Exploring The Impact of Consumer Perception on Their Buying Predispositions: A Theoretical Validation of Cause & Effect Theories

Sara Wahid
Independent Researcher,
Karachi, Pakistan.
Email: sabahatwahid@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper is grounded around the systematic literature review of cause-and-effect theories, persuasion and consumer decision making model and relevant existing research for understanding the role of perception in defining consumer behaviour, effect of internal and external variables on perceptions and the resultant buying behaviour. Selection of cause-and-effect theories was made due to their predictive nature, generalizability, testability and human centric attributes. Key findings reveal that perceived benefits are positively related with consumers' buying predispositions. Expectation of rewards depends upon the type of need gratification consumer is interested in. Moreover, highly motivated consumers focus on product specifications thus inclined towards the central route of persuasion. In contrast, less involved consumers will be hooked by message cues (like music, spokesperson etc.) hence the peripheral route is preferred. These insights are beneficial for advertisers and marketers as it allows them to understand the interplay of consumers' thought process, their underlying motives and its impact on their buying decisions.

Keywords: *Consumer Decision Making, Buying Predispositions, Perceptions, Buying Behavior, and Motivations.*

1.   Introduction

Perception is a process which helps us in understanding the world around us by using our five sensory abilities (Devito, 2018). Human beings are inundated with lots of information coming from several sources; it is difficult, or we should say impossible, to absorb each bit of it. Perceptions are influenced by five key elements i.e., exposure to the stimuli, the information chunk that individuals select to process, the hook in the message that grabs their attention, relatability and desire to know more.' (Wells, Burnett, & Moriarty, 2015, p. 131).

Perception involves the process of receiving, selecting, and interpreting some of the messages to which we come across. But it also depends upon which information cues we are allowing to reach us and how we handle them. The process of perception is a bit complicated since whatever is happening around us may be different than what we perceive. There are three important stages which occur in the process of perception. The first stage begins as soon as we get the information cue from the environment. At this point our brain gets activated and we start processing the information.

Schiffman & Kanuk (2007) also laid an emphasis on the process of selective attention. Selective attention also reflects that the amount of attention is also distributed based on selective criteria. The selective criteria suggest attending only that piece of information cue which appears to meet the requirements of consumers; otherwise, no chance to attend the irrelevant stimulus. Attention takes place when an individual's mind gets activated as soon as they are encountered with any information cue (Assael, 2008).

Sciffman & Kanuk (2007) explained that individuals perceive messages the way they like it, and this happens according to their perceptual mindset i.e., the relevance they tend to create with the new piece of information based on their existing psychological framework i.e., their observations, learning and their predispositions. The information is perceived only if it seems parallel to the one's existing mind. On the contrary, selective retention refers to the information processing mechanism whereby customers retain certain chunks of information only while ignoring the rest, thus

developing a positive inclination towards the selected messages (Nath, Saumyabrata, Mishra, Prashant G., Safi, Bahrullah & R., Sangeeta, 2023).

Devito (2015) explained that our expectations, necessities, aspirations, preferences and the world around them shapes the way we perceive and interact with our surroundings. Moreover, our decision to consume and engage with certain types of media messages reflects our worldview.

Turow (2017) highlighted that we as humans develop our personalized version of the real world; which is an amalgamation of the media we consume, our prior experiences and personal insight. Our perception of reality is mostly media driven thus, at times the distinction between personal insight and the media version of reality is challenging.

Human processes stimuli by connecting the dots of new information with the previously archived information in their storage / brain warehouse. In simple words, individuals interpret and assign meanings to the information by referring to their knowledge pool that they have acquired over the years by interacting with their surroundings. This process is referred to as Schema (Adekoya, 2013).

Hegde (2022) emphasized that schemas serve as an integral component in shaping our thinking pattern, the way we store / archive information, making sense of the socio-cultural environments and also our judgement process.

2. Scope & Significance

This paper establishes strong foundations for the field of consumer behavior, marketing, and advertising. Marketers can apply this theoretical framework to understand their prospects before launching their products in the market, i.e., pre-launch market research to position their products effectively and for post campaign evaluation to evaluate the efficacy of their campaigns.

Besides, advertisers can take the leverage in their potential campaigns if they get to know their audience better, which is possible if they study their target audience's needs, their expectations regarding the products and the degree of satisfaction they want to achieve through their potential purchase.

Hence, this theoretical framework is beneficial for both advertisers and marketers as someone rightly says that 'customers are king'.

3.   Research Objectives

Following are the research objectives:

- To examine the relationship between the consumers' buying predispositions and their actual purchase decisions
- To identify factors that affect the consumer's perception and resulting buying behavior.
- To identify the relationship between the consumers' message evaluation criteria and their preferred route to persuasion.

4.   Literature Review

This section highlights the descriptive analysis of cause-and-effect theories, persuasion model and consumer decision making model in the context of consumer buying behavior. Cause and effect theories revolve around the idea that certain factors or agents serve as catalysts for inculcating behavior patterns among individuals. It is commonly believed that for every 'reaction' there must be some 'action'.

