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The Importance of Affect in the Purchasing Behavior of Business to Business

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Abstract:

Purpose: *Theoretical nature and its aim is to present the theory of emotions in the purchasing processes of institutional clients. The justification for the adopted topic is the limited number of publications on the topic of affect in the purchasing behavior of business clients. The purpose of this article is to demonstrate the role of the effect in the purchasing behavior of business customers.*
Design/Methodology/Approach*: The article is theoretical in nature. It is an analysis of the literature on the use of emotions in the analysis of the purchasing behavior of business customers. It answers the question To what extent do emotions influence the purchasing decisions of organizational customers.*
Findings: *Effectively helping potential buyers manage their emotions—whether by evoking positive emotions such as excitement or by alleviating negative emotions such as fear and anxiety—can work to an organization's advantage.*
Practical implications: *The study results can provide company management with key information regarding customer relationship management towards taking into account affective components and paying attention to this significant aspect of purchasing behavior.*
Originality value: *The value of the article is the study of affect in B2B purchases.*

Keywords: *Purchasing behavior, business to busness, emotions.*

JEL codes: *M30, M31.*

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1. Intoduction

In light of current trends in global marketing, buyer-seller relationships in the business model (B2B) are becoming increasingly important and complex. Knowing what shapes the buyer's decision is essential for business success in a highly competitive environment. There is strong evidence that, in addition to rational aspects, emotional factors play a key role in purchasing decisions in general (Andersen and Kumar, 2006).

However, many professional buyers and sellers continue to neglect the dual nature of human consciousness: the individual as an objective, rational problem solver versus an emotional, sensory being with mystical qualities (Hirschman, 1985). Business buyers base their decisions primarily on rigorous cognitive analysis (Erevelles 1998), simple processes, and a cognitive chain of function-based arguments (Ho *et al.,* 2010). It is reasonable to assume that neglecting the non-cognitive antecedents of business decision-making reduces the potential for beneficial outcomes and performance because only “one side of the brain” is being used.

The role of emotions in decision-making has intrigued researchers for several decades, and various theories on decision-making have been proposed in the past (Engel *et al.,* 1968; Howard and Sheth, 1969). Most of them do not consider affect as a major driving force and emphasize a rational cognitive approach to decision-making. Although some behavioral models indirectly point to the presence of non-cognitive factors in decision-making, such as non-task factors (Webster and Wind, 1972), bargaining, and politicking (Sheth, 1969), the influence exerted on decision-making in organizational purchasing is not yet widely accepted .

Theoretical nature and its aim is to present the theory of emotions in the purchasing processes of institutional clients. The justification for the adopted topic is the limited number of publications on the topic of affect in the purchasing behavior of business clients.

2. Literature Review

As Sashim (1990) has argued, buyer behavior in business markets is distinguished from buyer behavior in consumer markets by the type of transaction. Business customers specialize in value-added products, and their purchasing decisions result in value-added chains. All preceding transactions are intermediate transactions, and the buyer in each transaction buys inputs to add value and produce products that he sells in subsequent transactions in the output market.

A key feature that distinguishes business market transactions from consumer market transactions is the long-term relationship resulting from the interdependence between buyers and sellers in business markets (Keep. Hollander, and Dickinson, 1998). Establishing an exchange relationship in business markets requires identifying the participants in the buying center, their roles in the buying process, in order to match the information provided by sellers with the competence level of the buying team members. In building stable relationships with buyers, sellers in business markets strive to understand customer expectations and provide support at every stage of the purchasing decision-making process.

The involvement of the seller depends on the purchasing situation (new or repeat purchase), the type of product/service purchased (the level of technological advancement) and the level of knowledge and experience of the individuals playing different roles in the purchasing team (Van der Valk and Rozemeijer, 2009).

The value of the relationship between sellers and buyers in business markets is determined by the quality of relational ties, such as trust and commitment, as well as the number and decision-making capacity of contacts between them (Palmatier, 2008). In this monograph, the research subject is organizations, hence the terms business customer or organization as buyer will be used in further considerations.

The theory of organizational buying behavior developed in the 1950s and 1960s and was dominated by the paradigm of large manufacturing organizations. Organizational buying was, to varying degrees, both professional and behavioral in nature, similar to consumer buying.

The literature in economics and, to a limited extent, marketing focused on variables related to the buying task itself and the rational factors in decision-making. In the views dominated by economic calculation, the goal of buying was to obtain a minimum price or the lowest total cost of ownership. However, some models focused on the organizational buying process emphasized factors that went beyond the purely economic aspect, such as reciprocal purchasing agreements, supplier loyalty, or building lasting business relationships.

