

Factors Affecting Consumer Behaviour

Consumer behaviour refers to the actions and decision-making processes of individuals or groups while selecting, purchasing, using, and disposing of goods and services. It is influenced by a wide range of internal and external factors. Understanding these factors helps marketers design effective marketing strategies and satisfy consumer needs.

The major factors affecting consumer behaviour can be broadly classified into **cultural, social, personal, psychological, and economic factors**.

1. Cultural Factors

Culture plays a fundamental role in shaping a person's wants, preferences, and behaviour.

(a) Culture

Culture includes values, beliefs, customs, traditions, and social norms learned from society. For example, food habits, clothing styles, and festival-related purchases vary across cultures.

(b) Sub-culture

Sub-cultures include religion, caste, region, nationality, and language groups. For instance, regional preferences influence food products, clothing, and lifestyle choices.

(c) Social Class

Social class is based on income, occupation, education, and status. People from different social classes exhibit different buying patterns, such as preferences for luxury or necessity goods.

2. Social Factors

Social interactions significantly influence consumer behaviour.

(a) Reference Groups

Reference groups are groups that influence an individual's attitudes or behaviour, such as friends, colleagues, or celebrities. Consumers often buy products to gain social approval.

(b) Family

Family members strongly influence buying decisions. Parents influence household purchases, while children increasingly influence decisions related to food, electronics, and entertainment.

(c) Roles and Status

An individual's role and status in society affect purchasing decisions. For example, a manager may prefer formal clothing, while a student may choose casual wear.

3. Personal Factors

Personal characteristics vary from one individual to another and affect buying behaviour.

(a) Age and Life-Cycle Stage

Consumer needs change with age and life stage, such as childhood, youth, marriage, parenthood, or retirement.

(b) Occupation

Occupation influences product choice. For example, a doctor may prefer professional attire, while a construction worker may need safety equipment.

(c) Income and Economic Conditions

Income determines purchasing power. Higher income leads to higher spending on luxury goods, while lower income focuses on necessities.

(d) Lifestyle

Lifestyle reflects a person's activities, interests, and opinions. People with active lifestyles may spend more on fitness and travel products.

(e) Personality and Self-Concept

Personality traits such as confidence, extroversion, or risk-taking influence product choice. Consumers often buy products that match their self-image.

4. Psychological Factors

Psychological processes strongly influence consumer decision-making.

(a) Motivation

Motivation arises from unmet needs. According to Maslow's Need Hierarchy, consumers satisfy basic needs first before moving to higher-level needs.

(b) Perception

Perception is how individuals interpret information. Different consumers may perceive the same product or advertisement differently.

(c) Learning

Learning occurs through experience and information. Positive experiences lead to brand loyalty, while negative experiences discourage repeat purchases.

(d) Beliefs and Attitudes

Beliefs are descriptive thoughts about a product, while attitudes reflect feelings and evaluations. Strong positive attitudes encourage purchase.

5. Economic Factors

Economic conditions influence consumers' ability and willingness to spend.

(a) Income Level

Disposable income directly affects consumption patterns.

(b) Savings and Credit Availability

Availability of credit facilities like loans and EMIs increases purchasing of durable goods.

(c) Price and Inflation

Rising prices and inflation reduce purchasing power and change consumer preferences.

6. Marketing and Situational Factors

Marketing strategies and situations also affect consumer behaviour.

(a) Product Factors – quality, design, brand, and packaging

(b) Price Factors – discounts, offers, and payment options

(c) Promotion – advertising, sales promotion, and social media influence

(d) Place/Distribution – availability and convenience

(e) Situational Factors – time, mood, and shopping environment

Conclusion

Consumer behaviour is influenced by a complex interaction of cultural, social, personal, psychological, economic, and marketing factors. No single factor operates independently. Understanding these factors enables marketers to predict consumer needs, design suitable products, and develop effective marketing strategies to achieve customer satisfaction and organizational success.