For critical analysis, an attempt is made to find the relevance of each theory with the most used consumer decision making model. The consumer behavior model is considered as it provides insights regarding the steps involved in consumers' decision-making process. The stages in consumer behavior can be highlighted as: 1) need recognition, 2) information search, 3) evaluation & comparison, 4) outlet selection & purchase decision, 5) post purchase evaluation' (Wells, Burnett & Moriarty, 1998, p.178).

4.1   Means End Chain Analysis Theory

Means End Chains theory posits the possible explanation of the consumer behavior by establishing a relationship (or developing a chain structure) between the best-selling features of the product, the anticipated benefits of the product that consumer is looking forward to and the worth (or significance) of the product according to consumer perception. Every consumer seeks certain benefits from the products or services being offered. These benefits

reflect the distinct qualities of the product (i.e., the unique selling point) and the consumer tends to form a connection between these two elements, i.e. attributes and benefits (of the product). In addition to the above elements there is another significant factor that completes the whole chain structure and that is the consumer's expected 'level of satisfaction' from the consumption of that product. The 'level of satisfaction' would either be in the form of acquired 'pleasure', 'comfort' or the 'sense of achievement' (Webb, 2005).

In view of the preceding lines about the 'means end chain theory' it is explicable that the whole 'chain structure' revolves around the process of consumer perception. Further, it explains how consumers process information about the brand i.e., their characteristics, benefits, and the efficacy or worth of the product.

4.1.1   *Relevance with Consumer Decision Making Model*

This theory deals with the three out of five steps involved in decision making as discussed by Wells, Burnett & Moriarty (1998). These include need recognition, evaluation, and post purchase feelings. Need recognition rests on the idea that when the customer evaluates the value of the product, they can identify certain human needs that can be gratified by the consumption of a particular product or service.

Parente (2006) highlighted some of the compelling reasons that trigger potential prospects to make a certain buying decision. These includes gratification of certain underlying needs or wants by consuming product, the product appears as the ultimate solution of consumers problems, when they (consumer) feel inquisitive about the brand, consumer find relevance with the product and their ideal self that reflecting their perfect self-image and their likeability towards the product and the advertising. Moreover, individuals can get motivated towards a brand if the mores and values featured in advertising appeals to them.

Evaluation stage wherein the customer evaluates the product benefits, attributes and the level of satisfaction that can be linked with the product purchase. Bower, Bootzin, & Zajonc (1987) stressed that our expectations play a pivotal role in our message evaluation stage. These expectations serve as reference material and based on our prior experiences and observations.

So, whenever we encounter any message, we begin to associate our expectations to assign certain meanings to it.

Post purchase feeling that reflects the state of contentment or dissatisfaction after experiencing the product. Webb (2005) discussed that after making a buying decision of a product or service, there can be two possible experiences. Either that purchase has satisfied the consumer's need, or it may trigger a feeling of dissatisfaction which will ultimately create 'Cognitive Dissonance.' This level of frustration would further aggravate when the consumer considers himself being ripped off. Also, if the weaknesses of the product or service cannot be kept hidden then it will worsen the consumer's state of mind.

The strength of the means end chain theory lies in its product-centered approach as its sole emphasis is on the customer understanding of the product in terms of its attributes, benefits, and the expected level of satisfaction. This insight can be helpful for advertisers or marketers as it gives them a better understanding of their product-related decision-making processes. Moreover, this theory reflects how consumers perceive information about any product or service by identifying their human needs that can be linked with the product use, their expectations regarding the product. In this way, if this theory is used as theoretical foundation for a pre-launch market survey it will discover several interesting insights into the advertiser's potential prospect i.e., the needs that generally triggers an individual to buy a particular product, the value that potential prospect associates with the product and the level of expectation also defines their attitude towards the product. Besides, the level of consumer expectation can also define the degree of acceptance or rejection in their purchase decision. Succeeding paragraphs highlight the significance of means end chain analysis theory in the contemporary media landscape.

Nafisyah et al. (2023) study in the context of telecommunication services revealed that there is a significant impact of perceived price and perceived trust on the perceived value of the product. Specifically, perceived price is negatively associated with the consumer contentment. Perceived trust can improve perceived value of the service hence generate consumer

satisfaction making them inclined towards repeating the purchasing behavior afterwards.

Li et al. (2016) study asserted that MEC's (i.e., means end chain) theoretical framework provides a better understanding of consumer's purchase predispositions behind the purchase of local food. They asserted that cultural inclinations and resulting values of consumers (which in this context: Javanese and non-Javanese Indonesians) are significant factors in discovering the actual reason behind their purchase decision, as they may differ from each other.

In addition, Lin, Hong Wen (2023) stressed the significance of the means end chain framework in explaining the user behavior of the TikTok platform. Results revealed that diversity of content, platform usability, appealing visual content and active social engagement are highly significant platform attributes. Also, mental models of different genders are different from each other thus affecting platform's perceived attributes and resulting consumer values. Kumar, Harish, Philipp A. Rauschnabel, Philipp A., Agarwal, Madhushree Nanda, Singh, Rajesh Kumar & Srivastava, Ritu (2024) also confirmed that the likelihood of consumer's favorable decisions increases with the mediating effect of augmented reality characteristics and likeable benefits. Hence, the applicability of MEC's theoretical foundation in the domain of augmented reality marketing is validated.

