



## **Integrative Functioning Between Consumerism and Consumer Behaviour: A Controversial Insight into Morals in Markets.**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Having associated the knowledge of the emancipatory concept, consumerism and consumer behavior in literature, the authors viewed to pen this synoptic concept paper in the hope of facilitating those who are interested in doing research studies on these two phenomena. The paper particularly stresses the business morality and consumer well – being to be adopted and enriched. In this respect, owing to lack of comprehensive literature on practicing aspect of consumerism, a rigorous search had to be made in respect of seeking for knowledge of this phenomenon with the aid of respective terminologies, dictionaries and other related documentary evidences from which knowledge of consumer behavior was also yielded. Accordingly, the authors endeavored to extract essential conceptual views alleged with regard to consumerism and consumer behavior and next in the light of those views, the ascertainment was justified. The key purpose of this work is to accommodate the readers to steer toward a controversy or discord in respect of current consumers' dissonant behavioral patterns including probable myopic behaviors and the safeguard given via consumerism in the global context. Thus, it is the belief that this paper may provide a room for those who have intention for engaging in research studies on this particular field in future.

**Keywords:** *Behaviour, Consumerism, Controversy, Sovereignty, Well - Being*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In this particular case, at first, it is better to clarify the differences of consumer, household, buyer, customer, and client who are involved in dealing with marketers. Strictly say consumer is the person who derives the satisfaction or the benefit offered. The 'consumer is not necessarily the customer, since there are often customers in the buying/ distribution chain; moreover, the consumer is frequently not the person who makes the buying decision; for instance, in the case of many household products, where the housewife may make the purchase but consumption or use is by the whole family. 'Consumer 'is not normally applied to the purchase of industrial goods and services where the customer is usually a corporate body. Nevertheless, consumable goods are sold to industry for corporate purposes and for the consumers of those goods can be identified for marketing practice. Household is designation of the single family unit. Mostly this designation is used for research purposes. Buyer is the person responsible for making a final purchasing decision. E.g. An executive in a company heading up the overall purchasing function. Department head in a department store. Customer is the person or organization who/ which is actually making the purchasing decision not the 'consumer 'or 'user'. Legally, a party to a contract for the sale of goods. Client is the person or organization, for whom/which a service is performed, such as advertising, market research or public relations. Sometimes it is used to refer to a customer. Thus, all businessmen ought to provide a visible interface with all above parties.

Over the years much concern for the consumer has been evidenced by some segments of the general public and legislative groups. The individual consumer is a lone voice crying in the wilderness, so the argument runs, since no single consumer is important to a giant business concern. The consumer who does not like what the business firm does is thought to have no resources. On the other hand, the business firm is thought to be very important to the consumer. Thus the business firm presumably has the power to take advantage of the consumer (Dincer, 2014). Many people believe that consumers are at a substantial disadvantage *visa- a- vis* business firms in the economic system (Ubayachandra E.G. & Nirmani C. Eldeniya, 2017). It is widely believed that businesses take advantage of consumers by selling them unsafe, impure, and low-quality products; by engaging in deceptive advertising; by using obscure or deceptive pricing techniques; and by providing inferior servicing of products. These practices are thought to come about because of the wide range of products now being made available to consumers, the supplanting of small family-run production units by large mass production factories, the great advances that have been made in mass communications, and growing monopoly power. They are alleged to result in restrictions of consumer welfare or well – being because they do not give consumers what they want and they utilize resources that could have been used to produce useful goods and services.

