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THE CONSUMER BUYING DECISION PROCESS

The purchase is only the visible part of a more complex decision process created by the consumer for each buying decision he makes. But what happens before and after this purchase? What are the factors influencing on the choice of product purchased by the consumer?

Today, let's focus on the Consumer Buying Decision Process and the stages that lead a shopper to purchase a new product. *Engel, Blackwell* and *Kollat* have developed a model of consumer buying decision process in five steps: problem of recognition, information search, alternative evaluation, purchase decision and post-purchase behavior.

Problem of recognition.

The need recognition is the first and most important step in the buying process. If there is no need, there is no purchase. This recognition happens when there is a lag between the consumer's actual situation and the ideal and desired one. However, not all the needs end up as a buying behavior. It requires that the lag between the two situations is quite important. But the "way" (product price, ease of acquisition, etc.) to obtain this ideal situation has to be perceived as "acceptable" by the consumer based on the level of importance he attributes to the need.

Information search.

Once the need is identified, it's time for the consumer to seek information about possible solutions to the problem. He will search more or less information depending on the complexity of the choices to be made but also his level of involvement.

Then the consumer will seek to make his opinion to guide his choice and his decision-making process with internal information and external information.

Alternative evaluation.

Once the information collected, the consumer will be able to evaluate the different alternatives that offer to him, evaluate the most suitable to his needs and choose the one he think it's best for him. In order to do so, he will evaluate their attributes on two aspects. The objective characteristics (such as the features and functionality of the product) but also subjective (perception and perceived value of the brand by the consumer or its reputation).

Purchase decision.

Now that the consumer has evaluated the different solutions and products available for respond to his need, he will be able to choose the product or brand that seems most appropriate to his needs. Then proceed to the actual purchase itself. His decision will depend on the information and the selection made in the previous step based on the perceived value, product's features and capabilities that are important to him.

Post-purchase behavior.

Once the product is purchased and used, the consumer will evaluate the adequacy with his original needs (those who caused the buying behavior). And whether he has made the right choice in buying this product or not. He will feel either a sense of satisfaction for the product (and the choice). Or, on the contrary, a disappointment if the product has fallen far short of expectations.

So, by improving their knowledge of the Consumer Buying Decision Process, brands can improve their marketing strategy to effectively respond and be present with their customers at each stage of their buying behavior. And thus raise and create a need, strengthen their relationship with their customers and grow their sales.

To avoid reputation damage and to develop a lasting relationship with its customers, the brand's interest is to multiply actions for optimizing the shopping experience in-store as well as the product experience. But also provide great customer service in case of dissatisfaction or issue with the product.