Trzebiński,Wojciech et al. (2024) revealed that attributes can significantly impact consumer satisfaction thus confirming the application of means end chain for understanding consumer decision making. For high tech-products, it is suggested that measurable / concrete benefits should be highlighted alongside the comparison with the competitor brand thus allowing customers to evaluate two products simultaneously whereas abstract / intangible attributes (emotional cues, luxury, convenience, emotional connection etc.) may not create substantial impact on consumer decisions.

Rasheed et al. (2023) revealed that benefits (both in terms of economic gains and intangible rewards like satisfaction, ease etc.) generate favorable online purchase behavior whereas associated risk is negatively correlated with the buying behavior. Abdelsalam et al. (2021) asserted that three significant

factors i.e., benefit in terms of platform efficacy, motivation and the value perceived by the user can determine their behavioral inclinations towards the social media platforms.

4.2   Edward's expectancy value theory

This theory explained the motivations behind the consumer decision making process. Besides, this theory laid an emphasis on the consumer's evaluative criterion for making a final purchase decision. This criterion revolves around two significant factors, i.e., the expectations of the consumer about the value of the product they would like to buy and the probability of getting the anticipated rewards / benefits from the product. Individuals anticipate a certain level of satisfaction in terms of the product's performance, i.e., the benefits of the product and tend to evaluate the propensity of gratification they would associate with the purchase of that product. Altogether both these factors enable the consumers to decide which product they would like to buy. The greater the likelihood of maximum benefits the more inclination a consumer will show towards a particular product in comparison with the other alternatives (Callan et al, 1999).

This idea provides an insight into the individual's decision-making process and elaborates how consumers evaluate the benefits associated with the buying or selling of products or services. Being a consumer, we tend to look out for all possible strengths and weaknesses before making a buying decision. Apparently, this theory can be applied to provide valuable insights about the consumer buying behavior as it suggests that an individual associates a certain value with products or services, evaluates its possible benefits and then makes a final decision. But to increase the efficacy of this theory, individuals preferred benefits and the actual product benefits appear to be in-line with each other to increase the quality of this relationship.

4.2.1   Relevance with Consumer Decision Making Model

This theory focused on consumers' evaluative criteria (one of the steps in the decision-making process as discussed by Wells, Burnett & Moriarty, 1998) for making a purchase decision. This criterion comprises two elements, i.e., the expectations of consumers about the value of the product and the possibility of reward from product consumption. In simple words

the relationship between the product's expected benefits and the level of anticipated satisfaction that it creates i.e., the higher the benefits expected the more likelihood of higher expectations regarding the product post purchase satisfaction. For instance: if a consumer perceives the maximum benefits of a certain product due to the discount offer of buy 1 get 1 free; this added reward may increase the expectations regarding post purchase satisfaction.

Moussa et al. (2024) study affirmed that the predispositions regarding the consumption of mobile commerce are interrelated with the likelihood of task efficacy, decision complexity & the reliability of mobile commerce. Thus, these predispositions increase the likelihood of adoption of mobile commerce. Discussing the potential of reward expectations and the applicability of gamification elements in social commerce, Yan et al. (2020) emphasized that consumers' online shopping behavior can be significantly improved by employing these game elements like players freedom, control, incentive mechanism and the immersive experience.

But if the consumers are unfamiliar with the product, and they do not have direct experience or no prior information of any kind then there is a possibility that they may overestimate product benefits and its consequences. This in turn may increase the chances of a possible misunderstanding or distrust between the product marketer and the prospectus. Also, this theory emphasizes direct experience with the product, i.e., no external factors are considered. For the positive side, it can be asserted that the product centered approach highlights the relationship between product and their actual prospects.

On the contrary, there are some factors that may create distortion in the desired message understanding. For example, every individual may perceive things differently depending on their personal schemas and this is natural. So, to minimize the effect of their differences, researchers may investigate the common parameters that consumers usually employ for reaching a certain decision like human needs or the conditions in which a product is generally consumed. For instance, Seo et al. (2023) revealed that the consumers' anticipated need for gratification from buying rental clothes online vary from pandemic to post pandemic times. Also, the emotional

attachment factor may inhibit customers from purchasing rental clothes online irrespective of pandemic or post pandemic situation.

Impact of different rewards may also vary as discussed by Wang et al. (2020) that monetary rewards are more effective as compared to social rewards as it offers emotional compensation to the customer thus affecting the online ratings of dissatisfactory items but questionable on ethical grounds.

Zubair et al. (2024) also stressed on the role of audience / customer as they found that product elements and user participation in social media discourse affects consumers' buying predispositions alongside the consumers' anticipation regarding the products' productivity.

In the context of consumer behavior, means end chain theory and expectancy value theory seems relevant as it explains how consumers perceive the products and services offered to them and associate certain expectations to be fulfilled by the consumption of a particular product. For advertisers, this theory can work best if they focus on the products' characteristic features and tend to highlight those aspects that consumers would desire for. According to this theory, consumers always seek benefits they would like to get after making a particular purchase therefore if the connection between the product attributes and the benefits preferred by consumers are consistent then it will automatically add significance to that product. Meanwhile consumers develop trust in the performance of the product and anticipate the consequences of the product in terms of immense satisfaction and comfort.