## 2. CONSUMERISM

Consumerism is a movement designed to ensure that ‘consumer’ interests are safeguarded. In a society where marketing orientation is universal, consumerism would be said to be obsolescent since, by definition, the consumer’s interests would be fully catered for by the competing firms. In fact, consumerism has aims which may be identified with those of marketing. In other words, consumerism is a movement, or a set of movements, intended to enable consumers to improve their levels of well – being in the economy (John Stapleton, 20012). The apparent problems of consumer’s vis-à-vis business firms have not gone unnoticed historically. They have given rise over time to the movement called ‘consumerism’. The movement is not new, going back at least to the birth of the *consumer cooperative at Rochdale, England, in 1844* (Sharp, 2010). It includes the establishment of organizations for consumer education. This concept is somewhat nebulous with different emphasis being given to it by different people. It almost defies definition, but perhaps we can establish a working description that will suffice for our purposes. Consumerism seems to be a movement shared by a great many people who believe that somehow the consumer is not getting a fair shake in the economic system. Several types of activity are employed that are believed to bolster the consumer’s position with respect to producers and sellers. These include consumer information and educational services performed by organizations such as Consumers. Union, the investigation of practices thought to be adverse to consumer interests and publication of reports by a number of consumer – oriented groups, lobbying by consumer advocates for legislation intended to protect consumers, and the extension of regulatory activities by government agencies for the same purpose. The 1960s saw the increase in ecological problems. This period witnessed the emergence of consumerism. Further, in 1962 President John F. Kenedy paving new path to consumerism, outlined four basic consumer rights: the right to safety, the right to be informed, the right to choose, and the right to be heard (Ferrel, Fraedrich, and Ferrell, 2005). In addition, economic analysis indicates three possible avenues through which consumerism may lead to improvements in the information made available to consumers.

Second, it may cut back on the amounts of useless or even deceptive competitive advertising to which consumers are subjected. Third, it may provide increased protection to consumers as they go about their consumption activities. The larger part of consumerism activities is directed toward protecting rather than educating consumers. They are directed toward protecting consumers from unsafe, impure, and low – quality products, and from unfair pricing practices. From the point of view of economic analysis, it is useful to classify the goods that are targets of consumerism into two groups: (1) those that generate spillover costs in consumption and (2) those that do not. Thus consumerism efforts are aimed at the provision of at least three type’s benefits to consumers. These are: (1) to make available more accurate and more complete information to consumers; (2) to reduce the amount of deceptive and useless sales promotion; (3) to protect consumers from spillover costs, from their ignorance, and

from manipulation by sellers. Thus, consumerism seems to be ethics oriented emancipatory phenomenon which is being gradually evicted in the global context today.

### **3. BUSINESS ETHICS**

In an ascertainment of authenticity and ideology of consumerism, it is noteworthy to remind business ethics as a whole and ethics in marketing in particular. Business ethics refers to a theory or morality that tries to systemize moral judgments and establish and protect fundamental moral principles. Under the ethics, the way by which the merits of an act is determined is called the deontological approach. An also the act by which the moral conduct is determined on the basis of consequences of an activity is called the teleological approach. Other ethical approaches are hedonistic approach, eudemonistic approach, and ideal approach. The hedonistic approach judges the morality of an activity on the basis of the extent of pleasure or pain of the nations as a whole. The eudemonistic approach measures the extent of pleasure to the nations. The ideal approach has a broad view of the value of an outcome of an activity and takes all intrinsically valuable humanist goods and services.

Among these, Sharp, J. (2000) focused on the concept of “fair service “and the authors expressed “it will be possible to reduce study of fair service to the principles of fair salesmanship”. The book could be regarded as a book on ‘Marketing Ethics ‘as includes commercial coercion, the limits of persuasion, fair pricing, and the ethics of bargaining. Philips C. F. (1939) in his article, entitled, “Some Theoretical Considerations Regarding Fair Trade Laws “. Following this work, most academic publishing in the 1950s concerned on issues such as fair trade, antitrust, advertising, and pricing. Carrol (1975) found that young managers would go along with their supervisors to show loyalty in dealing with matters related to judgments on morality. Bowman (2002) supported these ascertainments. Hunt and Vitell (2006) also provided understanding an empirically grounded model to illustrate how ethical decision making occurs in an organization. In the 2000’s, ethics in the world of business became a major issue with scandals associated with Enron, WorldCom, Tyco, Sunbeam, and Arthur Andersen. These activities resulted with Sarbanes – Oxley Act in 2002. After these scandals, the significance of the ethical issues and the importance of having a relationship based on trust with stakeholders is concentrated by many researchers, Murphy, Lacznia, Bowie, and Klein, (2005).

