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# Attitudes towards brand purchase -1

By Chuck Chakrapani

Consumers' attitudes may be important, but it is consumers' behaviour (i.e., brand purchase) that is of ultimate interest to us. There is a great deal of research in this area, not all of it enlightening.

## The relationship between attitude and behaviour

Marketers and Researchers generally assume that attitude is related to behaviour: positive brand attitudes lead to positive behaviour (buying) and negative brand attitudes lead to negative behaviour (not-buying).

As a result, researchers and marketers who would like to predict purchase behaviour tend to rely on overall brand attitudes of buyers and potential buyers.

Research, however, provides only weak evidence of a link between overall brand attitudes and specific single behaviours (Ajzen & Fishbein 1980). For instance, overall, a person may be favourably disposed towards McDonald's. This information does not enable us to predict a specific behaviour such as whether the person will frequent McDonald's more than restaurants, or whether he or she would recommend it to others and so on.

## Overall attitudes do not result in specific predictable behaviour

The main reason for this seems to be that overall favourable attitudes may be expressed in any specific combination of specific behaviours, which may or may not include the behaviour that the marketer might be interested in. For instance, many people may have positive attitudes towards cultural events such as opera and classical concerts but they may not attend them. Similarly, a person may have a highly favourable attitude toward Mercedes, yet may not buy this type of car, even if he or she could afford it.

This apparent lack of relationship between an overall attitude and specific behaviours has been highlighted in recent years when researchers noticed only a weak relationship between customer satisfaction (overall attitude) and loyalty (specific behaviour). Customer satisfaction may have different patterns of behaviour associated with it for different customers: Some customers may buy again (loyalty), some may speak well of the firm, and some may recommend it to others.

## Isomorphic and homomorphic relationships

In this case we have a relationship that is not symmetrical: a satisfied customer may not be loyal but a loyal customer is generally satisfied. This type of relationship ( $A$  implies  $B$  but  $B$  does not imply  $A$ ) is known as a *homomorphic* relationship.

Many marketing models, especially in the area of customer satisfaction and loyalty, ran into problems because they treated the relationship between general attitude (eg. satisfaction) and specific behaviour (eg. repeat buying) as *isomorphic* ( $A$  implies  $B$  and therefore  $B$  should imply  $A$ ).

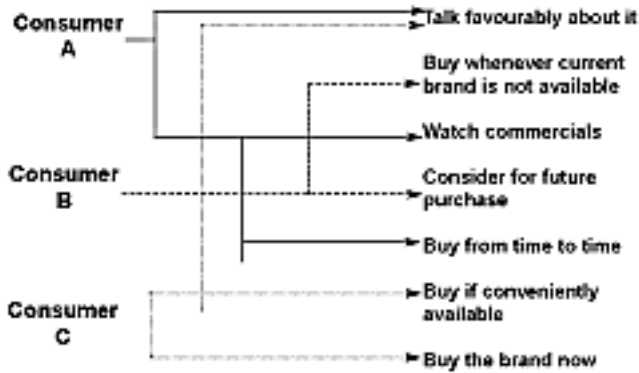
Exhibit 1 shows the relationship between overall attitude and specific behaviours.

## Exhibit 1

## Overall attitude vs. specific behaviours

Three consumers A, B, and C have a similar positive overall attitude toward a given brand

But each expresses the same overall positive attitude through different behaviour.



### Assymetry between general attitude and specific behaviour

Failure to understand the non-symmetrical nature of the relationship between a general attitude and specific behaviours has led to some strange conclusions. One such conclusion is that 'customer loyalty has nothing to do with customer satisfaction' because many customers who switch are in fact satisfied with their current brand. The inference is that, if customer satisfaction is not strongly related to loyalty, then loyalty is not strongly related to satisfaction.

But this inference is wrong. Customers with a favourable attitude towards a brand can express it through many behaviours; such behaviours may or may not include the behaviour deemed to be relevant by marketers (such as repeat buying). If we assume that a certain proportion of customers will express their satisfaction through repeat purchase behaviour then we can assign a certain weight that would reflect the overall influence of satisfaction in determining loyalty. In such models, satisfaction is not the only predictor of loyalty, but one of the many. It may even be that satisfaction does not lead directly to loyalty but loyalty, cannot be maintained without satisfaction.

So we need a model that identifies the attitudinal factors that influence specific behaviours. One such model is known as the *theory of reasoned action*.

### The theory of reasoned action

The theory of reasoned action was first proposed by Martin Fishbein (1980). The model is based on Fishbein's hypothesis that consumers consciously evaluate the consequences of alternative behaviours available to them and choose the one that leads to the most desirable consequences. The outcome of this reasoned choice process is reflected in the *intention* to engage in a given behaviour.

