

THE ROLE THAT PERSONALITY AND MOTIVATION PLAY IN CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR: A CASE STUDY ON HSBC

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Introduction

In today's information-oriented society, research and development, particularly information research, has become an important activity for business companies, institutions, and organizations, who want to know more about the consumer market, people who consider consumption as embedded and part of their everyday lives. Initially, commercialism of goods and services through advertising mainly focused on extant products and services that people need; nowadays, persuasive messages are extended through advertising, informing people about the goods and services that they should and ought to know and buy for themselves.

Selling these products and services through persuasive advertising messages, however, are the products of advertising research. More specifically, consumer research tries to identify not only the socio-demographic, but also psychographic profile of consumers, understanding how people can be persuaded to buy a company's product or service. Consumer research looks into the motivations and personalities of an individual in terms of consuming or buying a particular product or service, later turning this information into strategies geared at gaining a particular segment of the market that the company targets or centers on.

This paper discusses in detail the role that motivation and personality plays in influencing consumer behavior, taking the case of the Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation (HSBC) as an example to discuss and analyze these important points. In this paper, an analysis of the print ads of HSBC is analyzed, relating its features to identify its target market and perceived motivations and personalities of HSBC's target market. This study aims to provide an illustration of how motivation and personality analysis of consumers are vital to the understanding of consumer markets and behavior.

Consumer Personality and Motivation as illustrated in HSBC Print ads

The terms motivation and personality may seem familiar for people, but its significance to consumer behavior is less known, yet increasingly essential in identifying, determining, and understanding insights regarding consumption patterns and preferences.

Personality is defined by Sheth et. al. (1999) as “[a] person's consistent ways [sic] of responding to the environment in which he or she lives” (G-11). Personality, he states, is created through the combining of external influences or the social environment and genetic or biological traits of the individual. The combination of social with the individual

results to the creation or development customer personality; consumer personality may be product- or service-oriented, or both (243). Product-oriented consumers tend to patronize a product or service based on the merchandise itself, while service-oriented consumers tend to “seek relationships” with the seller, producer of the service or manufacturer of the product.

Motivation, meanwhile, is identified as “an inner drive that reflects goal-oriented arousal” (Arnould et. al., 2004:259). It differs from personality in that it is a deeper and more abstract concept, although similar to it in the sense that motivations are also linked to the social environment and individual traits of the individual.

In order to distinguish properly between the two terminologies, personality may be understood as a holistic or general term to describe consumer behavior—that is, consumer behavior at the macrolevel. Motivation, on the other hand, provides an in-depth look of the consumer as a unique individual and harder to discern and understand. Motivation, thus, represents consumer behavior at the microlevel.

Applying these concepts in the context of HSBC and its advertising and marketing strategies, the researcher of this paper analyzed three (3) print ads, which came out on three issues of TIME magazine: March 11, 18, and 25 for the year 2002. These issues are relevant for this study, since this is the year that HSBC launched its campaign on multiculturalism, entitled “Business Connections,” carrying with it the slogan, “Never underestimate the importance of local knowledge.”

These ads, which serve as units of analysis of the study, are textually analyzed to generate themes that depict the influence of motivation and personality of

the target consumer market in the production of the advertising message and form. The texts that follow discuss the salient points generated from the analysis, which involves the following: (1) HSBC ads illustrate how culture as the social environment and cultural traits serve as primary consideration in crafting today’s advertising messages to the consumer; (2) motivations such as achievement, power, uniqueness, affiliation, and self-esteem are the determinants of a consumer’s cultural environment and traits. These linkages are seen thoroughly in the next section.

“Never underestimate the importance of local knowledge”: HSBC on culture and the consumer

It was initially discussed that consumer behavior in terms of the personality dimension is primarily determined through the consumer’s merchandise- or service-orientedness. However, going further into the analysis of consumer personality, there is also recognition that consumers adopt various personalities depending on the role that they assume as consumer: user, payer, or buyer (Sheth et. al., 1999:243).

These distinctions are somewhat similar to the merchandise-oriented and service-oriented dichotomy introduced earlier, although in this new set of consumer personalities, the economic dimension is taken into consideration. Thus, consumer personality is divided into three facets: the merchandise-oriented consumer as the user, the service-oriented consumer as buyer, and the consumer’s financial position as the payer.

In the HSBC “Business Connections” advertising campaign, these components of consumer behavior become evident. The buyer or service-oriented consumer, clearly, is the primary target market of

HSBC, since its business orientation is to provide banking services for potential clients. However, it is evident that HSBC decided to transgress its role as bank service provider to becoming the consumer's "expert" on cultural knowledge of every nation engaged in the business industry. Its ad campaign is developed to fulfill this objective, allowing the consumers to get to know other societies and cultures around the world, stressing how HSBC knows each culture featured, and understands these cultures well, enabling them to effectively handle business and financial transactions with them.

