

Consumer Behavior

10. People in Groups



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10.1. Definition of group

10.2. Classification of groups

10.3. Group membership

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10.1. Definition of group

A **group** is a number of people who have:

A **common** purpose, **goal** or task.

A **sense of boundary** and hence an identity.

A minimum set of agreed **values and norms**.

Relatively **exclusive interactions** in a given context.

A **self-perception** by the members as a group.

Rice, C. (1993). *Behavioural aspects of Marketing*, Butterworth Heinemann., Oxford.

10.2. Classification of groups

Informal groups have the main characteristic of being **voluntary**, both for the group as for any member. They are **dominated by personal** rather than role **relationships**. They appear to exist to **satisfy the personal or emotional needs** of their members.

Formal groups are dominated by **more structured tasks** and **prescribed relationships**. **Role relationships** predominate. Organizations are made up of a series of formal groups.

Permanent groups are based on personal relationships, as opposed to **temporary groups** which are task driven. The latter usually disband when the task is completed.

10.3. Group membership

People join groups for a variety of reasons:

To **achieve goals** that can not be completed alone.

To **obtain friendship**, companionship or support. A source of psychological security.

To **gain status** or increase power.

Because they have **no choice**.

Argyle, M. (1989). The Social Psychology of work, Penguin, London.

When an individual becomes a member of a group in order to satisfy his social affiliation needs, **the price paid is conformity with the norms governing the group's behavior.** These norms may concern:

The **task** or activities of the group.

Non-formal goals such as hobbies.

Internal regulations such as roles, loyalty or discipline.

Opinions, **beliefs and attitudes.**

Physical **appearance** or dress.

10.4. Groups and individual behavior

The idea of group norms affecting individuals' behavior suggests that **individuals modify their behavior according to the groups that they are in.**

The degree to which we will **conform with the group depends on:**

The strength of our **desire of membership.**

The strength of our **wish to avoid isolation.**

The strength of our **belief of congruence with the norm.**

The degree to which we **doubt our ability to stand alone.**

Our **belief in the group's goals.**

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Factors affecting a group's influence on an individual's behavior

The group

Size. Those individuals with greater participation have the most influence on the group. The larger the group size, the more the extroverts in the group will tend to have an influence.

Membership. Homogeneous groups tend to be longer lasting, more stable and produce higher levels of member satisfaction. However, some level of variety increases the skills of the group.

The task. The nature of the task is likely to affect the kind of group that is appropriate, and the roles to be undertaken by the members.

Factors affecting a group's influence on an individual's behavior

Intervening variables

Communication patterns. Such patterns can affect the efficiency of a group in terms of task achievement. The importance of non-verbal communication is frequently overlooked.

Motivation. Individuals will find satisfaction in the group if they like the other members of the group (companionship); approve the purposes of the group (task achievement); or wish to be associated with the standing of the group (status).

Roles. Roles are always identifiable even in informal groups. Roles are assigned according to a “best available” process. The allocation of roles in informal groups is commonly done at a subconscious level. Some members may hold more than one role.