The most frequently described models in the literature on Organizational Buying Behavior (OBB) include: the Webster and Wind model of "organizational purchasing behavior", the Sheth model of "industrial buyer behavior" and the Robinson, Faris and Wind model of "industrial purchasing process" and "purchasing network structure". It is worth noting that the models listed were important starting points for research on organizational purchasing and contributed to the development of the field of science dealing with this area.

Referring to the above models of organizational purchasing behavior, it can be stated that: (1) organizational purchasing behavior is best described as a process consisting of at least three stages: pre-sale, sales and post-sale, (2) each model describes environmental influences such as: physical, political, economic, suppliers, competitors, technological, legal, cultural and global influences (in Sheth's model they are called situational influences); (3) each model includes organizational influences such as size, structure, orientation, technology, rewards, tasks and goals;

(4) finally, all three models emphasize the importance of characteristics of individual participants (buyers), including education, motivation, perception, personality, experience and their influence on the behavior of individuals during the decision-making process.

Traditionally, emotion and cognition have been considered to represent two fundamentally different processes (Hilgard, 1980), and most decision-making research has viewed emotion as a rational cognitive process. Researchers have developed a number of models and frameworks to explain the factors that influence organizational buying behavior.

Key to many of these findings is the conventional and accepted wisdom that views organizational buying as a rational, cognitive, and highly objective process driven primarily by logic rather than emotion (Patti *et al.*, 1991; Webster, 1995). The complexity, length, cost, and scale of organizational buying lend credence to this argument. In contrast to individual buying in consumer markets, organizational buying typically involves larger purchases, higher spending rates, longer negotiations, customized products, complex contracts, and greater stakeholder involvement (Lilien, 1987).

Both researchers and practitioners have historically argued that the complexities involved in the scope, size, and cost of such purchases make them a serious matter requiring rational decision makers to develop and implement well-thought-out heuristic plans that functionally benefit the firm.

Recent evidence on decision-making suggests a link between cognitive and emotional processes (Clore *et al.*, 2000; 2001) with information processing in the brain's emotional centers (Damasio, 1996). The affect-as-information model proposed by Clore *et al.* (2001) also discusses the ways in which affect influences judgments and decision-making. These discussions indicate that decision-making is no longer viewed as a purely cognitive process, and that the role of emotions in decision-making is gaining increasing awareness among decision-modeling researchers.

Gilbert and Wilson (2007) argue that the emotional consequences of an event are anticipated by individuals involved in decision-making through the simulation of that event in the future. Previously experienced emotions, together with the anticipated risk associated with choosing an option, influence the anticipated emotional reactions to expected outcomes.

Affect-decision theory (Mellers *et al.*, 1997) predicts that the choice between risky options is guided by the maximum positive expected emotional experience among the available options. Therefore, buyers prefer the option from which they expect to derive the maximum future pleasure. Bagozzi *et al.* (2016) use the concept of anticipated emotions, suggesting that decision-making depends on whether the purchase or non-purchase will make the individual feel better or worse. Anticipated purchase emotions are assessed in terms of the positive and negative emotions expected before the purchase intention is formed. It can therefore be said that anticipated emotions influence the behavioral intention of the buyer.

Pandey and Mookerjee (2018) has shown the presence of emotions in decision-making in organizational purchasing. Organizational purchasing involves members of different teams meeting in a buying center, each of whom has a specific role to play. Each individually evaluates the available options and goes through an emotional experience that will indicate individual supplier preferences. Then, all members of the buying center make a joint decision on the final selection of the supplier.

Extending the above concept of anticipated emotions to the organizational purchasing scenario, we assume that members of buying centers will be guided by the emotional consequences of purchasing from that supplier at the individual level while evaluating the assortment of suppliers in order to make recommendations.

Evolutionary emotion theorists define emotions as complex, fitness-enhancing responses to adaptive problems (Ekman, 1992). This approach suggests that specific emotions can lead to different outcomes through different mechanisms. Emotions are viewed as overarching neural programs that activate cognitive and motivational subroutines that facilitate adaptive behavior in the face of opportunity or threat.

When the emotional system is activated, it promotes a singularity of perceptions, cognitions, and behaviors aimed at solving the adaptive problem. Emotions can thus evoke action tendencies or states of readiness (Frijda, 1986), as well as different appraisals or evaluations of one's environment (Lazarus, 1991; Smith and Ellsworth, 1985). For example, the fear system promotes adaptive actions in the face of immediate threats, whereas the anger system evokes attack motives.