The March 18, 2002 ad of HSBC shows two images of hands toasting glasses together, with the first image displaying the text, "HUNGARY: Bad luck," while the second image shows the text "USA: Good health." This simple, yet effective display of cultural differences around the world is reflective of HSBC's work ethic, implying to the reader (who is also a potential customer) that they understand various cultures very well. This understanding of various cultures of the world becomes HSBC's advantage, since it helps them "...recognise [sic] financial opportunities invisible to outsiders" (TIME, 2002).

The buyer (service-oriented consumer) would be enticed with the said ad, since institutions whose primary commodity is service provision knows that understanding the individual and his/her social/cultural environment is one way of highlighting the fact that they are selling service that reflects the personality of consumer-buyer. For example, an American who encountered the HSBC ad discussed above will show approval of the distinction made by the banking company. This approval will, in turn, lead to the

development of credibility of HSBC and trust from the consumer; thus, the next time the consumer should consider seeking help in banking services of financial transactions, s/he would seek HSBC, primarily because it understands the individual's sentiments, feelings, and opinions—in other words, the customer's personality.

This can also be applied to the consumer as user, wherein the commodity can be either the information about Hungarian and American culture depicted in the ad, or the banking service provided by HSBC, or both. The first scenario occurs when the individual is also a business person who is interested in knowing the business culture of another country, which, to the business-oriented individual, is always a potential customer. The information that it is bad luck in Hungary and good health in the USA to toast glasses will become helpful to the individual when s/he deals with clients coming from these countries. Or, it may be that the consumer-user is interested in knowing up to what extent HSBC's credibility and banking experience is; thus, from the ad, one can already surmise that HSBC has sufficient experience to merit credibility and warrant trust from the consumer.

The consumer as payer, meanwhile, is different from the preceding kinds of consumer personalities discussed. Since in this category, the impact of economic stability and financial capability are taken into account, the strategy of HSBC must then emanate as to include and address the concerns of the consumer-payer in its ad. In the ad, this concern is addressed by the inclusion of the term "local knowledge" in its ad, giving reference to the fact that not only did HSBC learned to know and understand the culture of a country, but it

was also able to capture its people, the masses, which ultimately constitutes a particular culture, the keepers and actors of this “local knowledge.”

Whether the consumer-payer has financial troubles or not, HSBC considers everyone a potential customer, and the consumer-payer, through the ad, shall assume that HSBC will aid him/her for whatever banking service or financial support s/he wants to avail, simply because the institution understands “local knowledge,” the reality of life in that particular society in the world. HSBC, then ‘personalizes’ its service, accommodating for any diversity that it may encounter in the conduct of its business (Francese, 2004:40-1).

In effect, business institutions like HSBC have learned to ascertain the kinds of people who can be their potential clients or customer by categorizing them according to their cultural and individual traits. In this section, personality is shown to be a major determinant in identifying the likelihood of an individual to become a consumer of a particular product or service.

Thus, if the consumer is merchandise-oriented or a user, then goods as commodities are more appealing for him/her; the consumer as buyer, on the other hand, is more interested in establishing close ties with the sellers, producers, or manufacturers, the people who provide service for the consumers; and lastly, the consumer as payer takes into consideration the economic climate of the institution itself, and aligns it with his/her own financial status, and when both criteria meet, it is then that the consumer-payer decides whether to subsist to the product (or service) or not.

Motivations as the consumer “drive”: achievement, power, uniqueness, affiliation, and self-esteem

In the previous section, the researcher has identified consumer personality in terms of the product, service, and financial climate of both the seller and buyer. In this section, the study takes an in-depth look at the individual traits of these consumers, identifying potential motivations that serve as consumer ‘drives,’ needs and wants that may have been accomplished through the consumption of the product or service offered by the business company/institution. In this section, motives are identified into four, namely, achievement, power, uniqueness/novelty, affiliation, and self-esteem motive. These kinds of motives are present in one way or other within the consumer as s/he goes through the decision-making process (of purchasing a product, good, or service). These kinds of motives are defined by Arnould et. al. (2004) as follows:

Achievement motive- the drive to experience emotion in connection with evaluated performance;

Power motive- the drive to have control or influence over another person, group, or the world at large;

Uniqueness/novelty motive- the drive to perceive oneself as different from others;

Affiliation motive- the drive to be with people; consumers sometimes experience a strong motivation to

reconnect and associate with groups...; and

Self-esteem motive- credit for successes, explain away failures, (consumers) see themselves as better than most others.