### **4. ETHICS IN MARKETING**

The historical enrichment of marketing ethics begins in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century with the antitrust and consumer protection concerns. Bartels (1967) introduced first model for ethics in marketing. This model described the variables that affect marketing ethics decision making and attempted to specify the logical basis of ethical thinking. Ethical theorists have endeavoured to present a definition of ethics. Runes (1964), Taylor (1975), DeGeorge (1982), and Beauchamp and Bowie (1983) have all defined ethics interchangeably with morals. For marketers, ethics in the workplace refers to rules like standard

and principles governing the conduct of organizational members and the consequences of marketing decisions (Ferrell, 2005). The Marketing ethics should be considered from an individual and organizational perspective. From the individual perspective personal values and moral philosophies are the key to ethical decisions in marketing. Honesty, fairness, responsibility, and citizenship are assumed to be values that can guide complex marketing decisions in the context of an organization. From an organizational perspective, organizational value, codes, and training is necessary to provide consistent and shared approaches to marketing ethical decisions (Ferrell and Ferrell, 2005). There is an evolving concern that organizations must also focus on the important communities and groups that hold the firm accountable for its action (American Marketing Association, 2013). In the process of marketing ethics, marketing can identify the importance of stakeholders, stakeholder issues, and gather information to respond to important persons, groups, and communities (Jones, 1991). Personal moral development and philosophy, organizational culture, and coworkers, determine why different people perceive issues with varying intensity (Robin, Reidenbah, and Forrest, 1996; Collierand, J; Esteban, R. 2007). So, there is a general tendency to discipline top sales perform more leniently than poor sales performers for engaging in identical forms of unethical selling behaviour (Bellizzi and Hasty, 2003; Gellert, F; Schalk, R.2012). Marketing ethics still remains a complex area; although, marketing practice apparently has been brought into close conformity with prevailing ethical standards, marketing will be under pressure from organizational efforts to institutionalize formal ethics programmes in order to satisfy stakeholder demands.

## **5. CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR**

Consumer behavior is a noticeable dominant response that consumers display in seeking for, purchasing, using, evaluating, and disposing of products and services that they expect to satisfy their needs and wants. This substantially focuses on how individuals, households or families use their available resources on consumable things. Buying motives are all those factors within a person or an organization which combine logical criteria price, quality, delivery; but also highly subjective considerations, often difficult to locate, let alone measure, such as prestige, brand image, colour, shape, and packaging. Buying motives are all those factors within a person or an organization which combine to create a desire to purchase. The buying decisions include what they buy, why they buy, when they buy it, where they buy, how much they buy, how often they use it, how they evaluate it after the purchase, the impact of such evaluations on future purchases and how they organize it. Consumer behavior includes mental activity, emotional and physical that people use during selection, purchase, use and dispose of products and services that satisfy their needs and wants. Also, consumer behavior includes the selection, purchase and consumption of goods and services including elimination of three steps before buying activities, purchasing activities, and activities after purchase (Rostami, 2001).

With the emergence of an extensive technological, social, political and economic background, today's consumers have become more knowledgeable and their needs and wants are dramatically and marvelously changing. It is essential that marketers need to be aware of everything about what customers need and want, what they think, how they work and how they spend their leisure time. Thus, the marketers should identify and clarify the impact of the factors influencing on ultimate consumer buying decision and ought to develop the strategic plan to make an optimistic impact on the buying decision. Decision is a selection of an option or a course of action from two or more alternative choices derived from available information. It ought to be of course a rational and logical deduction. Based on the nature of the product and the nature of the need, the type of consumer decision can be varied. Extensive problem solving, limited problem solving and routinized response behavior are the major three dimensions of decision making. Extensive problem solving is a level of consumer decision making in which consumers have no established criteria for evaluating a product category or have not narrowed the number of brands they will consider as a small manageable subset. In case of limited problem solving, consumers have the basic criteria for evaluating the product category and the various brands in the category. This type of decision has to be made when a consumer purchases a new or an updated version of something. In respect of routinized response behavior, consumers have experienced the product category and a well - established set of criteria with which they have to evaluate the brands they are considering. (Ebert, D. 2010)

