

CAUSES AND REMEDIES OF CONSUMER DISSONANCE: A REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

This paper explored the causes and remedies of cognitive dissonance. “Cognitive dissonance”, a term used to describe the feeling of discomfort that result from holding two conflicting beliefs or discrepancy occurring after a post purchase evaluation. in many areas of life . When there is a discrepancy between beliefs and behaviours, something must change in order to eliminate or reduce the dissonance. To reduce or minimize cognitive dissonance three major steps are considered; focusing on more supportive beliefs that outweigh the dissonant belief or behaviour (selective exposure); reducing the importance of the conflicting belief; and changing the conflicting belief so that it is consistent with other beliefs or behaviours. The paper established that both consumers and marketers play major roles in remedying cognitive dissonance. Empirical studies were reviewed to show the existence of cognitive dissonance in politics, international marketing, retail businesses and product development, just to mention a few. The paper concluded that cognitive dissonance when viewed positively gives marketers insight into product improvement and customer retention strategies.

Key words: Cognitive dissonance, discrepancy, conflicting beliefs, perception, attitude

Introduction

Most consumers purchase goods and services based on their past experiences and information from producers and sellers. Often, these consumers go through various stages from problem recognition, information search, alternatives evaluation, choice (decision) and post purchase evaluation. After a purchase, use and/consumption of a product or service, the consumer undertakes a post purchase evaluation in order to seek consistency in his/her beliefs and perceptions. So inconsistency or discrepancy occurs when one of these beliefs conflicts with another previously held referred to as ‘cognitive dissonance’. The concept of consumer dissonance has captured the interest of many marketing and business researchers due to its explicit role in determining the success and failure of organizations. Consumers’ motivation to satisfying their needs and wants begins with setting certain standards which leads them into evaluating every alternative. Therefore, consumer dissonance occurs when none of the alternatives meets the consumer’s evaluation of the product. The major reason behind consumer dissonance is because customers are always looking for the best deal in the market that satisfies their preference and needs. In order to eliminate or reduce the discrepancy

between beliefs and behaviours, he/she would seek to find out the cause and take remedial measures. Business organizations especially in the service sector have important roles to play in curbing consumer dissonance and its negative effect on repeat purchase of their goods and services. This paper therefore, explored empirical studies to enable marketers' understand and appreciate the concept 'cognitive dissonance', discussed its causes, and how to handle it when it occurs in the consumer purchase decision process.

Consumer buying process

The consumer buying process is the actual stages the buyer passes through to reach a buying decision and outcome. The consumer basically, passes through five stages. These stages were first introduced by Engel, Blackwell and Kollat (1968) in Dewey, 2007 and they are: problem/need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives or information, purchase decision, post-purchase evaluation. Before we examine each stage, consider these important points. These five stages are a framework to evaluate a customer's buying decision process. The actual act of purchasing is only one stage in the process and the process is initiated several stages prior to the actual purchase. It is not necessary that customers get through every stage, nor is it necessary that they proceed in any particular order as not all decision processes lead to purchase because the individual may terminate the process during any stage. For example, if a customer feels the urge to buy chocolate, he or she might go straight to the purchase decision stage, skipping information search and alternative evaluation (Kotler, Keller, Koshy & Jha, 2009; & Anyanwu, 2013).

Stages of the consumer buying process

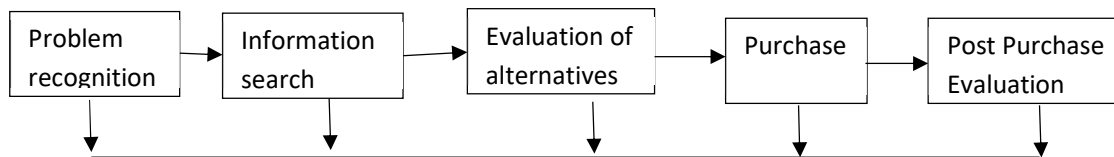


Figure 1: Diagram showing steps in the consumer decision process

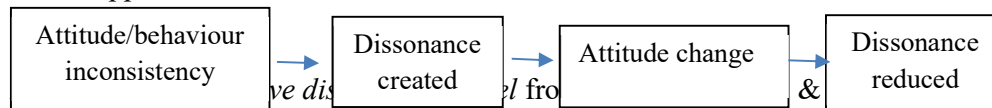
The five (5) stages in the consumer buying process are briefly explained.

