Buying the product

Lesson 4.4.3 | Consumer psychology

Core ideas

The buying stage is when intention becomes action, such as putting an item in a basket, paying or signing an agreement.

Checkout friction, such as long forms, unclear costs or queues, can interrupt a purchase even after the customer has decided.

Payment method can affect the pain of paying because cash, cards and digital payments may feel different psychologically.

Perceived ownership can increase once customers handle, customise or imagine using a product.

Returns policies, guarantees and reviews can reduce perceived risk and make buying feel safer.

After buying, reassurance and clear information can reduce regret, complaints and cognitive dissonance.

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Key terms

Buying stage: The point where a consumer commits to the purchase.

Checkout friction: Anything in the buying process that makes completing a purchase harder.

Pain of paying: The unpleasant feeling linked with spending money.

Perceived ownership: Feeling that an item is already partly yours before or during purchase.

Purchase intention: A consumer's plan or willingness to buy.

Conversion: Turning interest or intention into an actual purchase.

Returns policy: Rules about returning a product after purchase.

Post-purchase reassurance: Information or support that helps the buyer feel confident after buying.

Further detail and evidence

Engel-Kollat-Blackwell sequence: problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase and post-purchase evaluation. Feedback from experience can alter later searches and brand loyalty. The model is a framework, not a claim that every habitual purchase involves extensive conscious searching.

Buying the product

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Continued

Sinha et al. (2002) investigated Indian shoppers' store choices. Convenience/proximity, merchandise, ambience, service and an established relationship can matter, with importance varying by store/product and shopper characteristics. Demographics describe associations rather than immutable rules about individuals.

Post-purchase dissonance is discomfort from conflicting thoughts about a chosen product and attractive rejected alternatives. It can grow with importance, close alternatives and irrevocability. Reduction includes seeking supportive information, reinterpreting advantages, avoiding negative material or changing/returning the choice.

Nordvall (2014) used a virtual grocery rate-choose-rate task with 100 participants. Chosen items became more favourably evaluated, consistent with reducing dissonance even for everyday goods. Rating change is an indirect indicator rather than a direct readout of discomfort.

Applying the ideas

After buying a costly phone, a consumer may emphasise its camera and stop reading reviews of a rejected model. This changes the balance of beliefs, without necessarily improving the phone. A return policy reduces finality and can change the decision context.

Evaluation and connections

Stages can overlap, be skipped or recur. Self-report can reconstruct a reason after the event. Cultural context and changes in retail formats limit temporal generalisation. Rate-choose-rate designs should consider whether initial preferences were measured imperfectly, rather than attributing all later change to dissonance.