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ATTITUDES IN MARKETING

Unless marketers use coercive physical force or outright deception, the simplest way to create favorable perceptions and influence purchase intention is through the formation of positive attitudes towards brand and product. Thus, attitudes will always remain an essential aspect of marketing and consumer research. Stated another way, attitudes provide the only real lever that marketing practitioners can effectively and realistically manipulate to create desired marketplace consumer behaviors.

Role of attitudes in marketing. The concept of attitudes is firmly embedded in social psychology. Considerable research in the last 30 years has provided additional insight to the hypothetical construct. Attitudes are generally considered to be a useful construct in assessing behavior because attitudes may exert selective effects at various stages of information processing, can be learned, changed, and maintained, and sometimes are predictive of behaviors based on the evaluative meaning assigned to objects (Eagly and Chaiken 1993).

Lutz (1991) suggested that attitudes have important decision-making and market orientation implications, “attitude is a key link in the causal chain between attribute perception on the one hand and intentions and behaviors on the other hand.” Attitudes may be useful for segmentation of markets (based on attitudes), new product concept testing, and promotion strategy (advertising and positioning). From the consumer perspective, attitudes can make decision making easier and more satisfying (Fazio 1995).

Attitudes are extremely valuable to marketing because attitudes can be modified through priming, promotion, and branding. Marketers cannot directly manipulate behaviors, but marketers can influence attitudes that may lead to desired marketplace behaviors.

Attitude-behavior consistency. It is often noted that there exists weak or inconsistent relationship between attitudes and behaviors. This may be the case if we consider attitudes independent of other variables and attempt to identify behaviors that spawn spontaneously from held attitudes. A basic attitude is a link between perceptions, intention and behavior (Lutz 1991)—an internal state that intervenes between stimuli and response and affects these responses (Eagly and Chaiken 1993). Attitudes can guide perceptions as well as behavioral, cognitive, and affective responses (Fazio 1986; Fazio 1995). Consistent with this line of thinking, we must consider attitudes as mediators and moderators of other behavior inducing variables. We must also consider the factors that mediate and moderate the attitudes on behavior. Thus, Fazio (1986) specifically suggested that we not examine “how” attitudes spawn behaviors, but “when” attitudes energize or guide behaviors.

A substantial body of research has accumulated investigated the “when” there exist attitude-behavior consistency and have identified interesting mediators and moderators that influence attitude-behavior consistency. For example, several studies demonstrated that attitude accessibility and attitude confidence accessibility and attitude confidence moderated the attitude-behavior relationship (e.g. Berger and Mitchell 1989; Fazio et al. 1989). Greater accessibility and confidence generally lead to greater attitude-behavior coherence. Situational variables such as vested interest, personality factors, self-monitoring, consistency between affective and cognitive components of attitude, have all been demonstrated to have a moderating influence on the relationship between

attitudes and behaviors (Fazio 1995). Holbrook and Batra (1987) provided a framework that links together ad content, emotional responses, attitude towards ad, and attitude towards brand, and found that emotions had a mediating influence between ad content and attitude towards ad. Considerable work has examined the impact of product trial versus advertising (e.g. Smith and Swinyard 1983) on product attitudes. In most cases, trial forms stronger attitudes than general advertising and demonstrated greater attitude-behavior consistency. Dholakia and Sternthal (1977) demonstrated source credibility influence on attitude towards ad. MacKenzie and Lutz (1989) demonstrated attitude towards ad had strong mediating influence on the attitude towards brand, and Olney, Holbrook, and Batra (1991) demonstrated a chain of events from content, to attitudes, to actual viewing behavior.

In conclusion, if we do not consider attitudes as sources of behavior, and instead consider attitudes as mediators and moderators of behavior, then we see that attitudes play a pivotal role in behavior, and worthy of continued research and study.

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