etc.	18.3	54.0	+195.1
restauratives, tonics	86.8	89.5	+3.6
sweeteners	80.8	85.0	+5.2
yogurt	39.0	37.2	-4.6

Source: MK, VA

The statistical evidence is quite uniform: Besides some rare examples we observe a clear trend towards extremes. Theoretically, this trend could just be a trend towards more extreme wordings; from other evidence (purchase records compared with actual market data)

**Exh. 4: Percentage of respondents which show extreme levels of outcomes as regards leisure time activities 1980/81 and 1984/85.**

leisure time activities	extremes (+/-) (%)		increase (%)
	1980/81	1984/85	
active sports	50.9	52.3	+2.8
go to a club	63.8	64.1	+1.3
listen to music	42.8	46.5	+8.6
go to theatre etc.	49.6	53.1	+7.1
cook, bake	52.1	50.7	-2.7
knit, tailor	65.0	68.0	+4.6
go to disco, bar	54.0	56.5	+4.6

Source: MK, VA

we derive a constant response behavior, however. As a consequence we conform the general hypothesis of a more heterogeneous behavior in 1984/85 compared to that in 1980/81. This hypothesis refers to the aggregate as well as the individual level. Considering the short time span (comparable data for a longer time span are not available) the findings have not been expected.

#### **4. Consequences the marketers have drawn**

The retail sector's as well as the restaurant sector's developments are analogous to the changes in consumers behavior; discount stores and boutiques, both increase its market shares, traditional shops are decreasing; fast food and first class or exotic restaurants develop well whereas traditional restaurant are losing in importance.

The consequences to this trends different manufacturers have undertaken are similar. Brands in the same product category have been successfully marketed either as discount or as prestige brands

(pharmaceuticals, car versions, furnitures). The discount brands are running for a big uniform market composed of consumers aiming to rationalize their behavior, the prestige brands for market niches composed of consumers aiming to have fun/to develop themselves. Comparing the elements of marketing mix for both segments we may easily develop the following two profiles (exh. 5).

**Exh. 5: Profiles of functional products compared to adventure/prestige products**

functional products	adventure/prestige products
strategy of cost reduction mass production rational communication low priced products with adequate quality anonymous mass distribution (tele shopping)	strategy of USP small series production emotional communication life style oriented products personalized exclusive distribution

Any development of an adventure or prestige-type product asks for quite elaborated behavior research in order to find out the unserved preferences which unfortunately are not stable at all (data-base marketing).

**5. Consequences for consumer behavior research**

The late sixties and the early seventies have been the time of life style analyses. The basic philosophy of this research tradition which heavily has been influenced by the A-I-O-paradigm (Attitudes, Interests, Opinions) may be formalized as subsequently be done: When behaving as consumers (product choice, brand choice, store choice, product usage,...) the individuals follow some guidelines which are rather stable over time and product categories.

Referring to the behavioral concepts we have dealt with and following that set of theories one would classify a consumer as function-oriented, as conservative, and as innovative. However, reality is different; the consumer does not show much consistency in behavior. An individual behaving as a sporty driver may not be a sporty biker, even worse; a person showing some ecological attitude as regards washing powder (no phosphate!), does not show any ecological attitude as regards fuel (no lead!). These type of findings have induced the general feeling that the typologies have failed. However, it seems that this conclusion is not an adequate one.

We all suppose that there must be some consistency in consumer behavior—otherwise all value concepts as well as approaches based on homeostatic equilibria would be wrong—but we need a different approach! According to the author's understanding the failure of the "classical" typologies is a consequence of not explicitly taking into account financial as well as time budgets as constraints of the consumers choice. These constraints impede a consumer to behave homogeneously. Due to financial restrictions e.g. the consumer is not able to consume as his life style is asking for. In such a situation the consumer will either modify his life style in total to a less financially burdensome life style or he will just fulfill his life style in those areas which are especially relevant for him. The first conclusion is consistent with classical life style analyses; the second asks for a new type of typology approach including values/attitudes, opinions, interests as well as time and financial constraints (A-I-O-C-paradigm). The financial constraints on consumer behavior are especially relevant to individuals who have a



rather good intellectual but rather bad financial background (students, young professionals, intellectuals) or those who have severe time constraints. All these consumer segments show important discrepancies between traditionally defined life styles and actual behavior. Elder individuals and rather rich people do not show the same frequency of discrepancy according to first hand research results. As a side effect the new life style approach will give an explanation to the often replicated statement "consumer show an ecological attitude but an economical behavior!". Taking the higher prices of ecological products and the rather low importance ecology does have in day-to-day life the behavior is easy to explain.

From the new life style approach based on the A-I-O-C paradigm we derive the following hypotheses:

- As far as individually important ( $\leftrightarrow$ value system) products are concerned the discrepancies between life style and actual behavior should be minor ones compared to the behavior as far as unimportant products are concerned. For those products the new approach is less promising than for other products.
- The new life style approach should be superior to the traditional life style approach whenever individuals with a temporary budget constraint are concerned (newly unemployed persons, persons with good financial perspectives).
- The new approach should induce a higher increase in internal and external statistical validity for products being part of the demonstrative consumption sphere than for products belonging to the private consumption sphere.

These hypotheses are under study; some preliminary results

are promising, confirming the superiority of the A-I-O-C-life style paradigm to the A-I-O-life style paradigm. With some increase of leisure time and disposable purchase power probably the need for a better understanding of consumer life styles is ever growing.

**Sources:**

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