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Some Contributions to the Study of Marketing Behavior

By Marguerite C. Burk

What makes consumers buy, or what causes them not to buy, has long been the subject of research, and today it is a well worn topic of conversation. Agricultural economists are professionally concerned with consumers' demand for food and the motivation of their choices. Through the years, fashions in this area of research have changed, as have the phrases used to describe it. Twenty years ago the key phrase was "food habits," later abandoned for "consumer preferences." More recently, it has become "motivation research." No matter what the name, agriculture has a stake in the results. The editors offered Miss Burk the opportunity to review some of the recent contributions to the subject, and what began as a review of several books developed into the discussion that follows.

THE OBJECTIVES of this article are threefold. Basically, the purpose is to review four recent books that deal with motivation research and marketing behavior. But other contributions besides these books are surveyed to indicate the significance of research in this field to agricultural economists. The third objective is to describe some of the unfulfilled needs of food consumption analysts for basic research by social scientists other than economists.

The four books reviewed are: *Motivation and Market Behavior* by Robert Ferber and Hugh G. Wales, (7)¹ *Motivation Research and Marketing Management* by Joseph W. Newman, (10) *Marketing Behavior and Executive Action* by Wroe Alderson, (1) and *Consumer Behavior: Research on Consumer Reactions* edited by Lincoln H. Clark. (4)

Motivation and Market Behavior (7) by Ferber and Wales is a compilation of readings on motivation research sponsored by the American Marketing Association. Its aim is to provide a wide range of ideas on the subject for the benefit of specialists in marketing and business research by presenting: (1) Different interpretations and attitudes toward the study of motivation and (2) various approaches to solving problems in human motivation.

¹ Numbers in italics in parentheses refer to Literature Cited, p. 19.

The authors view motivation study as the search for the *whys* of human behavior, both of individuals and of large groups of people. They stress the fact that research into motivations involves the use of all sorts of techniques from many disciplines—statistics, psychology, economics, sociology, and other social sciences. The existence of different levels of motivation and knowledge of when and how to carry out an analysis on each level, must be recognized as indispensable to a sound understanding of the subject. The authors are critical of the fact that motivation studies have rarely "held other factors constant."

Part I of the Ferber and Wales book provides a general discussion of the meaning and nature of so-called motivation research based on writings of proponents and opponents of the narrow view of the subject—the one that equates the psychological approach with motivation research. The other three parts of the book present illustrations of alternative approaches that are used to explain market behavior. Part II describes and discusses the principal psychological techniques used in motivation research,² showing the strong and weak points of each. Part III gives a rundown of non-projective survey techniques,³ and part IV pre-

² Such as depth interviewing, focused group interviewing, projective techniques of word association, sentence completion, Rorschach Test, Thematic Aperception Test.

³ Such as use of informed opinion, measurement of consumer attitudes toward products, brand preference studies, regression analysis.

sents some interesting material on the techniques of aggregative analysis.

The flavor of the book and of the controversies it describes can be illustrated with a few quotations. On page 11 is this conclusion of Charles Cannell, "Techniques are measurement devices only; they are not theory. Theory is essential to understanding the consumer, and techniques in themselves are useless without theory and without hypotheses derived from theory. . . ." Some examples of the findings of motivation researchers on the personality and social status aspects of the demand for automobiles are scattered through the book. The comment of Wroe Alderson is particularly pertinent to an evaluation of the results of such motivation research. He writes, "The very fact that a symbol might be recognized by others may make it less acceptable to the subject as an outlet for secret yearnings . . . (7, p. 17)." One of the readings in the book is the paper by Pierre D. Martineau, "A Case Study: What Automobiles Mean to Americans." By now, most Americans are aware of the fact that motivation researchers have stressed the symbolism of automobiles in the modern American culture and that doubts have arisen about their conclusions.

Alfred Politz has been one of the critics of motivation research as narrowly interpreted. His article, "Motivation Research—Opportunity or Dilemma," is an indictment of the validity of psychological methods as sometimes applied to marketing research. He emphasizes the need for quantification and restricts the use of motivation research to the development of hypotheses. In contrast, Ernest Dichter maintains that such techniques are sufficient in themselves. Politz writes, ". . . The problem of the researcher is not to find causes but to find controllable causes . . . (7, p. 52)." He argues that consumer research is a multiphase process.⁴

L. Edward Scriven points out in his paper, "Rationality and Irrationality in Motivation Research," that nose-counting has the function of determining how many people do what. The next problem is to determine why. He believes that the psychological approach to marketing offers "a

⁴Robert J. Williams of Alfred Politz Research, Inc., presented a useful short critique of motivation research in his article, "Is It True What They Say About Motivation Research?" (11).

starting point from which the statistical researcher may determine the relative importance of various motives and attitudes . . . (7, p. 65)."