Given the following kinds of motivations and their definitions, the HSBC advertising campaign clearly invokes all of these motivations. This is actually imperative for the company, since they have as their audience people of all ages, gender, races, and culture. In order to become effective in motivating and persuading consumers to subsist to the HSBC service, the company must be able to “grasp” or capture all of the characteristics of its consumers; thus, the need to consider all the motivations that a consumer may have or use in the process of deciding to purchase a product or subscribe to a particular service.

The “Business Connections” ad campaign illustrates the achievement motive, primarily because HSBC tries to establish personal relations with the consumer. In trying to sell its service (banking service), HSBC evokes the emotions of consumers as it re-establish ties with him/her by showcasing a particular culture of a nation (Benady, 2004:43). For example, the HSBC ad depicts the culture of UK and US by illustrating an image of cross-legged shoes, where the act may be construed as “relaxed” in American culture, while it is considered “rude” among Thai people. Feelings of approval and/or reproach over the said cultural norms shows how achievement—that is, to achieve and conform with the cultural norm—becomes a primary factor that convinces the consumer to subsist to the product or

service. Similarly, the illustration of a particular culture through print advertisement creates the impression that every culture has power, thereby influencing the consumer that as member of that culture, s/he has power to approve or disapprove of the ad and patronize or not patronize the product or service advertised.

The most important and dominant motives included in the ad are the uniqueness, affiliation, and self-esteem motives. In the HSBC ad campaign, the showcasing of a particular culture per ad illustrates the strong regard the company has for cultures of the world—that is, the uniqueness of a society or nation and the individual. These motives work in linkages, initially starting with starting with the premise that every culture is unique, and proof of this in the ad is the provision of information telling the readers the uniqueness of a particular material, symbol, or activity in the business culture of a particular country (Brown et. al., 2003:19).

In the same way, affiliation results from the character of uniqueness, wherein the consumer, once s/he has identified herself/himself with the culture depicted in the ad, feels a sense of belongingness with the subject or image displayed in the ad. Thus, the consumer who understands and agrees with the culture depicted becomes affiliated with it, and HSBC, taking advantage of this event (creation of uniqueness and sense of affiliation), persuades the reader to subsist to HSBC, the company that ‘understands’ people of all cultures. Combining both uniqueness and affiliation results to the development of self-esteem, where the consumer, once s/he recognizes the value that HSBC gives to people of his/her culture, would then affiliate himself/herself with the banking

institution. In effect, the ad portrays the HSBC brand as embedded in each culture and actually belongs to the people. Thus, the ad campaign becomes successful in showing the consumers that HSBC knows its consumers—their personality, and what motivates them to consume a particular product or service.

Conclusion: Motivations and Personality reflects the HSBC Consumer

In the previous sections of this study, motivation and personality were shown as essential factors identifying and reflecting consumer behavior. It is evident that both sociodemographic and psychographic characteristics both determine consumer personality and motivations (Rafee, 2004:17).

Personality primarily determines the consumer as buyer, payer, and user of a product and/or service. In so doing, the sociodemographic variable income and socio-economic class helps determine the extent up to which the consumer shall adopt the roles enumerated earlier. Furthermore, attitudes towards a product or service—that is, becoming product- or merchandise-oriented or service-oriented as a consumer is a psychographic variable that also aids him/her to buy and consume the product/service. Both variables work together to ultimately determine the consumer's choice and preference of a product or service.

Motivations are also important determinants of the consumer's characteristics and behavior towards consumption. Along with sociodemographic variables of income, age, sex, and ethnic membership, psychographic variables such as need for achievement, affiliation, power, and self-

esteem are also taken into account. Combining these variables together result to the fulfillment or failure of the consumer to achieve his/her needs, depending on the quality of the product or service offered—that is, up to what extent consumers' needs are achieved through the product/service.

It is important to provide a case in point to illustrate how consumer characteristics (personality and motives) eventually influence consumer behavior. In the case of the HSBC ad campaign, we have seen how personality and motivations become components of the ads, allowing it to create and transmit an effective advertising message to the reader/consumer. Centering on the issue of cultural sensitivity and tolerance to people's and individual's differences become the vehicles of persuasion that HSBC uses to illustrate the personality traits and motivations of the consumer. In the case of HSBC, research on the profile of the HSBC consumer showed that there is indeed a large percentage of today's consumer market who came from various ethnic or cultural origins apart from the American (or Western) consumer (HSBC CSR Report, 2003).

In sum, this study has shown that taken to its advantage, research and information concerning consumer behavior shows that two of its influential factors are personality and motivation. The future of better and more effective advertising and marketing promotions of the consumer market can thus be further improved, as was shown in the HSBC experience, wherein consumer personality and motivation are taken into consideration and acknowledged as imperative in determining the consumer market in today's information age.

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