- 1) **Problem recognition** (awareness of need): This is the difference between the desired state and the actual condition. At the problem recognition stage, the consumer discovers a need or gap which is often stimulated by the marketer through product information. For example, the consumer may see a commercial for a new spectacles, the commercial therefore stimulates the recognition that he/she needs a new spectacle.
- 2) **Information search**: Once the need has been recognized, the consumer searches for information to enable him/her make a decision. The information could be searched internally by consulting friends and relatives (word-of-mouth), or externally by consulting marketer dominated sources; comparison shopping; public sources, etc. A successful information search leaves a buyer with possible alternatives (the *evoked set*). An evoked set is a group of relevant brands that a prospective consumer is favourably familiar with and may consider in making a purchase decision (Anyanwu, 2013).
3. **Evaluation of alternatives**: At this stage, there is a need to establish criteria for evaluation (features the buyer wants or does not want). He/she ranks/weights alternatives or resumes search. The consumer evaluates all the products available on a scale of particular attributes which have the ability to deliver the [benefit\(s\)](#) sought for. The brands and products that consumers compare 'their evoked set' represent the alternatives being considered by consumers during the problem-solving process. This is sometimes known as a 'consideration set'. The evoked set tends to be small relative to the total number of options available. When consumers commit significant time and resources in the comparative process, review [price](#), [warranties](#), terms and conditions of sale and other features, it is said that they are involved in extended problem solving.
4. **Purchase decision**: At this stage the consumer chooses buying alternative which will include product, package, store, method of purchase etc. Therefore, the actual purchase is differentiated according to decision, time lapse and products availability.

5. **Post-purchase evaluation:** This stage determines whether a consumer is satisfied or dissatisfied with the purchase decision. Post-purchase evaluation lies between the relationship between the consumer's expectation and the perceived performance of the product. If the performance of the product matches the consumer's perceived expectation, he/she is satisfied, if it exceeds then, he/she is excited; and if it falls short of expectation, he/she is dissatisfied. The consumer's dissatisfaction therefore, leads to cognitive dissonance.

Theory of cognitive dissonance

The term "cognition" implies any knowledge, opinion or believe about the environment, about one's self and one's behaviour. Dissonance occurs where there is an inconsistency between any two cognitions and can give rise to psychological tension (Achumba, 2006). The term "**cognitive dissonance**" is thus used to describe the *feelings of discomfort* that results from holding two conflicting beliefs (Cherry, 2015). It can also be defined as "a person's conflicting thoughts or ideas which directly cause changes in behaviour or attitude associated with those thoughts or ideas" (Dickens, Kuhns, & Sheets, 2013). For example, imagine a consumer plans and decides to purchase the latest a phone based on the persuasive and informative nature of the advert. With much enthusiasm, he/she went to the store, paid for the phone, had it set up. He/she imagined how effective and convenient the phone would be able to take selfies and share them via social media such as WhatsApp, be able to download music, videos and document with ease.



After the purchase, the consumer undertakes a post-purchase evaluation and observes that it neither take picture due to the malfunctioning of the camera nor download files. The anticipation and excitement of using the new phone are not in harmony with his/her recent observation. The pieces do not fit. He/she would be upset, partly because the phone is malfunctioning, and is inconsistent between pre-purchase expectation and the actual purchase experience. This uncomfortable and unpleasant state leads to cognitive dissonance. Cognitive dissonance can occur in many areas of life, but it is particularly evident in situations where an individual's behaviour conflicts with beliefs that are integral to his or her self-identity.