The article by Warren J. Bilkey, "A Sociopsychological Approach to Consumer Behavior," is a good example of the approach of Kurt Lewin—"which teaches that people's actions are survival oriented, their behavior being motivated by their wants and satisfactions in relation to the social environment in which they live (7, p. 233)." According to Bilkey, Lewin in his analysis of consumer behavior for the National Research Council during World War II "employed the concept that consumer purchasing in its essence involves a psychic conflict between the person's desire for the item in question and his resistance against the undesirable considerations which the purchase entails, such as money cost and buying time involved. . . ."

Lewin worked on food habits, but Bilkey points out that he failed to relate these findings to the interviewees' actual purchasing behavior. The article by Bilkey describes his small-scale study in which he attempted to quantify people's stated psychic tensions regarding the purchase of certain items and their expenditures for those items. Bilkey believed that he found certain quantitative relationships and that psychic tensions for food were related to the standard of living, the level of uncommitted cash balances, and food price changes.

In the introduction to the last part of their book, Ferber and Wales point out that analysis of the end-result of human behavior can yield, at times, more reliable information regarding the psychological bases for this behavior than can actual interviews, and invariably at considerably lower cost. The contribution of Ruth P. Mack, "Why Consumer Purchases Change Over Time," utilizes a method for prediction of such purposes based on an analysis of aggregates. Her working hypotheses are derived from considerations of individual behavior. Mrs. Mack uses shoes as her example and develops four dimensions in buying: (1) which needs are filled, (2) choice of article to satisfy want, (3) when to buy, (4) relative price.

The contribution that Ferber and Wales make lies in their measured presentation of a broad range of conflicting ideas, and evaluations and ordering of those ideas through introductory notes to each part, and headnotes to each reading.

Business Use of Motivation Research

Newman's book, *Motivation Research and Marketing Management* (10), was written for business executives. It is based on an extensive review of the actual application of the findings of motivation research by research firms, marketing agencies, and business firms for which the motivation studies were made. The purposes of the book are, first, to provide an improved basis for thinking about the nature and significance of motivation research, and, second, to contribute to an understanding of management problems related to its use in marketing.

The key ideas are set forth in the preface. Three in number, they are: (1) Products and services have as their paramount purpose the satisfaction of the wants of the people who buy and use them. (2) Progress consists of evolving better conceptual schemes, that is, more meaningful ways of looking at our world. (3) Buying and consumption should be recognized as human acts serving human purposes.

Newman's definition of motivation research differs markedly from the limited view often presented. He describes motivation research as the attempt to apply systematically the accumulated knowledge of human behavior and the analytical concepts and research methods of such behavioral sciences as psychology, sociology, and social anthropology to the buying behavior of individuals and of groups. This description raises, in the mind of this reviewer, the question of what role the economist is supposed to play in the analysis of consumption and of consumer buying.

The book has three parts. The first covers the concepts of buying behavior and their development, the second provides selected cases of motivation research as examples of its potential, and the third takes up the meaning of motivation research for marketing knowledge and administration.

Marketing people, according to Newman, have thought about buying and consumption in terms of sales data, economic theory, and lists of buying motives without measurement of their relative importance in particular instances. He discusses the common use of introspection, quickie market research, and the compilation of basic marketing facts without exploration of their *whys*. All too often, emphasis has been on techniques and procedures.

Following this up, Newman argues that progress in marketing depends upon developing better concepts of the nature of the people and things with which it deals. To support his argument, he quotes James B. Conant: "The revolutionary advances in science are made in terms of new conceptual schemes (interlocked with controlled experiments), not in terms of improved methods, and not in terms of amassing data."⁵ Newman believes that motivation research is contributing to the ongoing process of conceptual development. He points out that the newer research is developing both the concepts relating to the consumer, such as self-image, basic needs, and the influences of the cultural and social milieu, and concepts relating to the product, such as brand image.

Although all aspects of the examples presented are interesting, this reviewer found Newman's discussion of their objectives and of executives' reactions to them particularly thought-provoking. He stresses the two phases in research effort—the formulation of hypotheses and their testing. This book, as well as the one by Ferber and Wales, describes some of the motivation research carried on by automobile manufacturers. Toward the end the author emphasizes contributions of behavioral scientists to idea getting or hypothesis formulation. "An adequate explanation of consumer behavior will be developed only when the psychological aspects are treated together with the cultural, interpersonal, situational, economic, and material which determine how man's needs finally are handled (10, pp. 392-393)."