Considering the above-mentioned discussion on the consumer's developed association between the 'preferred benefits' and the 'actual features' of the product, it can be asserted that these two elements may serve as rewards for the prospective buyers. These rewards may act as stimulating agents and provide reinforcement for the consumer's buying behavior.

4.3   The Attribution Theory

The Attribution theory focuses on the agents that serve as reasons for an individual's behavior. Theory puts forward an idea that the individual seeks ways to justify their behaviors and other people alike. A person, to vindicate

display of certain behavioral patterns tends to search for reasons or factors that can be held responsible (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2007).

Attribution was contributed by Fiske and Tailor (1984), Jones & Davis (1965) and Kelley (1979). This concept rests on the idea that human beings seek justifications for others' behaviors and their own behavior too (As cited by Devito, 1997).

It appears that this theory can easily be related to the consumer post purchase behavior wherein individually either get reinforcement from the experience of buying products or services or get infuriated due to the disappointing consequences. Consequently, they either acknowledge the benefits of the product by continuing their purchase decisions or impugn the substandard performance of the product; hence, no likelihood of favorable attitude towards that product or service from then on. Moreover, it can be considered that attributions do play a vital role in identifying the core reason for one's behavior in certain situations. The nature of this theory allows researchers to consider this theory as a theoretical foundation for understanding the relationship between consumers and several internal or external factors.

This theory allows advertisers and marketers to understand the causal relationship between their potential prospects and their buying behavior. By holding some internal or external factors responsible for their behavior, to justify their behaviors, consciously or unconsciously they define why they do what they do. This means that they give cues to understand the motives behind their decisions. Together with this, there is a possibility that the reasons that consumers attribute for their certain behavior may not necessarily depict the actual motives behind their decision. But it may give clues to make some sense of their behaviors by understanding different kinds of attribution people generally make.

4.3.1 Relevance with Consumer Decision Making Model

Attribution can be observed in the 'evaluation' (one of the essential steps involved in consumer decision making as discussed by Wells, Burnett & Moriarty, 1998) process, when people finally decide whether to buy or not to buy a particular product. Post purchase attributions can or may vary because

they reflect the post purchase feedback and that may or may not be in-line with the consumer's early attributions during the evaluation process. This change in attributions may cause a certain level of uneasiness or discomfort among the minds of consumers; and it may increase the likelihood of favorable or unfavorable future decisions, respectively.

There is another important criterion to understand the attributions i.e., the nature of consequences that a particular behavior brings forward and the effect that it may have on the consumers' contribution. (Rosenthal & Jacobson (1992) explained the 'Pygmalion Effect' in which the nature of anticipated behavior i.e., positive & negative both affects the individual's performance accordingly (As cited by Devito, 1997).

For instance: if an individual performs certain actions that bring them recognition, then there is a possibility of internal attributions i.e., those factors that can be associated with one's own self. Whereas, if the action does not bring any favorable consequences, then there is a possibility of external attributions as it is human nature to find escape from the situations that cause discomfort.

Unlike previous theories, attribution theory provides an understanding of the relationship between prospects, their decision, and the impact of internal / external factors in their decision-making process. Also, the nature of attribution related to the low-risk decisions may be different with high-risk decisions. Because if the decision involves low risk, there is a possibility that consumers may give a second try to the product to re-authenticate their previous attributions. But in case of high-risk involvement, consumers may either reject or accept the early attributions altogether depending on the consequences of their behavior.

For instance, if consumers justify their purchase decision because of those television advertisements they viewed recently, the underlying reason appears to be some of the message elements of that television commercial. Like they can make decisions about buying some product as compared to other alternatives because of the celebrity endorsements, in particular advertisements or the claims that have been made in the commercial. They give credit for their buying decision to those televised advertisements that

have compelled them to do certain action. Given that, similar 'blame games' also appear in the case when individuals get influenced by some of their favorite celebrity endorsing a product or the time, they ask for recommendations about product or service from family, peers, or acquaintances. In the same way, they can also claim to be ripped off on certain purchases if they find the product featured in television commercials different as compared to the one, they bought. To encapsulate, the above case can be considered valid for justifying the relevance of this theory to the context of consumer behavior research.

Ghosh et al. (2022) asserted that the buying predispositions of women are significantly correlated with their perceptions of the advertisement primarily applicable in the context of women related products. Rimoldi (2008) also unveiled that a favorable attitude towards advertised products increases the likelihood of encouraging buying behaviors. In addition to this, Kotwal, Gupta & Devi (2008) underscored that television advertising serves as a potent source of information for potential consumers and facilitates them in making a rational decision. Also, Gazley et al. (2012) asserted that dislike ability of advertising decreases the likelihood of favorable buying behavior

Relevant research establishes the relationship between the impacts of celebrity endorsing products in advertisement on consumer recall of brand. A research study carried out by Jawaid, Rajput & Naqvi (2013) elucidates the positive correlation between the celebrity endorsement and its impact on teenage impulsive buying.

