

The impact of Emotions on Consumer Behaviour in Post Covid Environment: A Neuromarketing Perspective

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Introduction

There has been increased interest to revisit the role of emotions in consumer behaviour (Knutson et al., 2007). Traditionally the research trend has relied heavily on thought process at the expense of emotions in predicting consumer behaviour. However, consumer neuroscience with the aid of modern technologies enables us to redefine consumer behaviour with emotions at the epicentre of this new development. This review paper explicates the crucial role emotions play in better understanding consumer behaviour in the post covid world in areas such as pricing, advertising, consumer preferences and decision making.

This is particularly important, as marketers and academicians alike want to understand how emotions influence digital consumers in the post covid world. A better understanding of

consumer emotions and how it affects their behaviours will be the determining factor for the new businesses to flourish in this emerging highly complex world.

Background

Recent years have been characterised by the advance of experimentation into multidisciplinary channels to answer increasingly complex questions about the nature of human behaviour. This recent trend is testament to the increase of ‘neuroculture’ (Frazetto and Anker, 2009) - the application of the neuroscientific methodologies to various disciplines.

Neuroscience applied to the understanding of consumer behaviour, or ‘Consumer neuroscience’, holds the premise of answering long-standing research questions, add new theories and increase the level of explanatory power of models that predict behaviour (Knutson et al., 2007) in the new normal that is emerging post covid. The predominant approach in consumer behaviour research has been to rely heavily on understanding, explaining and predicting behaviour based on thought processes, or cognitive processes, at the expense of emotions (Zajonc, 1980).

The direct role of emotions on thinking has been firmly established (Damasio et al., 1996; Bechara, 2004, Damasio, 2008). Observing the recruitment of the brain’s emotional processing architecture in consumer research tasks has undoubtedly contributed to a better understanding of the nature, role and impact of emotions on various facets of consumer behaviour such as decision-making, prices, preferences and advertising. This article reviews that literature and ask critical questions in light of its relevance for the post covid business practices.

i) Decision Making

The review of the articles related to decision making suggests that the inclusion of emotions does optimize choice behaviour (Loewenstein, 2000; Mellers and McGraw, 2001; LeDoux, 1997). Studies have suggested that ninety-five percent of thinking takes place in our unconscious minds of which the common chunk includes the processing of emotions, thoughts, memories and other cognitive processes that we cannot articulate (Zaltman, 2003). Aside from the impact of emotions on preferences, immediate emotions emanating from the evaluation process itself can also affect choices (Adaval, 2001; Erev, 1998; Pham et al., 2001). Emotions emanating during the experience phase of evaluation or enjoying the product is an important phase in which emotions plays a prominent role in deciding in favour or against a particular alternative (Richins, 1997). This begs the questions that how these experiences will be replicated for the digital consumers in the post covid world?

ii) Prices

The primary focus of emotions in literature on pricing is to uncover the nature of their impact on price judgements; for instance, how prices of various goods represent “value” (O’Doherty, 2004; Rolls et al., 2010). There is also compelling evidence that the various elements of the marketing mix are considered and often integrated during buying decision-making. In the post covid world however there are questions around the social role of prices, and price fairness and how various consumers perceive price differences in the same products across various platforms (Amaldoss and Jain, 2005).

iii) Preferences

Another important aspect of decision-making is the evaluation and the resulting preference formation for available alternatives (Rolls et al., 2010; McClure et al., 2004; Erk et al., 2002; Plassmann et al., 2007a)

Marketing scholars are well aware that optimal design based on consumers' preferences is one of the most important aspects of product sale (Bloch, 1995). In the post covid world some exogenous variables such as social and peer factors are moving to online (such as celebrity and micro influencers) and have started becoming the part of the purchase and preference formation process. Recent evidence suggests that dopamine and phenyl ethylamine flood the brain on the exposure of a globally famous celebrity faces like (Brad Pitt, Lionel Messi, Angelina Julie) triggering a huge surge of positively valence emotions inducing trust on the advertisements (Mucha, 2005). Hence, emotions emanating from the repeated exposure of a familiar celebrity face could induce trust on the promotional message. Many smaller companies have increasingly focussed on micro influencers to induce trust and build positive brand preferences for its digital customers.

iv) Advertising

The significance of emotions as a primary contributor to making a purchase, as a result of brand recall and memorization, has been identified by Ambler and Burne, (1999); Plassmann et al., (2007b); Ambler et al., (2000). Their experiments revealed that cognitive ads with a lot of factual information causes strong activation in the superior prefrontal cortex and posterior parietal areas related to the use of working memory, whereas emotional ads which includes more images and tunes produce activation in the areas such as amygdala, brains stem, VMPFC and OFC (Ambler et al., 2000). This information is vital for companies wishing to replicate their communication objectives through application of AR and VR technologies in the post covid world.

Conclusion

Based on the literature findings pertaining to emotions in consumer behaviour it is contended that advances in neuroscience tools has made possible to shed additional light on the role of emotional functioning. This is extremely important as traditional mediums are being replaced almost entirely in the post covid world to reach customers. Delving deeper into consumer emotions is a prerequisite for better understanding and explaining consumer behaviour to reach these customers more efficiently. Inferences from the activation of affect laden brain circuitry available through neuroscience data therefore improves our understanding of the role of emotions in decision-making in the post covid world.

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