

Consumer Behavior

1. Sources, Aims and Scope of Consumer Behavior



José Manuel Fernández Polanco
Patricia Martínez García de Leaniz

DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

AREA OF MARKETING AND MARKET RESEARCH

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1.1 The Concept of Consumer Behavior

Consumer behavior is the study of the processes used by individuals, groups, and organizations when making decisions regarding goods and services in order to satisfy their needs.

It seeks to understand the **decision making** processes of buyers, both individually and in groups.

It studies characteristics of consumers from a wide range of research fields gathered into a **multidisciplinary approach** in order to understand how the different variables interact and affect consumers' purchase decisions.

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Customers versus Consumers

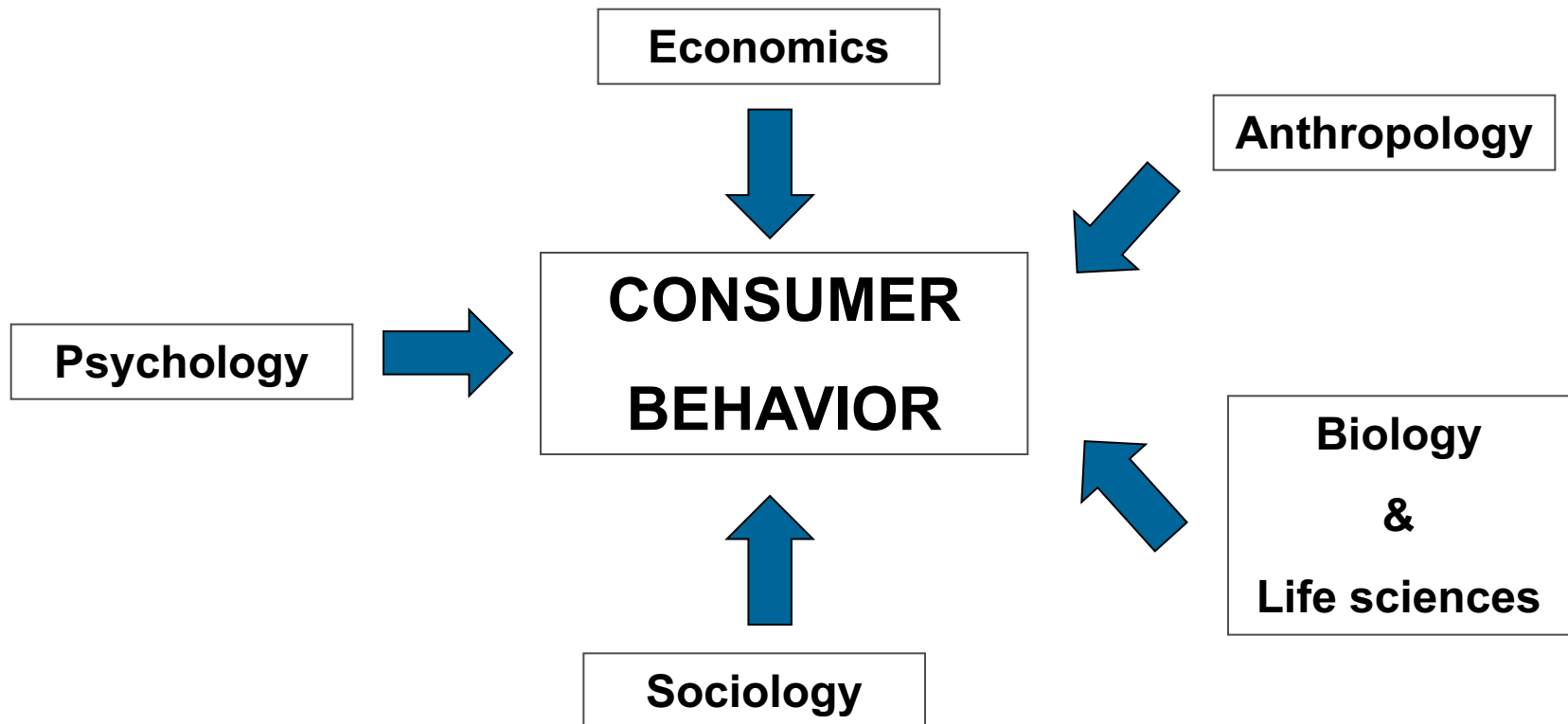
When purchasing products customers play the **three distinct roles** of user, payer and buyer. These three roles can be undertaken by the same or different individuals, resulting in important implications as regards the participating variables and their effects.

The concept of “**consumer**” is related to the **final user**, who will derive a utility from satisfying a given need.