Pughazhendi et al. (2011) conducted research in Coimbatore, India. Results revealed that celebrity endorsements play a pivotal role in disseminating information about durable goods and it also affects the brands' recall among the potential consumers. Moreover, consumers buying behaviors also get triggered by celebrities mainly when they laid their emphasis on affordability and product quality. In contrast, Mai,Nguyen Quynh, Nguyen,Long ThangVan, Thuan,Nguyen Hoang and Ngo,Liem Viet (2025) revealed that the role of social media influencers in endorsing beauty brands is validated subject to the brands' credibility and the user's experience alignment.

While discussing the influence of social media celebrities, Lee et al. (2025) revealed that social media display of materialistic possessions serves as the important factor in shaping the public image of the content creator. In contrast, there is a negative relationship with the perception of low-key consumers and the materialistic expression on social media. Du et al. (2023) asserted that the Para social relationship between social media influencers and their followers can be a gamechanger if the selection of influencers is carefully aligned with the product endorsed.

In the context of technology, an interesting investigation conducted by Zhang et al. (2025) revealed that the involvement in metaverse tourism is positively aligned with the degree of receptiveness and the level of absorption among gamers. Hence, attributions for technology centered products heavily rely on the consumers' willingness and inclinations towards technological advancements.

Subsequent paragraphs will elaborate the significance of factors that affect consumer decision making process which in turn allows advertisers to select the relevant persuasion route to convince their prospects effectively.

4.4 The Elaboration Likelihood Model

'The elaboration likelihood model (ELM) suggests that a person's level of involvement during message processing is a critical factor in determining which route to persuasion is likely to be effective' (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2007, p. 243).

Hawkins et al (2010) argued that involvement appears to be the decisive factor for the consumer's information processing and attitude change. Consequently, it is ensured that the individuals with high degree of involvement towards the product will show more likelihood to pursue the central route thereby emphasizing on the related variants of the message to create favorable associations. On the contrary, in low involvement cases individuals do not pay heed to the relevance factor, take a peripheral route instead of focusing on product features they attend corresponding factors of the message i.e., background music, illustrations and the spokesperson of the targeted message.

The elaboration likelihood model is significant in understanding the role of internal / external factors to persuade consumers of different categories. Assael (1998) discussed studies supporting the notions of ELM i.e., Elaboration Likelihood Model presented by Petty & Cacioppo. It was asserted that to increase the efficacy of advertising content primarily for the consumers with a high relevance factor; message should lay emphasis on the attributes and the benefits of the products. On the contrary, for 'uninvolved consumers' it is imperative to focus more on other contributing factors that supplement the advertising message (for instance the surroundings or the context of communication) but require less involvement in message reception.

Pillai et al. (2022) asserted that the consumer perception of benefits associated with online food delivery service are favorably aligned with their buying behavior, unlike risk association. In addition, message efficacy is relevant for conscious consumers whereas emotional appeal works best for passive consumers. Feng,Nuanru (2024) studied the patterns of consumer behaviors in the context of WeChat Group Buying and revealed that there is a shift in consumer behavior from peripheral routes driven by the social recommendations towards the service-centered central route resulting in an increase in the propensity of favorable buying behavior. Consumers' perspective can be significantly influenced by the sociocultural context of social media platforms in contrast to the information component of the advertisements. Thus application of ELM is validated in the context of social media advertising (Pan, Piao & Zhang,Hao, 2023).

Study conducted by Jayawardena et al. (2023) asserted that Virtual reality advertising is effective when catering the self-actualization and moral fulfilment needs of the consumers like promoting recreational inspirations or philanthropic expressions. On the contrary, augmented reality deals with the cognitive needs of consumers as it enhances their message retention and also triggers favorable buying dispositions.

Shao et al. (2023) highlighted that consumer's emotional connection as well as their rational mindset can be simultaneously affected based on the source credibility. Unlike social recommendations that work only when no prior connection with the brand exists

In sum, the ELM model is compatible with this theoretical framework as it facilitates the understanding of message processing and consumer buying intentions. It is therefore addressing research question 3 as this model explains how consumers would process advertising messages that are consistent to them, and which route they would like to follow. Likewise, it also elucidates the effect of consumer involvement with the product to the change in individual attitude.

Consider the example of cooking oil advertisements and the effect on consumers vary depending upon their level of involvement with the product. If housewives are exposed to this message, then they would probably take the central route as they are more concerned about their family health hence more involved with the product. On the contrary, if male professional is watching this advertisement, then there are less chances of high involvement as they generally do not bother to consider the brand of cooking oil.

To recapitulate the concept of ELM it is observed that this model is applicable to apply the consumer behavior understanding so that the consumer can be motivated accordingly. Moreover, it presents a theoretical framework to understand the evaluative criterion most often employed by the individuals to get to the final decision.

5.   Methodology

This research revolves around the systematic review of the cause-and-effect theories, persuasion model and consumer buying behaviour model and the relevant studies to present a theoretical framework that elaborates the relationship between consumer buying predispositions and their actual buying behaviour. Cause and effect theories i.e., means end chain analysis theory, Edwards' expectancy theory, attribution theory have been selected mainly because they are predictive in nature, encompasses human centric attributes, generalizable & testable as well. Variables highlighted in these theories include an individual's expectations regarding the outcome of the product, their needs, product attributes and rewards associated with the purchase of a certain product.