Psychologist Leon Festinger (1957) proposed a theory of cognitive dissonance centred on how people try to reach internal consistency. He suggested that people have an inner need to ensure that their beliefs and behaviours are consistent and they strive to avoid inconsistent and/conflicting beliefs that lead to disharmony. In his book "*A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*", Festinger explained, that cognitive dissonance can be seen as an antecedent condition which necessitates activity toward dissonance reduction, just as hunger leads toward activity oriented toward hunger reduction (Cherry, 2015).

Basic assumption of Festinger's theory:

Cognitive dissonance theory is based on three fundamental assumptions.

1. *Humans are sensitive to inconsistencies between actions and beliefs.*

According to the theory, we all recognize, at some level, when we are acting in a way that is inconsistent with our beliefs/attitudes/opinions. In effect, there is a built in alarm that goes off when we notice such an inconsistency, whether we like it or not.

2. *Recognition of this inconsistency will cause dissonance, and will motivate an individual to resolve the dissonance.*

Once consumers recognize that they have violated one of their principles, according to this theory, they will feel some sort of mental anguish. The degree of dissonance, of course, will vary with the importance of their belief/attitude/principle and with the degree of inconsistency between their behaviour and their belief.

3. *Dissonance will be resolved in one of three basic ways:*

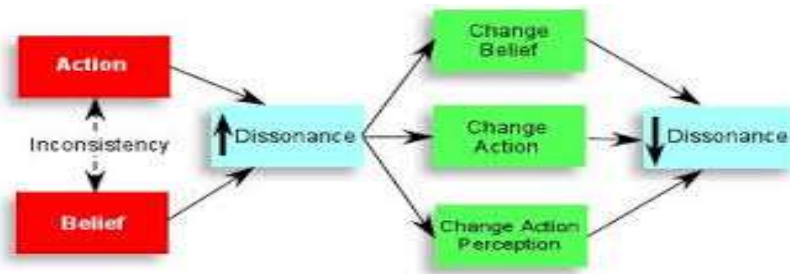


Figure 3.
consumer
Source:

A model of
dissonance
Singh, J, (1988).

Consumer complaint intentions and behaviour: Definition and taxonomical issues.
Journal of Marketing. 52 (January):93-107

a. Change beliefs

Perhaps the simplest way to resolve dissonance between actions and beliefs is simply for consumers to change their beliefs. The theory established this as the simplest option for resolving dissonance although it is probably not the most common.

b. Change actions

A second option would be to make sure that you never do this action again. This is because; guilt and anxiety can be motivators for changing behavior. This involves getting rid of these feelings without changing ones beliefs or actions.

c. Change perception of action

This is a more complex method of resolution which is to change the way consumers view/remember/perceive their action. It involves being rational in their actions.

There have been three major revisions relevant to modern interpretation of dissonance phenomena quoted in Manoj (2014), this modifications where to ensure that the consumer dissonance theory is consistent with behaviour which include:

Aronson's self-consistency theory (1968): The theory proposed that dissonance resulted from behaviours that were discrepant with one's conception of oneself as a decent and sensible person. He opined that dissonance theory does not rest upon the assumption that man is a *rational* animal; rather, it suggests that man is a *rationalizing* animal, that he attempts to appear rational, both to others and to himself.

Steele's self-affirmation theory (1988) proposed that dissonance emerged from threats to the overarching self-system, and that dissonance reduction relied on re-establishing the integrity of the global self-concept. He opined that individuals reflect upon their values, has been shown to foster resilience. In particular, after individuals consider the facets of their life they most value, they are less inclined to exhibit anxious or defensive responses in the aftermath of criticisms, rejections, or other personal threats.

Cooper and Fazio's 'New Look' theory (1984) proposed that dissonance resulted from creating unwanted aversive consequences and did not require cognitive inconsistency.