The concept of “**customer**” is related to the **buyer and payer**, and can be a different person from the consumer. If so, the customer will have to know and understand the final consumer’s needs in order to make adequate decisions as regards which product has a greater utility for the final user.

1.2 Sources for the Study of Consumer Behavior

Multidisciplinary approach



1.3 Theories of Consumer Behavior

The economic approach

Man is regarded to be entirely **rational** and **self-interested**, making decisions based upon the ability to **maximize utility whilst expending the minimum effort**.

A consumer would have to be aware of all the available consumption options, be capable of correctly rating each alternative and be able to select the **optimum** course of action.

Due to limitations in the availability of information and ability of processing, individuals are often described as seeking **satisfactory** rather than optimum choices.

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The psychodynamic approach

Behavior is subject to biological influence through 'instinctive forces' or 'drives' which act outside of conscious thought.

Sigmund Freud identified three facets of the psyche, namely the Id, the Ego and the Superego. Behavior is the result of an antithetic balance among these three facets.

Behavior is determined by **biological drives**, rather than individual cognition, or environmental stimuli.

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The behaviorist approach

Behaviorism states that behavior is explained by **external events**, and that all actions, thoughts and feelings can be regarded as behaviors. The causes of behavior are attributed to factors external to the individual.

This approach relies heavily on **logical positivism** purporting that objective and empirical methods used in the physical sciences can be applied to the study of consumer behavior.

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The cognitive approach

In contrast to the behaviorists, the cognitive approach ascribes behavior to intrapersonal cognition. The individual is viewed as an 'information processor'.

This questions the explicative power of environmental variables, however an influential role of the environment and social experience is acknowledged, with consumers seeking and receiving stimuli as informational inputs for internal decision making.

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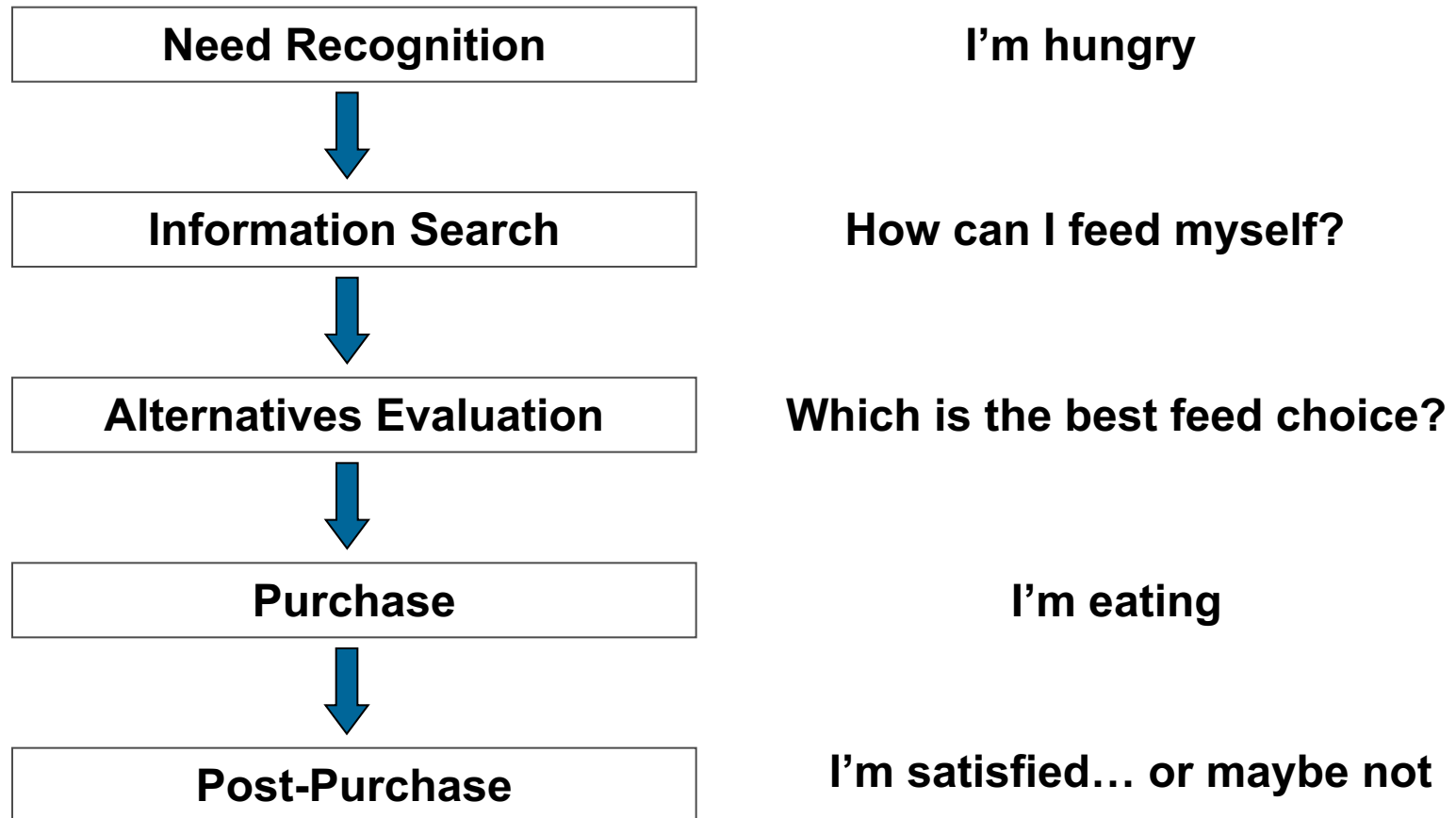
The humanistic approach