Fishbein was one of the first social scientists to recognize that people's attitudes toward objects may not be associated systematically or strongly with specific behaviours. If so, what does determine whether a consumer will engage in a particular behaviour? Fishbein proposed that a consumer's immediate behaviour is determined by his or her intention to engage in that behaviour.

This reasoning led Fishbein to reformulate his multiattribute attitude model. The new model extended his original model beyond a consumer's beliefs and attitudes to include his or her behavioural intentions. Behavioural intention is the single best predictor of a consumer's immediate actual behaviour.

The theory applies to any reasonably complex *voluntary* behaviour. Will a consumer buy a particular brand of car? This reasonably complex behaviour can best be predicted from the consumer's *intention* to buy that brand of car. The theory does not apply to involuntary behaviours. For instance, a person's intent to buy a car may not

be related to his or her intention, if the car is paid for by the employer and his or her options do not include the intended model.

Exhibit 2 shows the formal model of the theory of reasoned action. According to the model, consumers tend to buy if they evaluate the product favourably and judge it to be popular with other people. Consumers tend to refrain from buying if they evaluate it unfavourably and judge it to be unpopular with others.

## Exhibit 2

### The theory of reasoned action

#### Hypothesis

Any complex voluntary behaviour (such as buying a given brand of car) is determined by a person's intention to perform that behaviour.

#### The formal model

The model's formal structure is given by  

$$B \sim BI = A_{act}(w_1) + SN(w_2)$$

where

B = Specific voluntary behaviour  
 (e.g., actual buying of a brand of car)

BI = Consumer's intention to engage in that behaviour  
 (e.g., intent to buy that car)

A<sub>act</sub> = Consumer's attitude towards engaging in that behaviour

SN = Subjective norm with regard to whether other people want the consumer to engage in that behaviour

w<sub>1</sub> = A weight that reflects the relative influence of A<sub>act</sub>

w<sub>2</sub> = A weight that reflects the relative influence of SN

### Model components

**B (Behaviours).** The first component of the model is B or behaviours. Behaviours are specific acts directed towards some object. Thus buying brand A is a behavior. Behaviours always occur in an environment (situational context). For instance, one may order a pizza while at home alone or while out with friends. Marketers should be clear about the aspects of behaviour they want to measure since the behaviour component of the theory is dependent on the context.

**BI (Behavioural Intention).** This proposition connects a future action (purchase behaviour) with current purchase intent. Intention can be viewed as a plan to reach a goal through a specific action (Bagozzi & Warshaw 1990). Behavioural intentions are created as a result of one's belief about two types of consequences A<sub>act</sub> and SN.

Behavioural intentions vary in their strength, but they can be measured by asking consumers to state their probability of carrying out a specific behaviour. The questions used to elicit the intent could be as simple as the ones shown in Exhibit 3.

### Exhibit 3

#### Measuring behavioural intention (BI)

##### Possible questions

All things considered, how likely is it that you would buy a car for your personal use within the next three months?

Extremely likely 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 Extremely unlikely

If you buy a car in the next three months, how likely is it to be a Lexus?

Extremely likely 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 Extremely unlikely

The strength of evaluations of a consumer's different salient beliefs about the functional consequences of an action are combined together to arrive at an attitude toward the behaviour, as shown below:

$$A_b = \sum b_{ie}i$$

This sums the consumer's overall evaluation of performing a given behaviour.

(For a description of the components of the above equation and the concepts behind them, please refer to article #102 in the September issue of *Imprints* .)

Attitude toward a brand ( $A_o$ ) is very different from  $A_{act}$ . Although both of these concepts are based on salient beliefs, the beliefs are different.

For instance, the attitude toward a brand ( $A_o$ ) can be positive but it may not be the attitude towards buying. Mercedes is a comfortable car (Positive  $A_o$ ) but too expensive (Negative  $A_{act}$ ). The car may be easy to service (Positive  $A_o$ ), but has higher upkeep costs (Negative  $A_{act}$ ). The converse may also be true: the car is expensive (Negative  $A_o$ ) but provides best overall value for the money (Positive  $A_{act}$ ).

Because the salient beliefs differ, it is possible for marketing strategies to have a differential impact on  $A_{act}$  and  $A_o$ .

Researchers (and marketers) should be careful about what they are measuring. Attitudes towards a product or attitudes towards a specific behaviour such as buying. The difference may not be trivial.

(Note . We will discuss this model more in the next issue of *Imprints* .)

*Dr. Chuck Chakrapani of Standard Research Systems is a Toronto-based consultant who works internationally. His book How to Measure Service Quality & Customer Satisfaction is published by the American Marketing Association. He can be reached at [chakrapani@cheerful.com](mailto:chakrapani@cheerful.com) . (© Chakrapani, 1999. Article reference #103/ 1099/Imprints.)*

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