Empirical case studies

A study by Ehikwe, Eze and Odigbo, (2015) revealed that advertising messages in Nigeria lacked evidence in their claims and consumers not weary of the antics became victims of dissonance. Information was highly distorted to favour chosen alternatives designed to sway consumers who purchased the products and turned around to seek information to improve the state of discomfort thereby changed their attitudes and beliefs. Different media had diverse forms of distortions that caused dissonance. The advertisement of consumer durables and political products had great

influence on consumers in their choice of products. Political products were highly vulnerable to bias advertising messages as the characters of the products were not visible and consumers relied on available information and limited experience on the political candidates. There was a high degree of misinformation and their finding agreed with the report in the Daily Independent on the sanction by the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) against the electronic media including the national and private media “for breaches in political advertorials in the build up to the general elections.” The various biases in cultural and tribal barriers became destabilizing factors that the minorities wallowed in subjection to the whims and caprices of the majority tribes. The consumer durable products attracted advertising with distortions of high magnitude. Information was scanty, and when sufficient such were devoted to misinformation, false claims and counterclaims, distortions in headlines, images, logos, captions, wrong and unreliable presentations.

Cognitive dissonance could be experienced in both pre and post action/purchase activities. The magnitude of dissonance differs and pre action dissonance was avoidable but with the pain of inconvenience in search of appropriate and sufficient information. The post dissonance attracted loss of product and time, discomfort, confusion, irrational and maladaptive behaviour. The two concepts were associated with discomfort of feelings and attitude change (Ehikwe, Eze & Odigbo, 2015).

In a study by Kuka and Jakada (2015), on the effect of cognitive dissonance on the marketing of fairly used cars in Nigeria, it was highlighted that the main effect of cognitive dissonance in the purchase of a fairly used car is the risk associated with the inconsistencies in the buyer’s mind that often results in economic and psychological imbalances. These imbalances often lead to the de-marketing of a product through negative word-of-mouth communication. Thus, the study recommended that marketers should seek to sell a product that satisfies the buyers’ needs in order to facilitate repeat purchases. In doing so, it should be remembered that the sale is made only when the actual purchase is completed and marketers should continue to reinforce the buyers’ attitudes about the product at all times. This practice helps to build consumers’ confidence and reduces the perceived risk of making a wrong purchase. It can also reduce the buyers post purchase dissonance and develop their trust on the marketer’s product. Given the level of involvement of the purchase decision, some buyers may feel somewhat uncomfortable at some point after purchase especially if they identified some inconsistencies between the chosen car and the forgone alternatives. Therefore, there is a need for used car sellers to teach their customer-contact people how to resolve problems and diffuse customer anger. They should endeavour to import quality and environmental-friendly used cars into Nigeria in order to reduce the probability of dissonance.

Another study by Nadeem (2007) revealed that dissonance can be created by a retailer’s sales staff, because the consumer may feel that he or she was persuaded into the purchase. On the other hand, a store sales staff can reduce dissonance by providing information and reassurance. Such positive support could assist consumers to decide to repurchase the same product at subsequent times.

Not to be forgotten in a hurry is the incident which occurred in 2004, in which there was an uproar that the popular noodle brand Indomie was deadly as it had killed a consumer with several others ending up in hospital. This incident resulted in dissonance towards the brand. To remedy the situation, the National Agency for Food and drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) tried to dispel the fear over the safety of the product by declaring it fit for human consumption after a series of laboratory tests which revealed that only three batches totalling about 360,000 packets of Indomie were actually contaminated by an acute toxic Carbofuran. Consequently, the then Director-General of NAFDAC, Late Prof. Dora Akunyili ordered an immediate recall of the affected batches of Indomie for destruction by the agency (BNW, 2004). Also, the company’s managing director had to eat the noodles during national news period in order to persuade consumers and eliminate their fears.

Self-attribution and cognitive dissonance

According to Pennington (2002), the environment has a great impact on self-attribution. Self-attribution is a behavior that learned through learning processes. The behavior we get socialized into has a great contribution to self-attribution. If people stay in an environment that has a negative attitude towards some behavior, one is likely to behave the same. Similarly, if one stays in an environment that promotes certain behavior, the person will have high chances of impressing the behavior. Theoretically, nurture occurs in a manner that is similar to the process of person biology.