According to Sharp (2010), there are four views of consumer decision making. They are economic view, passive view, cognitive view, and the emotional view. In a world of perfect competition, the consumer makes rational decision in terms of align with the pocket and this refers as the economic view. Opposite to the economic view some say consumers are basically submissive to the self-serving interests and promotional efforts of marketers. It is called passive view. As per the cognitive view, the consumer becomes a problem solver. Those types of consumers are actively searching for goods and services which fulfill their needs and enrich their lives. In case of emotional view, consumers act with inner feelings or emotions when they are buying goods and services. Some studies allege that, consumers are likely to buy impulsively and they are influenced not only by family, friends, role models and advertisers, but also by mood, situation, and emotion. If the situation is so, it is clear that, consumer behavior affects both cognitive and emotional aspects of consumer decision making. The process of consumer decision making can be identified as three distinct and interconnected stages via input stage, process stage and output stage. In concerning models of consumer buying behaviour, mainly four important models are stressed here. They are;

- Model of Consumer Decision Making
- Engel,- Blackwell – Miniard Model of Consumer Decision Making Process
- Nicosia Model of Consumer Behavior

- Stimulus Response Model

In short, these models are chronologically discussed below. Having read the figure -1 below, an understanding of consumer decision making process can be obtained. Mainly this model includes three stages namely input, process, and output. In this context, it seems that consumer behaviour involves in rather complex process.