Moreover, the consumer buying behaviour model was studied to understand the impact of the above-mentioned variables (factors) on the

consumer decision making process. The elaboration likelihood model was selected to identify the most suitable persuasion route for the prospects based upon the understanding of factors that usually triggers their decision-making process.

Considering the selected theories and models, research questions have been designed to study the correlation between consumers' purchase intentions and their actual buying behaviour:

o   What is the relationship between consumer buying predispositions and their actual buying behaviour?
o   What are the factors that affect consumer perception & their actual purchase behaviour?
o   How do consumers' message evaluation criteria predict their preferred route to persuasion?

6.   Findings & Results

To explain the basic tenets of each theory and how they are interlinked with the consumer decision making process, refer to table 1 & figure 1. Considering the basic assumption of means end chain theory, it can be stated that the relationship between product benefits, consumer expectation of the product and the value that an individual assigns to that product; reflects the process of selective perception. Selective perception revolves around the idea that an individual attends and perceives every piece of information if that is consistent with their existing belief system.

In this case, if there is a gap between product benefits and consumer expectations then there is a growing possibility of inverse feedback from the prospect, i.e., they may disregard or reject the information altogether. Relevance is the key factor as per the assumption of this theory and it increases the efficacy of this entire chain of consumer behaviour.

Together with this, Edward expectancy theory focuses on self-perception and allows great liberty to researchers to understand the process of perception and its relative equation with the product/ services and their resulting buying behaviour. Besides, the value that an individual assigns to a particular product may create complexities in understanding consumer

behaviour. It is assumed that every individual differs from each other because of their personal schema that reflects their values, experiences, observations and learning from childhood. The efficacy of this theory can be maximized if the individual's 'collective values' to be identified will ultimately facilitate researchers to categorize the consumers based on some commonly found values. The same treatment can be given to identify consumers who have most found 'human needs' to group them together on similarity basis.

The 'product centred approach' of this theory and Edward expectancy theory allows researchers to utilize this theory as a foundation to understand the consumers likes and dislikes about the product, their specific underlying needs that can be later associated with the product benefits. But in case of 'product repositioning' there is a need to redefine the target market. In this case there is a possibility of complexity between the product's actual benefits and the consumers' expectations of the product attributes because they do not have any prior information on the subject. Like means end chain, there is an element of uncertainty that lies in the case of unfamiliar products. This theory can be best utilized to understand the customer relationship with the products that they are already familiar with.

In consideration of the above-mentioned cause and effect theories; it is observed that certain factors play a substantial role in affecting an individual's buying predispositions and ultimate purchasing behaviour. Theoretically, it seems obvious that the individual behaviours are often driven by the rewards associated with the purchase of that product or service, the consumer's favourable experience with certain products and the dissonance that occurs due to the specific mediated messages. All these factors are consequential as they provide consumers with an evaluative criterion to take future buying decisions accordingly. Moreover, individuals develop certain expectations about the performance of their 'would-be' purchase item. Thus, the level of expectation associated with their buying decision also enables consumers to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the product or service to make a rational decision.

Similarly, the theoretical framework of attribution theory also underscores that individual seek out reasoning to justify their behavioural

patterns. Likewise, people tend to evaluate themselves by observing others' reactions towards them. In terms of advertising, it appears relevant to explain the consumer behaviour for buying products or services that often get triggered by the need of social approval.

In practice, means end chain analysis and Edward expectancy theory are applicable during the pre-launch phase / initial market research of advertising campaigns, when the purpose is to understand the existing consumer perceptions and their buying inclinations towards the product. For existing products or services, this theory will allow marketers and advertisers to understand the relationship between the products' actual benefits and how they are being perceived by their prospects. For instance, if customers' expectations and product benefits are congruent there are increased chances of favourable consumer behaviour and that will ultimately be deemed as a successful advertising campaign as well. In contrast, if a certain product/service advertising campaign fails or seems unsuccessful it can be gauged by examining the customers' expectations and the product's benefits claimed via advertising messages. The difference/s between the customers' expectations and the actual product benefits reveal that there seems to be a communication gap between the marketer's perspective and the customers' expectations regarding the product / service.

Likewise, Edward expectancy theory also allows the advertisers and marketers to understand what customers are looking for in their respective products or services and then select their persuasion tactics accordingly. Ostensibly, this usually happens in advertising campaigns; during the market research phase marketers get the idea what their customers are anticipating which they later transform through their brands' USP (i.e., unique selling propositions). Thus, the above analysis addresses the concerns of research question 2 regarding the factors that can affect consumers' purchase intentions and actual buying behaviour.

The Elaboration Likelihood model is also practically suitable for advertising strategists as it allows them to understand the persuasion route they should be following for influencing their target audience. For instance, the central route when people are highly motivated then logic can be used to

persuade them. Whereas emotions can work best if people are least involved in the product. Based on their understanding, they can design their advertising messages in a more precise and efficient manner. This addresses the research question 3 as the elaboration likelihood model presents the role of audience factor in deciding the relevant route of persuasion.