Specifically, individuals see their overt behavior, assign intentionality in an attribution to external causes, and infer personal internal states from behavioral observations.

YuLun and Ching-Jui (2014) supports that despite the fact that people tend to expect intuitively that opinions guide other people's actions, Cognitive dissonance as one of action-opinion concepts, people's behaviors can lead to ensuing inspiration on individual opinions in addition to beliefs through validations that happens to preserve the truthfulness of perception of self or general worldview. He further asserted that, the level of dissonance, of course, can vary with the standing of the belief, attitude or principle and with the level of discrepancy among specific behavior and the belief. In whichever case, according to this perspective, the bigger the dissonance, the higher one gets motivated to resolve it. In addition, when consumers who are experiencing conflicting emotions and engaging in self-persuasion in a situation in which they feel cognitively dissonant, read about others' experiences and compare their own experiences, that may be more positive or negative than the consumer's own experiences, with the experiences of others, as a result of accessing that information their feelings and cognition might change; they might then, accordingly, change their word-of-mouth (WOM) messages about the product.

Importance of cognitive dissonance

Festinger (1957), asserts that cognitive dissonance plays a role in many value judgments, decisions, and evaluations. Becoming aware of how conflicting beliefs impact the decision-making process is a great way to improving your ability to make faster and more accurate choices. Again, the existence of dissonance, being psychologically uncomfortable, will motivate the person to try to reduce the inconsistency (dissonance) and achieve consonance. When dissonance is present, in addition to trying to reduce it, the person will actively avoid situations and information which would likely increase it. The theory further adds that cognitions are elements of knowledge that people have about their behaviour, their attitudes, and their environment. As such, a set of cognitions can be unrelated, consonant, or dissonant with each other. The purpose of this theory was to investigate the relationship between dissonance and effort.

Perspectives on cognitive dissonance

People hold a multitude of cognitions simultaneously, and these cognitions form irrelevant, consonant or dissonant relationships with one another (Rudolph, 2003). Sticky-Marketing (2002) supported that cognitive dissonance occurs when a person experiences conflicting ideas, states of emotion, or feelings. They will be driven to reduce this state of tension and will take action to reduce this state of tension and will take action to return to consonance (the opposite of dissonance). Dissonance is when you have internal conflict; it is cognitive when you recognize it. The action you are driven to take to reduce or eliminate dissonance is called dissonance-reducing behaviour.

According to Boyd, Walker, Mullins and Larrenche (2002), two cognitions are said to be dissonant if ones' cognition follows from the opposite of another. What happens to people when they discover dissonant cognitions? The answer to this question forms the basic postulate of Festinger's theory. A person who has dissonant or discrepant cognitions is said to be in a state of psychological dissonance, which is experienced as unpleasant psychological tension. In support, Arnould, Price, and Zinkhan (2004) state that this tension state has driven like properties that are much like those of hunger and thirst. When a person has been deprived of food for several hours, he/she experiences unpleasant tension and is driven to reduce the unpleasant tension state that results. Reducing the psychological state of dissonance is not as simple as eating or drinking however.

Burnett (2000) highlights that to understand the alternatives open to an individual in a state of dissonance, we must first understand the factors that affect the magnitude of dissonance arousal. First, in its simplest form, dissonance increases as the degree of discrepancy among cognitions increases. Second, dissonance increases as the number of consonant cognitions held by an individual increases. Third, the relative weights given to the consonant and dissonant cognitions may be adjusted by their importance in the mind of the individual.