Applying an evolutionary approach to emotions has implications for organizational buying behavior. Because individuals experience different emotions during the buying cycle, they may result in unique motivations and behaviors. For example, because an emotion such as fear initiates behavior in the face of a threatening situation, fear may be a key motivator to seek out products and services that mitigate potential threats. Thus, understanding the action tendencies and appraisals that specific emotions evoke throughout the buying cycle can provide broad insight into the mechanisms of B2B decision-making.

It is also worth noting that among the psychological theories focused on the role of emotions in the decision-making process are theories of regret and disappointment (Loomes and Sugden, 1982) and the affect theory of decision (Mellers *et al.*, 1997). According to regret theory, the decision-making process can be modeled as the minimization of the regret function, which describes the difference between the outcome of a given choice and the best possible outcome in a given state (Loomes and Sugden, 1982). The affect theory of decision indicates that people make choices in order to maximize their emotional experiences, not just utility (Mellers *et al.*, 1997). Affect influences many cognitive processes (Gazzaniga *et al.,* 2002).

Studies have shown that positive affect improves problem-solving skills (Isen and Means, 1983) and improves memory processes related to the performance of perceptual functions. The literature indicates two types of affective influences: the influence of relevant emotions and the influence of irrelevant emotions. Relevant emotions are those that result from the decision-making task being performed, are felt at the moment of making a decision or at the moment of experiencing the consequences of the decision-making process (Loewenstein and Lerner, 2003).

In the case of irrelevant/incidental emotions, the sources of these emotions usually lie in environmental stimuli (e.g., good smell, beautiful sights and scenes, good music, etc.) and may also include the mood or disposition of the person. Research indicates that even if emotional information is irrelevant, it influences the uncertain choice and the experience induced by the outcome. People in a good mood: (1) recall information that is consistent with stereotypes and schemas better, (2) associate information more strongly in free recall (Bless, Hamilton, and Mackie, 1990), (3) make faster and better decisions (Isen and Means, 1983), (4) show greater originality in creativity tests (Isen, 1984), and (5) create broader categories that include more specific objects (Isen, 1987).

On the other hand, sad people: (1) differentiate more strongly between persuasive and unpersuasive arguments in persuasive messages, (2) estimate more accurately the true magnitude of event correlations, and (3) solve syllogisms better than people in a good mood.

These studies suggest that emotions have quite a fundamental influence on the way information is processed. Positive affect facilitates heuristic processing and deviations from rules, sometimes with original effects, whereas negative affect seems to result in more systematic and controlled processing of information.

Damasio (1994) argues that even in a less complex situation, when heuristic processing is involved, the influence of mood will be quite pronounced. Given that positive emotions are associated with heuristic, faster and global processing, and negative emotions with substantive, slower and local processing , their influence on the judgment task will also be different.

The important conclusions proposed in Andersen and Kumar's (2006) research show that emotions drive organizational purchasing at every stage of the purchasing process. This is consistent with the notion that emotions in buyer-seller relationships occur at multiple levels of the relationship. Before the supplier search begins, a mixture of positive and negative emotions are felt and expressed, including hope, surprise, anxiety, and frustration. Once suppliers are selected, the element of surprise gradually fades and is replaced by trust—built after thorough vetting. Trust is the most important emotion expressed and observed at later stages of the purchasing process. This finding is consistent with many years of organizational research that has repeatedly emphasized the importance of building and maintaining trust between buyers and sellers (Moorman *et al.,* 1993).

The findings further support the view that trust is crucial in mitigating negative emotions such as fear and anxiety. The emotions that emerge at the end of the purchasing process will depend on the actual performance of the supplier. Negative behaviors evoke regret and frustration, whereas positive behaviors evoke confidence, pride, and joy. Failure to achieve planned goals may foster negative self-evaluative emotions such as shame and regret. This finding complements previous literature on the role of pride in salesperson–customer interactions (Bagozzi, 2006).

Employee emotions appear to be another research topic, reflecting interest in understanding how the perceptions, feelings, and attitudes of employees, especially those at the frontline of service, affect CX (Bowen, 2016). Research suggests that employees' social competences affect a wide range of outcomes for customers and organizations. For example, Delcourtet *et al.* (2016) discuss employees' competences in perceiving, understanding, and regulating customer emotions during service encounters.

Umasuthan *et al.* (2017) found that frontline employees' empathy directly affects customer emotions. Thus, through planned processes, service organizations should provide employees with conditions to convey positive emotions during encounters and/or suppress negative emotions. In this sense, employee satisfaction appears as a key antecedent of employee reactions, with the main assumption that the more satisfied employees are, the better services customers will receive.

Recently, research on employee emotions has evolved towards the concept of employee experience. Employee experience is a holistic concept that helps organizations recognize the feelings and perceptions of employees and consequently implement better practices in the workplace, which results in greater CX. Employee emotions, and consequently their experiences, can influence CX, especially those on the front line of service, who have direct interaction with the customer and therefore play a key role in the process of emotional contagion.