The humanistic approach seeks to explore concepts *introspective* to the individual consumer rather than describe generic processes.

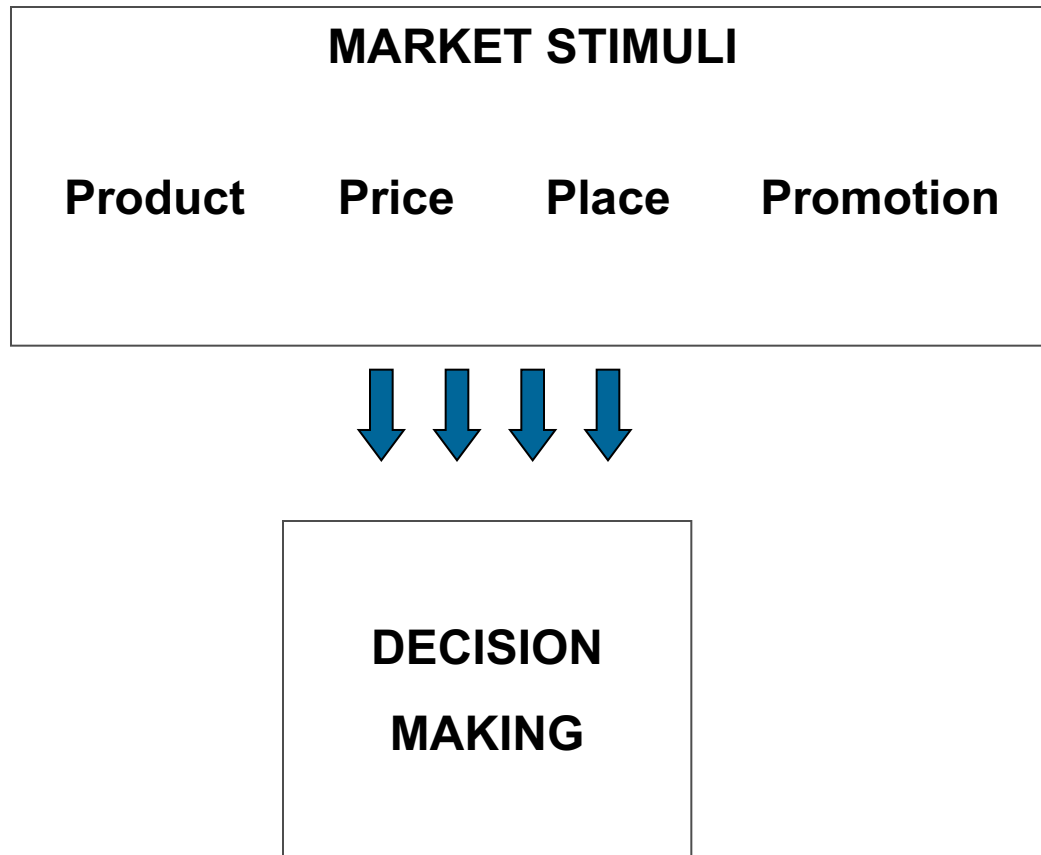
Cognitive approaches rely upon the assumption of the consumer being a rational decision maker, appearing to dismiss the role of *emotion* in decision making.

Emerging work has started to examine the concept of *volition*, seeking to understand and address the gap between a consumer's stated purchase intentions and their actual final purchase behavior.

1.4 The Process of Decision Making



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