Czinkota, Dickson, Dunne, Griffin and Urbany (2000), assert that because purchase decisions often require some amount of compromise, post purchase dissonance is quite normal. Nevertheless, it is likely to leave consumers with an uneasy feeling about their prior beliefs or actions – a feeling that they tend to resolve by changing their attitudes to conform to their behaviour. Thus, in the case of post purchase dissonance, attitude change is frequently an outcome of an action or behaviour. The

conflicting thoughts or dissonant information that follows a purchase are prime factors that induce consumers to change their attitudes so that they will be consonant with their actual purchase behaviour.

Also, Pradeep and Moschis (1982), state that the main exploratory variables used in psychological processes underlying consumers' post-purchase product evaluation have been prior expectation of the consumers about the product performance and the subsequent (dis) confirmation effects on the actual product performance. In essence, the central proposition of Festinger's theory is that if a person holds two cognitions that are inconsistent with one another, he will experience the pressure of an aversive motivational state called cognitive dissonance, a pressure which he will seek to remove, among other ways, by altering one of the two dissonant cognitions (Benn, 1967). This distressing (aversive) mental state termed cognitive dissonance is therefore conceptualized as an aversive drive. In Festinger's theory, the mind is imagined as a system that takes inputs from the environment in the form of information, processes it, and then creates behavioural outputs (LittleJohn & Foss, 2005). This goes to show that people are adept at justifying their behaviour. The magnitude of this dissonance depends on the importance of the issue, attractiveness of the rejected alternative and the number of options considered (Griffin, 2006; LittleJohn & Foss, 2005 & Rice, 1997).

Communication is an important instrument for the reduction of dissonance and to encourage consonance through persuasion. Dissonance reduction is a change of action and an account of how beliefs and behaviours can change attitudes, (West & Turner, 2010). These changes occur by the desire to improve the satisfaction derived from attitudes and behaviours against the inconsistencies and dissonance. The cognitive dissonance theory as an action directed counter intuitive opinion theory focused on the beliefs, attitudes and behaviours of individuals wrapped in inconsistencies, conflicts and confusions emanating from decisions taken and the desire to restore normalcy and harmony. The challenge of dissonance is the quest to change attitude, belief and behaviour positively. The message distortion and bias factors account for the degree of dissonance. The significance of the issues involved determines the dissonance ratio which is the strength of dissonance cognitions experienced relative to the consonant cognitions, (Zimbardo, Ebbesen, & Maslach, 1977) and the rational for the actions, (Matz & Wood, 2005).

Causes of cognitive dissonance

As explained above, the cause of dissonance is the conflict between two cognitions. For instance, when a consumer purchases a product which has favourable and unfavourable characteristics, cognitive dissonance sets in because of the features not purchased and the unfavourable features present in the one he has purchased (Achumba, 2006). As further explained by Kuka & Jakada (2015), after the purchase, the consumer might experience different behavioral outcomes. If the product's performance tallies his expectations there will be satisfaction, otherwise, the consumer will be dissatisfied and disappointed which brings about dissonance. Rama-Rao (2010), reports that dissonance is likely to occur when the action is irrevocable or when there are several desirable alternatives. This goes to show that dissonance is likely to be stronger on the purchase of durables. A consumer who is experiencing cognitive dissonance after his or her purchase may attempt to return the product or seek positive information about it to justify the choice.

When a purchase transaction is completed, most consumers feel that their decisions were largely effected by the sales interventions made by the seller and hence cognitive consistencies were compromised to the various marketing strategies of seller (Bell, 1967; Cummings & Venkatesan, 1975). A consumer after making a desired decision may feel that by choosing a certain brand, he has forgone the positive traits of an alternative brand, which he could have possessed if he had chosen the alternative brand. The guilt might get accentuated if bought brand doesn't perform compared to desired expectations.

Strydom, Cant, and Jooste (2000) revealed that some of the alternatives not chosen may have attractive features, so that the correctness of the choice is not obvious. Cognitive dissonance is most likely to occur for major purchases that are difficult to select and undo. People tend to resolve the discomfort or buyer's remorse by seeking information to support their decision and by becoming more critical of the alternatives they rejected. Singh (2003:4) points out that because consumers are uncertain of the wisdom of their decisions, they rethink their decisions in the post purchase phase. This stage serves several functions; it serves to broaden the consumer's set of experiences stored in

memory, it provides a check on how well the consumer is doing in selecting products, the feedback received from this stage helps the consumer to make adjustments in future purchasing strategies. According to Singh (2003), it appears that dissonance is likely to occur under the following conditions.