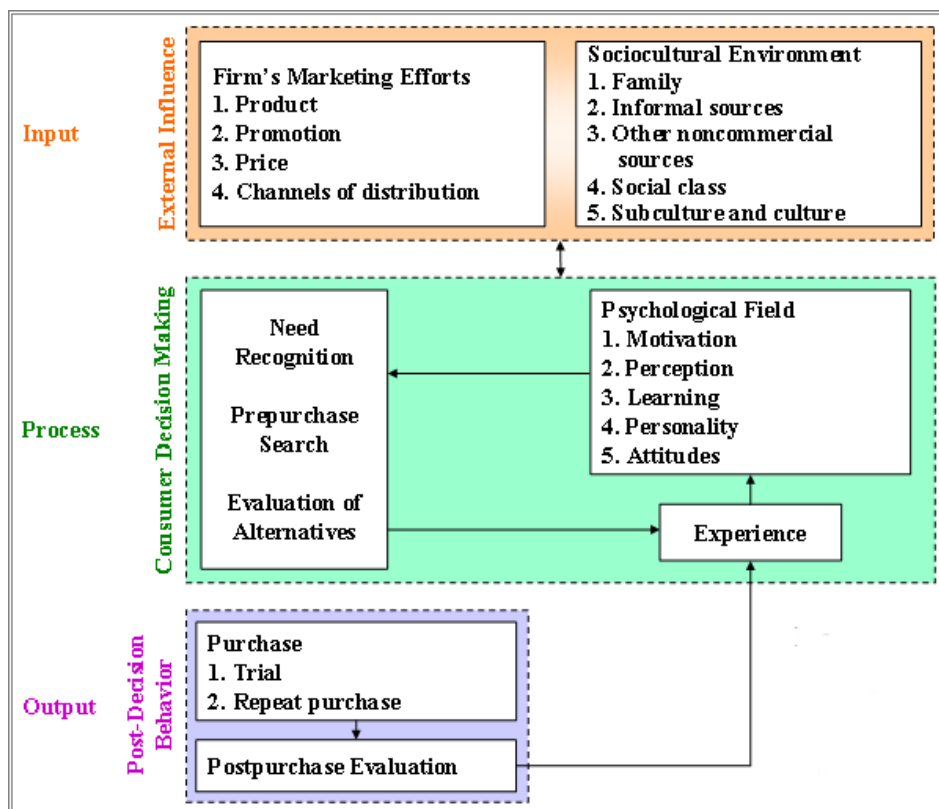


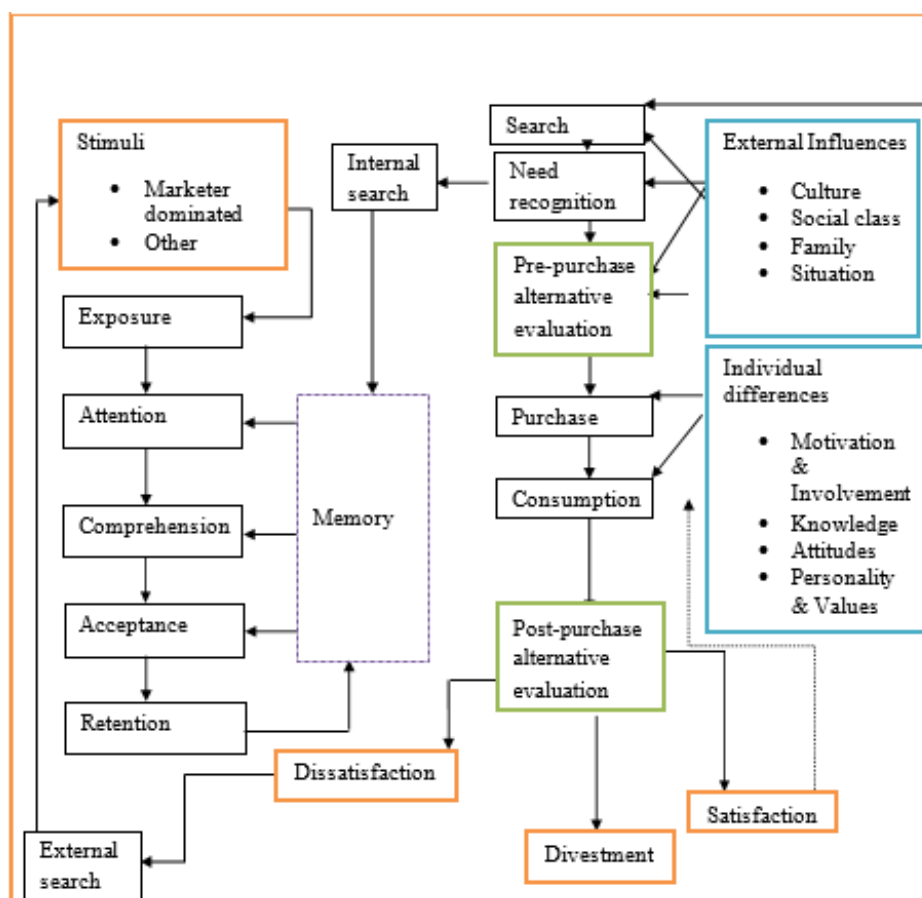
Figure 1: The Model of Consumer Decision Making

Source: Consumer Behavior by Sciffman, Kanuk, Ramez Kumar

Here, it seems that there are three stages namely input stage, process stage and output stage along with what external influence, consumer decision making and post decision situations are appeared. In the case of input stage, marketing mix strategies and socio-cultural environment including five sub factors play a vital role. In opposite to this stage, the second stage represents need recognition, pre- purchase and evaluation of alternatives. The arrow running from box to box indicating experience says those three factors have significant influence on experience gained buy the consumer. Cyclically experience directly affects socio- cultural factors. At third stage, both trial purchase plus repeat purchase and post- purchase evaluation make influence on experience of the consumer.

Next, let us consider second type of consumer behavior model called Engel – Blackwell model illustrated by the figure 2 below.

Figure 2: Engel, - Blackwell – Miniard Model of Consumer Decision Making Process



Source: Engel J.F, Blackwell, R D, Miniard, 1973, Consumer behavior

The above model reveals how the environmental influences and individual differences impact on consumer. Those two factors play an important role in decision making process. The model shows various components of consumer decision making and the relationships among them. The Engel-Blackwell-Miniard Model consists of five stages. They are information input, information processing, decision process stage, decision process variables and external influences. Information input stage includes all kinds of stimuli. A large number of stimuli both marketing (advertising, publicity, personal selling, POSM, direct marketing) as well as non-marketing sources (family, friends, peers) are exposed by the consumer and those stimuli operate to draw consumers' attention. These stimuli are providing information to the consumers and taking the inductive step of the consumer decision making process.

