

How Consumers Make Their Choices

Any attempt to describe a complex, non-linear process such as consumer choice necessarily simplifies it and removes much of its richness. Thus, this article will make consumer choice seem more logical, structured, rational, and deliberate than it often is. We know that a situation plays an important role in consumer decisions. For example, when we are tired or in a hurry, we are likely to make choice processes than we would if we had more energy or time.

Here are some of the choice processes that consumers make:

Attitude-based vs. Attribute-based decisions. Consider the following two processes a consumer might use in purchasing a printing machine.

Process 1. The consumer remembers that the Brother brand printer his last roommate had seem to work well and have printed quality bookmarks for his project. His parents had a Canon printer that also works well and was used in printing custom bookmarks. The difference is that his parents' printer was very large and bulky. Same goes with his old HP printer, which, by the way, had not performed as well as he had expected. He goes to a store, and gathers the price information, recording time, and ease of remote access on each of these brands. He mentally ranks each brand on these three attributes and his general impression of their quality. Based on these evaluations, he makes a choice.

Process 2. In a similar situation, the consumer still remembers about the Brother brand printer and how his previous roommate has one that seem to work well especially with printing quality custom bookmarks. Again, his parents had the Canon that also works well and was also used for bookmark printing. Once again, it's a matter of one being too large and bulky. And his old HP printer had, well, seen its last job as it hadn't worked as well as he hoped. At the store, well, again, he sees that the Brother and Canon brands are about the same price. He finally decides to buy the Brother printer.

The first example is an attribute-based choice. It requires the knowledge of specific attributes at the time the choice is made and involves attribute-by-attribute comparisons across brands. While the second example, is an attitude-based choice. It involves the use of general attitudes, summary impressions, intuitions, or heuristics. There was no attribute-by-attribute comparisons made at the time of choice.

Affective choice. Consider a consumer buying an alarm clock. She inspects several models, noticing many differences among them. Some models have a snooze-alarm feature; some don't. While others have a battery back-up; and the others, well, they don't have them. The models also vary on the wake-to-music or wake-to-alarm feature, top-mounted versus side controls, push-button versus rotary or sliding switches, so on and so forth. She reviews her relative preference for these diverse features; and finally chooses the model that gives her the best combination of the desired features.

Now consider that she was buying a dress for an upcoming big social event. Scanning a rack full of dresses in a store, she pulls out a few that seemed to look very nice. One of them particularly caught her eye- she tries it on and confirmed that she looks great in it. She tries another one which she thought made her look too conservative. A third one made her look too sexy. Somehow, the first one looked so right for her. A few more minutes of contemplation later, she has made up her mind to buy the dress that would make a spectacular impression at the party.

The purchase of the dress is primarily an affective choice. Such choices do not lend themselves well to either the attribute-based or the attitude-based choice approaches. Affective choices tend to be more holistic in nature. The brand is not decomposed into distinct components, which means that each is not evaluated separately from the whole.

Attitude-based decisions and affective choices are among the primary types of choices and most common among consumers. Know them well because they can help you come up with the best strategy the next time that can make many of your target customers become actual buyers of your products.

About the Author

Troy Duff works as a businessman and currently runs a printing company that offers [custom bookmarks](#), banners, magazines, flyers, door hangers, catalogs, table tents, presentation folders, [bookmarks](#), custom printer and other printed ads.

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