1. A minimum threshold of dissonance tolerance is passed. That is, consumers may tolerate a certain level of inconsistency in their lives until this point is reached.
2. The action is irrevocable. For instance, when a consumer purchases a new car, there is little likelihood of reversing this decision and getting the money back.
3. There are several desirable alternatives. Today's car buyer, for example, has an abundance of choices among similar attractive models. In fact, research indicates that those consumers who experience greater difficulty in making purchase decisions, or who consider a wider range of store and brand options, are more likely to experience greater magnitudes of post purchase dissonance.
4. Available alternatives are quite dissimilar in their qualities (there is little "cognitive overlap"). For instance, although there are many automobile models, each one may have some unique characteristics.
5. The buyer is committed to a decision because it has psychological significance. A large and important living-room-furniture purchase is likely to have great psychological significance to the buyer because of its dramatic reflection of the buyer's decorating tastes, philosophy and lifestyle. Ego involvement will be quite high.
6. There is no pressure applied to consumers to make the decision. If they are subjected to outside pressure, they will do what they are forced to do without letting their own viewpoints or preferences really be challenged. In other words, when pressure is applied, consumers will externalize the source of their dissatisfaction rather than allow any mental unease or discomfort regarding their own cognition.

Why marketers are concerned about consumer dissonance

Consumer dissonance is a major player in determining the future of an organization and its offerings in an identified market segment. This is because, when a consumer gains maximum satisfaction from the consumption of a product, there will be repeat purchase, therefore sales and revenue will increase, but when there is dissatisfaction, there will be an inverse decline in sales, no repeat purchase, poor revenue, brand failure, and can lead to brand switch. Therefore, the concept of consumer dissonance is of great importance to the marketer because it help the marketer to:

- Understand the impact of consumer reactions to a firm's marketing strategy on its success.
- Understand and know which marketing-mix offers the needed utility to customers, and analyze the what, where, when and how consumers buy.
- Better predict how consumers will respond to marketing strategies.

Cognitive dissonance is also relevant to marketing when there are conflicting claims associated with a product. Marketers need to take into account any area associated with their offerings likely to produce cognitive dissonance and attempt to reduce them as much as possible in their communications and the products themselves (Zikmund & Amico, 2002: 119).

Remedies of cognitive dissonance

Based on Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance, people try to seek consistency in their thoughts, beliefs, and opinions. Thus, where conflicts subsist between cognitions, they will take steps to reduce the dissonance and feelings of discomfort. This, they can achieve in a few different ways. Cherry (2015), gave three key strategies to reduce or minimize cognitive dissonance:

1. Selective exposure

This strategy focuses on the more supportive beliefs that outweigh the dissonant belief or behaviour. The consumer should expose himself selectively to information that would increase feelings of dissonance. Dissonance is an aversive motivational state, therefore people naturally attempt to avoid dissonance-arousing situations (Kowol, 2008). In essence, some persons prefer to be exposed to information that is supportive of their current beliefs

rather than to non-supportive information, which presumably could arouse dissonance. For example, people who learn that greenhouse emissions result in global warming might experience feelings of dissonance if they drive a gas-guzzling vehicle. In order to reduce this dissonance, they might seek out new information that disputes the connection between greenhouse gases and global warming. This new information might serve to reduce the discomfort and dissonance that the person experiences.

2. **Reduce the importance of the conflicting belief.**

For example in medical and health care services, a man who is concerned about his health might be disturbed to learn that sitting for long periods of time during the day are linked to a shortened lifespan. Since he has to work all day in an office and spends a great deal of time sitting, it is difficult to change his behaviour in order to reduce his feelings of dissonance. In order to deal with the feelings of discomfort, he might instead find some way to justify his behaviour by believing that his other healthy behaviours make up for his largely sedentary lifestyle.