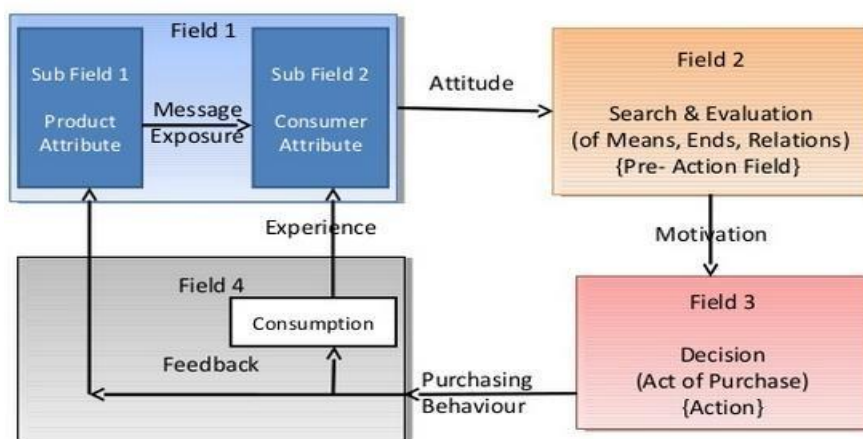
At the information processing stage, the stimuli received from the first stage are being processed into meaningful information. This stage consists of consumers' exposure, attention, perception, acceptance and retention of information. In the decision process, the five stages are followed by the consumer in order to make a purchase. They are problem recognition, information search, evaluating alternatives, purchase and post-purchase evaluation. According to Engel-Blackwell-Miniard model, that it is not necessary for every consumer to go via all the five stages, it depends on whether the problem is an



extensive or a routine one.

The model suggests an individual can influence on the various stages of decision making process. The individual characteristics which affect the decision making process include Motivation & Involvement, Knowledge, Attitudes, Personality & Values. External influences indicate that the certain environmental and situational conditions affect the decision making process. These conditions include culture, social class, and family background (financial condition) etc. For further understanding, next consumer behaviour model, Nicosia Model can be associated.

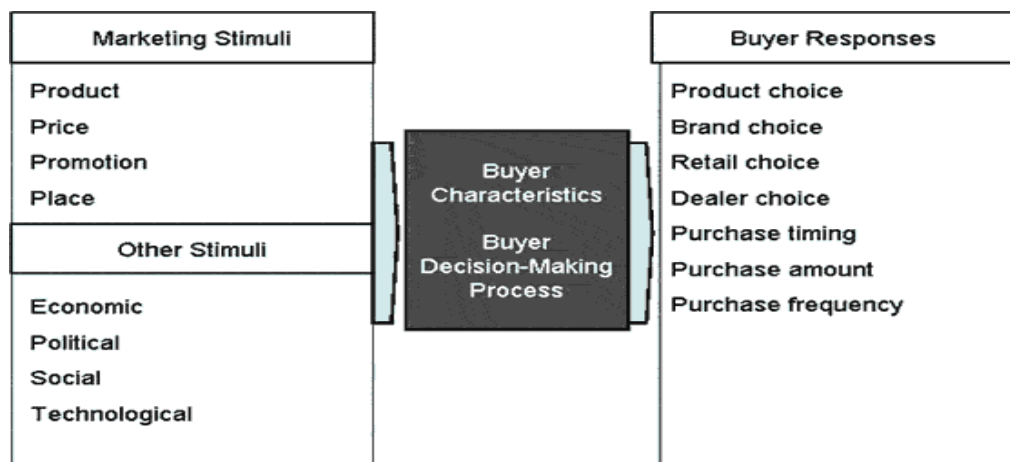
Figure 3: Nicosia Model of Consumer Behavior



Source: Lindquist, Jay. D, Sirgy, M Joseph; *Consumer Behavior* 2009

This Model concerns the inter-relationships among the firms marketing communications, the attributes of the consumer, the consumers' decision process including search and evaluation process, actual decision process and the feedback of the consumers' response to the firm. Many researchers have identified this model as a dynamic one. This model consists of four main fields. The first field represents the output of a commercial message from the firm in the form of advertising or other promotion and its effects on consumer (Anupam, 2010). As per the model, the first sub field represents the product attributes which convey the company's message to the target audience. The second sub field represents the consumer attributes. By creating a certain attitude from company, it makes an input for the field two in which the evaluation of the advertised product and other alternatives takes place. If the process results in motivation to buy, it becomes the input for the field three. The field three represents the act of purchase. This transforms the motivation into the act of buying. The field four includes use of purchased item and evaluation of options. The result of purchase leads to storage of the product. This reveals the retention of the experience by the consumer as an influence on future purchase. Four main fields depicted by this model are interconnected each other and one's output becomes an input in another field. One of the well-developed and tested models of the buyer behavior is the stimulus response model illustrated bellow.