As noted above, the emotional component is an important component of individual experiences, which can shape the quality of cooperation in the group/purchasing team, directly influence the decisions made in the purchasing process, and thus shape business effects on the supplier side. Managing the experience of business customers with a multidimensional approach significantly increases the chance of achieving positive financial results, shaped by indicators of loyalty, satisfaction and positive opinions from the engaged customer.

3. Conclusions and Further Studies

In summary, the buying behavior of business customers can be summarized as follows:

1) Objective criteria, such as meeting needs and production schedules at minimal cost, are the basis for selecting products or services.

2) The purchasing decision-making process usually involves more than one person; purchasing managers rarely make a purchasing decision independent of the influence of other stakeholders , both within and outside the purchasing organization. The group making the purchasing decision is, in turn, embedded in a network of individual and organizational relationships.

3) Because of the large financial volume, the number of stakeholders involved , and the often complex, technical nature of the products on offer, the B2B purchasing process is typically time-consuming and may involve extensive negotiations and bargaining. The extended B2B purchasing process and its interactive nature (involving many members of both the buying and selling organizations) make it difficult to establish functional relationships between the supplier's selling efforts and the buyer's reactions.

4) B2B buyers are more interested in meeting their overall needs than in purchasing a specific product, the offer may be complex and include training, technical support, financing.

Discussions about the role of emotions in marketing are ubiquitous. Wind (2006, p. 474) states that *"the buying criteria of organizational buyers and consumers are multidimensional and include relational and emotional characteristics, not just considerations of features, functionality, delivery, and price."*

Bagozzi *et al.* (1999, p. 202) describe the importance of emotions to the overall marketing process: *"[emotions] influence information processing, mediate responses to persuasive appeals, measure the effects of marketing stimuli, initiate goal setting, implement goal-directed behaviors, and serve as goals and means of consumer well-being."*

In consumer research, the effectiveness of using consumers' emotional approaches to stimulate, shape, and confirm decisions is widely accepted and well-researched (e.g. Bagozzi *et al.*, 1999; Laros and Steenkamp 2005). In contrast, in B2B environments, there is skepticism about the impact of emotional approaches on marketing success and performance.

The impact of emotional issues on business activities has rarely been acknowledged, for example in relation to team projects (Peslak, 2005), management (Brothridge and

Lee, 2008), or in specific domains such as public relations. Many conceptual models assume that emotions play a role in initiating, developing, and maintaining relationships (e.g., Andersen and Kumar, 2006). Organizational buyers are often afraid of making a mistake, failing to be competitive and innovative, losing position, failing to solve a problem, and losing trust.

Emotions drive organizational buying at every stage of the buying process. This is consistent with Andersen and Kumar's (2006) assertion that emotions in buyer-seller relationships occur at multiple levels of the relationship. This includes emotions that emerge at the initial stages when a need is recognized, through to the end when buyers evaluate supplier performance and make decisions about the future of the buyer-supplier relationship.

When a supplier search begins, a mixture of positive and negative emotions is felt and expressed, including hope, surprise, anxiety, and frustration. Once suppliers are selected, the element of surprise gradually fades and is replaced by trust—established after a thorough vetting process. Trust is the most important emotion expressed and observed in the later stages of the buying process. This finding is consistent with many years of organizational research that has repeatedly emphasized the importance of building and maintaining trust between buyers and sellers (Moorman *et al.*, 1993; Morgan and Hunt, 1994). These findings further reinforce the notion that trust is key in mitigating negative emotions such as fear and anxiety.

The emotions felt at the end of the buying process will depend on the actual performance of the supplier. Negative performance creates regret and frustration, while positive performance creates trust, pride and joy.

Effectively helping potential buyers manage their emotions—whether by evoking positive emotions such as excitement or by alleviating negative emotions such as fear and anxiety—can work to an organization’s advantage.

For example, affect regulation theory suggests that individuals often proactively attempt to reduce negative emotions. If consumers are feeling fear, a company can provide a solution to help alleviate those negative emotions. Similarly, if anxiety is being felt, marketing messages can be designed to alleviate that anxiety. Developing reassuring emotional messages that promote personal values of hope, support, and success can stand out in a marketplace dominated by negative messages focused on product functionality (e.g., are you sick of leaking gas tanks? Call our salespeople).

It is worth noting that future research directions may include examining how emotions affect loyalty, share of wallet, and post-sale processes. Finding ways to assess emotional states among B2B professionals would allow for a deeper understanding of the study of emotions in organizational settings.

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