3. **Change the conflicting belief in order to be consistent with other beliefs or behaviours.**

Though somehow difficult, changing the conflicting cognition is one of the most effective ways of dealing with dissonance. Particularly in the case of deeply held values and beliefs, change can be exceedingly difficult. For clearer understanding, it is important to note that both consumers and the marketers have crucial roles to play to ensure that dissonance is reduced or eliminated.

The consumer's role in remedying cognitive dissonance

The consumer can rationalize the purchase decision as being wise, seek out information that supports the choice (while avoiding dissonance-creating competitive ads), try to 'sell' friends on the positive features of the brand or look to known satisfied owners for reassurance (Schiffman, O'Cass, Paladino & Carlson, 2014). Since so many decisions will produce dissonance, consumers try to reduce dissonance by re-evaluating the information they obtained prior to the decision and by searching for more information. Mogaba (2006) suggests the following steps to reduce dissonance:

1. Deny or distort information
2. Seek confirming opinions from others especially reference groups.
3. Discredit the information source
4. Minimize the issue's importance
5. Change the overall evaluation of the chosen alternative.

Furthermore, Uzma and Reshma (2012), opine that though dissonance can be felt by the consumer at any stage during the consumer decision making process, it is during the post purchase stage that dissonance could cause even emotional discomfort in the consumer's mind. They outlined the following strategies necessary to reduce consumer dissonance:

1. Focus on more encouraging beliefs that offset the dissonant belief or behavior.
2. Reduce the importance of the contradictory belief.
3. Change the conflicting belief so that it is consistent with other beliefs or behaviours.
4. Looking for credible source which target consumers trust. At the same time word-of-mouth communications need to be increased.
5. Emphasize on attributes that offer maximum information about the product features.
6. Avoid extraneous information about the product (deceptive advertising).
7. Develop and implement marketing mix that impact on consumer's attitudes.

The marketer's role in remedying cognitive dissonance

Smith (1993), asserts that sellers should address post-purchase dissonance by reassuring the buyer with a congratulatory note, additional advertising, after sales service and, most of all, a product or service that lives up to the promise made in the promotion strategy. Schiffman, O'Cass, Paladino & Carlson (2014) further suggested that marketers can help consumers reduce dissonance by including messages in their advertising specifically aimed at reinforcing consumers' decisions, complimenting their wisdom, offering stronger guarantees or warranties, increasing the number and effectiveness of the services, or providing detailed brochures on how to use the product correctly. These are important

because dissonance that is not reduced or eliminated leads to future complex decision about products in that category (e.g. abandonment and negative word-of-mouth). On the other hand, the more times a consumer makes a buying decision that produces satisfaction, the greater the chance that the decision will become programmed or reutilized (repurchase and brand loyalty).

Conclusion

Cognitive dissonance is caused by a discrepancy between the outcome of a behavioural act and the standard to which it is compared. When customers feel abandoned, cognitive dissonance surfaces and repeat sales decline. Today this issue is more pertinent than ever because customers are far less loyal to brands and sellers than in the past, because buyers are more inclined to look for the best deal, especially in the case of poor after-the-sale follow-up. More and more buyers favour building relationships with sellers. It is unlikely that dissonance can ever be totally avoided, but where the elements creating the dissonance are relatively unimportant, the pressure to correct them will be low. However, where the issues involved are perceived by the individual to be significant, the presence of such dissonance will motivate the person concerned to try to reduce the dissonance and achieve consonance, by changing their attitudes or behaviour to bring them into line. The concept of cognitive dissonance is an integral aspect of consumer behaviour which deals with post-purchase action of the consumer. Dissonance is not necessarily bad as it gives the marketer an insight on consumers' perception and attitude towards his product, how to improve his product and guide him in selecting strategies that would enable him retain his consumers.

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