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CONSUMER BEHAVIOR IN THE CONTEXT OF BEHAVIORISM THEORY

Introduction. The question of what influences a consumer's buying decision is, without exaggeration, one of the key questions in marketing. Building the brand's interaction with the target audience, developing the idea and content of the advertising message, finding effective communication channels and implementing a dozen more urgent tasks depends on the answer to it. Social psychology, back in the last century, offered its own view of the problem, giving the world the theory of behaviorism, a theory based on the study of the dependence of the behavioral reactions of a person on stimuli from the external environment.

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In our time, behaviorism has found application in marketing as an attempt to gain a deeper understanding of the psychological aspects of consumer behavior. The development of behaviorism as a doctrine of behavior entailed the formation of a whole direction in psychology. It is based on observing the reactions of the personality that arise in response to specific stimuli.

The leading role in this process is assigned to the environment – it is she who is a set of situations of different nature, influencing by human actions.

Leaving almost no attention to motives, emotions and feelings as biased and not measurable quantities, behaviorism focused on understanding the connection between stimulus and response, believing that knowing the mechanism of its occurrence, it is possible to simulate a certain model of behavior [1-3].

The key position of behaviorism, which has been adopted by advertising as well, is to condition the desired behavioral responses through positive (praise, reward, gift, result) or negative (criticism, loss, punishment, failure) reinforcement.

A person in his actions is guided by the experience gained and repeats in practice those actions that contributed to the achievement of the goal.

Behavioral marketing is based on the study of consumer psychology, motivations for consumer behavior, etc. Such marketing is especially important for large, advanced firms that are able to carry out serious in quality and quantity marketing activities in the market in the form of product, pricing, sales and communication policies [2]. However, fighting for the wallets of customers, the company primarily seeks to capture not only their wallets, but also their hearts to achieve benefits for their products and ensure the commitment and loyalty of customers to the brand of the company.

In marketing practice, behaviorism has gained popularity with the development and dissemination of advertising technologies. Actually, it became a response to volatile consumer behavior: how to influence the choice of a product, how to stimulate a purchase? Marketing actively uses the stimulus-response model: buy now and get a discount / bonuses / gift / opportunity to win, etc. Various incentive promotions, for example, Black Friday, are built on the same principle [5].

The consumer finds himself in a situation where he is surrounded by a powerful marketing message: an unprecedented decline in prices for goods and services in a short period of time. Resisting the incentive to save, “buy more for the same money,” is difficult to reap – many consumers postpone a purchase until the date of the promotion, and marketers are empowered to literally control consumer behavior.

American psychologist and writer F.B. Skinner put forward the idea of variability in reinforcement, suggesting the following possible modes:

- mode with a constant ratio (more reactions – more reinforcements, or more purchases – more discounts, more ad views – more video demonstrations, etc.);
- a regime with a constant interval (reinforcement follows at clearly defined intervals of time, which can be manifested in the schedule of activities to promote the product: the frequency of sales promotion campaigns, advertising, etc.);
- mode with a variable ratio (the average number of reactions is taken into account, which is good to use when planning advertising activity);
- mode with a variable interval (reinforcement follows after an indefinite time; in marketing, this option is embodied, including in the accrual of bonuses some time after the purchase) [1-3].

The objectivity of the method used – observing customer behavior and analyzing quantifiable data – speaks in favor of the application of the approach in marketing. Behaviorism also leaves the possibility of modifying the desired responses in buyers.

But one should not lose sight of the «downside» of behaviorism: any reaction, including a negative one, is fixed. If the client contacted the support service and did not receive a result, he will remember the negative experience of interacting with the company. When a consumer has purchased a product of inadequate quality, given the variety of choices, he is unlikely to buy it again.

For all the seemingly win-win behavior, behaviorism can be accused of one-sidedness and a rather narrow interpretation of human behavior, which is considered solely from the point of view of receiving stimuli. He leaves “overboard” both other types of learning (in addition to punishments and rewards) and a whole range of internal mental mechanisms [4, 5].

The practicality of behaviorism does not take into account possible emotional states, while they are associated with situations of reinforcement and can have the most direct impact on the decision to purchase.

However, many provisions of the theory were successfully adopted by marketing in the last century. Practice has shown that the reinforcement that follows a person’s action actually sets the desired behavior for the manufacturer / advertiser and, as a result, strengthens its position in the market.

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