Referring to image 1 which addresses research Q3 as it represents the central route of persuasion where the audience is highly motivated and relies on logical reasoning, thus focusing more on the product specifications therefore the message should be designed in a way that it highlights the product centred attributes like possible benefits and associated rewards etc.

Whereas image 2 addresses research Q3 as it represents the peripheral route of persuasion where the audience is least motivated and thus focuses more on the external factors therefore the message should be designed in a way that highlights the background music, celebrity spokesperson, visuals, colours etc.

Based on the discussion in previous paragraphs, it can be asserted that there is a significant relationship between an individual's buying intentions and their actual buying behaviour. Therefore, studies emphasizing consumer's buying predispositions can be beneficial to understand the consumer's real buying behaviour.

Table 6.1 *Overview of the Theories*

Theory	Basic Tenets	Relevant Decision-Making Steps	Scope & Significance
Means End Chain	Refers to a chain structure which elaborates the consumer perception and the factors affecting the process of perception, i.e., product features, consumers' anticipated benefits and the value of product for customers	This theory highlights factors that are relevant for three important steps of consumer decision making model i.e., *need recognition, evaluation, and post purchase evaluation*	Presents the insights regarding the product-oriented factors that affect consumers decision making, beneficial for pre-launch market research and designing an effective advertising strategy
Edwards' Expectancy Value theory	Revolve around the consumer motivations i.e., expectations of the consumer about the value of the product they would like to buy and the probability for getting the anticipated rewards / benefits from the product.	Referring to the *evaluation* step of the decision-making model, as consumers value the association of certain rewards as a positive reinforcement which results in raising their expectations	To increase the likelihood of favorable behavior, individuals preferred benefits and the actual product benefits appears to be in-line with each other
Attribution theory	Talks about the agents that serve as justifications or reasoning for an	Refers to the *post purchase evaluation* as consumers either	Applicable for post campaign evaluation by advertisers and

| individual's behavior i.e., positive, or negative reinforcement. | find positive reinforcement in terms of rewards associated with their purchase or feel dejected due to negative reinforcement | marketers, as it will help them understand the consumer feedback and the efficacy of their campaigns. |

Table 6.1 addresses the research question 2 as it explains the basic tenets of each theory and how they are inter-linked with the consumer decision making process.
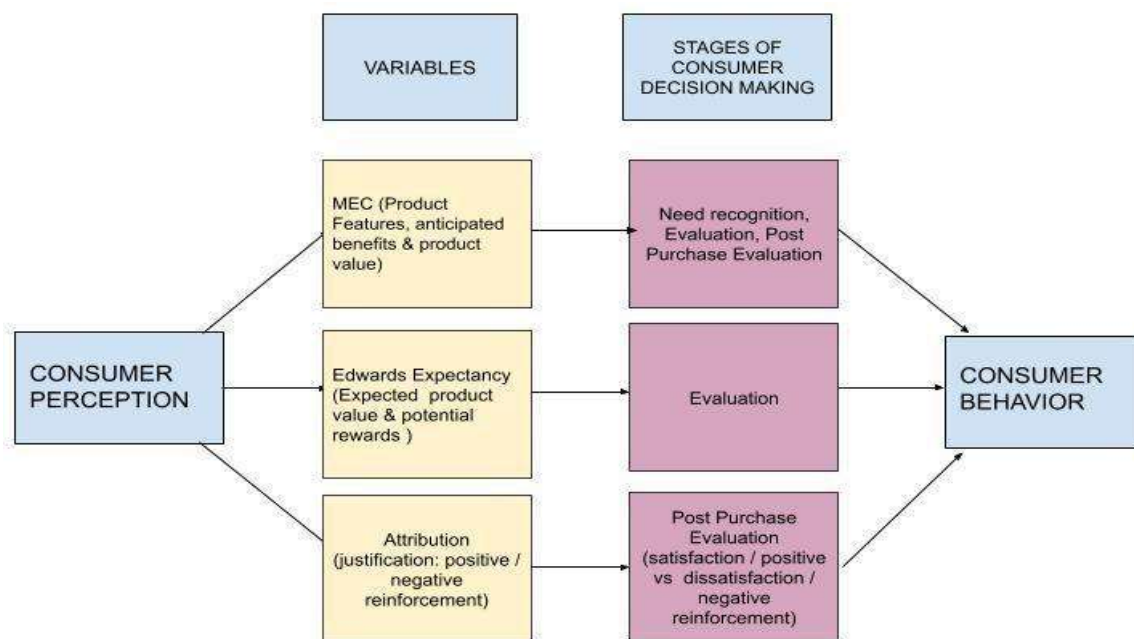

Figure 6.1 Relationship explained between Variables

Figure 6.1 clearly depicts how the variables identified through the selected theories affect different stages of the consumer decision making process.
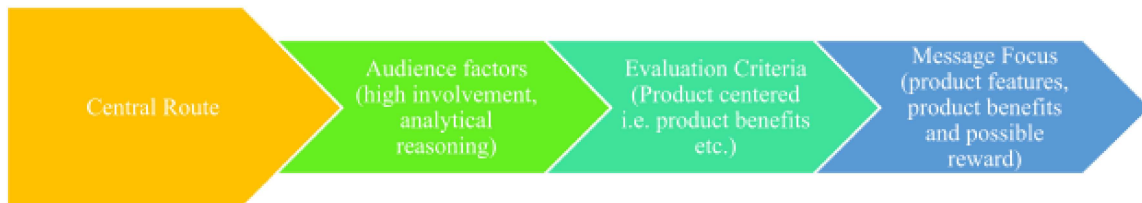
Figure 6.2 Central Route Explained