Figure 4: Stimulus Response Model



Source: Jim Riley, 2012

In the above model, marketing and other stimuli enter the customers' "black box" and produce certain responses. Marketers ought to try to identify the customers' inner mind and be able to capture their desires. Marketing stimuli (product, price, place and promotion) together with other stimuli (political, economic, social and technological) enter the customers' inner mind (black box) and make decisions according to it. Buyer's characteristics consist of social, cultural, personal and psychological factors. Culture involves in three main elements such as sub-culture and social class. Social factors involve in reference groups, families, and roles & status. Personal factors involve in age/life cycle stages, occupation, economic circumstances, lifestyles and the self- concept. Psychological factors involve in motivation, perception, learning, and attitudes. As a result of operating the buyer decision making process, the decisions on product, brand, retail, dealer, purchase timing, purchase amount and purchase frequency take place.

In today's dynamic and dramatically competitive market, consumers have various options to buy products or services. There are extensive number of retailers and variety of retail formats because retailers are struggling to create a solid customer base in order to survive in the market place and to achieve impressive profits. Retailers also use promotion to create brand image and to build consumer awareness and preference for a store or brand which, in turn, may generate store patronage and the sale of goods and services.

A positive mood serves as a contextual cue for evaluating the perceived quality, image of a product and store, and purchase intention also proves opinion. Customer buying decision is driven by combination of attitudes corresponding to the purchase behavior and a set of beliefs and motivations toward the behavior (Burnkrant 2012). Intentions are usually determined by the willingness to stay in the store, willingness to repurchase, willingness to purchase more in the future and willingness to

recommend the store to others. (Baker 2002). An optimistic mood serves as a contextual cue for evaluating the perceived quality, image of a product and store, and purchase intention (Ebster, 2014). Ultimately, this will lead to create satisfied customer who will spread the positive word of mouth for many other customers. According to Emily White (2012), the primary purpose of merchandising is the presentation of products in a manner that makes them to be sold more quickly, with a highest retail margin. By making a careful consideration, retailers can directly approach the customers and can yield customer loyalty through careful branding and attractive displays.

## 6. CONCLUSION

In paying an in – depth attention on so – called facts pointed out under the authenticity of consumerism, it is understood that consumerism rigorously emphasizes the well-being of consumers. It looks like an integral element of protectionism. Especially it attempts to eliminate pessimistic social spillovers, marketers’ miss behaviors and their malpractices, and ignorance of consumers and so forth. So, it seems to be a consumer democracy - centered phenomenon. As we know different consumers possessing multiple inner – mindsets or black boxes may behave impulsively and miscellaneously in the market. In the field of marketing, this is a fundamental strategic question to be taken into consideration of marketers. The importance of this question is that when they define their business wrongly that will calls for a wrong understanding of the business. Irrespective of customers’ real needs, if businesses function by focusing on only their existing products/services, such a practice is called “*product focus*” or “*myopic thinking*”. The key implication here is that they forget their customers’ real requirement without focusing on improving their products/services. Further, *shopping experience business* is an important practice to be concentrated because it paves the path to steer toward imagery business. As explained earlier, consumer behavior may take different patterns owing to multiple psychological deviations occurring in the consumers’ mindsets.

Some might be impulsive while some are compulsive in making purchase decisions. Accordingly as far as possible, marketers ought to act like psychiatrics to go into the inner –minds of consumers in order to cater them ethically and genuinely. Companies need to assess whether they are truly practicing ethical and socially responsible marketing. But, unfortunately most organizations define minimum acceptable ethical behaviour and implement this level. In this case, both normative and descriptive understanding will be required to improve marketing ethics. Such an act of marketers is entirely expected by any movement which is under the umbrella of consumerism. Thus marketers ought to be aware of functioning of consumerism under which consumers are safeguarded. For succeeding this, consumer behaviour should be linked together with consumerism which ought to be geared further and allowed to play in the real practice. There should be both back –ward and for – ward linkages between consumer behaviour and consumerism letting consumers to attain well – being. In conclusion, this

overview of consumerism and consumer behavior provides a concise synopsis of the major works in the field and the authors encourage readers to draw their own insights from these substantial efforts.

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