Image 6.2 above addresses research Q3 as it represents the central route of persuasion where the audience is highly motivated and relies on logical reasoning, thus focusing more on the product specifications therefore the message should be designed in a way that it highlights the product centred attributes like possible benefits and associated rewards etc.
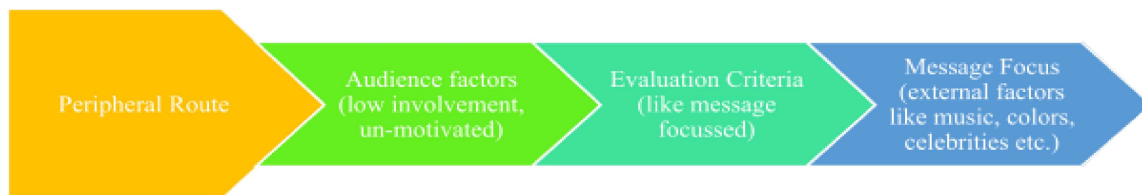

Figure 6.3 Peripheral Route Explained

Image 6.3 addresses research Q3 as it represents the peripheral route of persuasion where the audience is least motivated and thus focuses more on the external factors therefore the message should be designed in a way that it highlights the background music, celebrity spokesperson, visuals, colours etc.

7.   Conclusion

To sum up, this theoretical framework is considerably significant as it lays the foundation of pre-launch market research and post campaign evaluation. For the pre-launch market research this study provides theoretical insight regarding the processes that may affect consumer's initial thought process as well as their message evaluation criteria. To understand consumer inclinations, market research tools (e.g., survey questionnaire, in-store or online observations of customer's inclinations) can be designed by

incorporating means end chains and expectancy value notions, i.e., product features, benefits, customer expectations regarding the product rewards and the potential possibility of customer satisfaction.

Specifically, if means end chain is utilized then some important aspects should also be considered for instance; tangible and intangible benefits can affect consumer behaviour differently (Trzebiński, 2024), gender perceptions of associated benefits may vary significantly (Lin et.al, 2023) and cultural inclinations have the potential to affect individuals perceived values of the product (Li et.al,2016).

In the context of Edward's expectation value theory, key insights highlighting the diversified nature of new media landscape includes: game based rewards mechanism can works best for enhancing consumers online shopping experience (Yan, 2020), expected need gratification may vary depending upon the conditions in which decision has been made along with the consumer's frame of mind(Seo,2023), monetary rewards can redress customer's in case of substandard product (Wang, 2020), product specific elements and customers' social media communications does affect their online buying predispositions (Zubair,2024).

Display of materialistic possessions by social media influencers may affect low-key and status conscious customers differently (Lee,2025), selection of celebrity association with the product should be carefully planned (Du et.al, 2023), favourable behavioural inclinations towards technology products heavily rely on the degree of willingness and likelihood of technology adoption by the consumers (Zhang et.al, 2025)

It is important to note that the amount of prior information that a person may have about stimuli can affect their feedback towards the product. Also, the impact of communication strategy can also vary depending upon the degree of familiarity the consumer depicts towards the product. In this way, existing customers who are already familiar with the product may respond differently as compared to the new ones. Pillai (2022) also confirmed that the message's efficacy can have a substantial impact on conscious consumers unlike passive ones who get swayed by the emotional appeals. Transition from peripheral towards central route is witnessed in studying behavioural

inclinations of WeChat group where people make group buying decisions based on recommendations followed by the value of the service (Feng, 2024), social media community discourse needs to be considered when dealing with the consumer behaviour on social commerce (Pan et.al, 2023).

Similarly, individual expectations and feedback towards rewards associations may be different altogether as it may reflect their individual evaluative criteria as well as their personal preferences. Consciously or unconsciously, individuals tend to make their decisions based on certain underlying factors that they may not be aware of at the time of decision making but serve as the driving force behind their decision-making process. For instance, Seo (2023) mentioned how emotional attachment with the clothing purchase may inhibit customers from buying rental clothes online.

To conclude, this study encapsulates the idea that people may have different reasons for making and justifying their decisions, therefore marketers and advertisers can apply relevant theoretical parameters validated by the available empirical research to understand the significant dimensions of consumer behaviour and predict the impact of the intended communication strategy on their potential prospects.

8.   Recommendations for Future Research Studies

o   Since this paper revolves around the systematic literature review therefore only secondary research has been used to address the research questions. In future studies, primary research can also be used to expand the scope of this study.

o   This theoretical framework particularly highlights the impact of consumer needs, product benefits, product features and the consumer expectations regarding the products and services. Hence other possible factors like gender perception, audio-visual components of message, technological readiness should also be considered in future studies.

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