Newman's book provides agricultural economists with (1) some valuable stimuli to rethinking our bases for analysis of economic data on consumption, (2) a highly readable summary and appraisal of research on motivation, and (3) still another goad to cooperative research with other social scientists.

From a Sociological Viewpoint

Wroe Alderson's *Marketing Behavior and Executive Action* is in effect an antidote for an overdose of claims for motivation research. The basic premise of this book is that marketing behavior is

⁵ Page 46 of Newman. (10) Quotation from "Science and the Practical Arts," *Harvard Business Review*, Volume XXV, 4A (Autumn 1947), p. 550.

essentially group behavior. "Consumption, which is the end and aim of marketing activity, is a highly socialized activity . . . (1, p. 15)." The objective of the book is to present a functionalist approach to marketing theory. The author takes a *very* broad view of the field of marketing; he concerns himself with the development of a *general science* of human behavior. "Functionalism is that approach to science which begins by identifying some system of action, and then tries to determine how and why it works as it does (1, p. 16)." Throughout the book, Alderson stresses the whole system or Gestalt approach of starting with the whole and then proceeding to examine the parts. This is akin to the process of disaggregation used in macroeconomics.

Alderson stresses a sociological interpretation of marketing. For example: "The main body of contemporary economists are functionalists in the sense of concerning themselves with systems of action and how they operate to achieve the objectives of their participants. Marketing theory differs from received economic theory mainly in visualizing a more flexible functionalism which is concerned with a variety of systems involved in the movement of goods and services (1, p. 25)." This heavy dose of sociology is indeed surprising, coming as it does from one of the successful professional market researchers for business.

Part I, headed "Marketing and the Behavioral Sciences," draws on a number of social science fields for elements of a theory of group behavior. Early in part II, in a discussion of the theory of market behavior, is this statement ". . . Economics starts with certain assumptions as to market organization, while marketing in a sense starts further back with attempts to organize the market or to establish the process of orderly marketing which economics for some purposes takes for granted . . . (1, p. 99)."

The chapter in part II on motivation in consumer buying is enlightening and stimulating. ". . . Consuming units such as households are organized behavior systems, but they are systems with a dual aspect . . ." as buyers and as users of goods (1, p. 163). Alderson identifies rational problem-solving as a key aspect of consumer behavior. He reviews the development of ideas on consumer behavior by referring to Bentham's pleasure-pain principle of human conduct, the explanations of marginal utility exponents, the habit

and impulse ideas of behavioristic psychologists, and the more recent emphasis on instinctive drive by the Freudian psychologists. He stresses the idea that consuming habits are part of the pattern of living, but buying habits are only derived from this pattern. He argues that the consumer purchaser is trying to resolve problems created by his desire for a high standard of living amid uncertainties arising from outside influences.

Alderson makes this significant point, ". . . The concept of demand in economic analysis is concerned primarily with the consumer buyer making a choice in the presence of scarcity. To analyze demand for its own sake would be to explore the problems of choice which affect consumers in the midst of abundance (1, p. 285)." Those who agree with Galbraith that many Americans have reached this state of affluence will recognize the urgent need for research in this area.

Part III deals with executive action in marketing. As these chapters are written primarily for executives and management, they are passed over here except for the note that chapter 13 on the solution of marketing problems is based on the idea that problems should determine methods and not vice versa.

Compendium on Consumer Behavior

Lincoln H. Clark has assembled in *Consumer Behavior: Research on Consumer Reactions* (4) two sets of conference papers. Those in part I were presented to the 1955 meeting of the Committee for Research on Consumer Attitudes and Behavior. Part II contains selected papers prepared for the Conference on Consumption and Economic Development at Princeton University in 1955.

The items in part I that are likely to be of particular interest to researchers in agricultural marketing are: "Consumer Reaction to Product Innovation" by Wroe Alderson, "Consumer Product Acceptance Rates" by A. C. Nielsen, Jr., "Product Changes and Consumer Reactions" by Alfred Politz, and James Morgan's article with an extensive bibliography, "A Review of Recent Research on Consumer Behavior." Much of the bibliography is annotated.

Another article with a bibliography, "International Comparisons of Patterns of Family

Consumption" by the late Faith Williams, is in part II. This bibliography covers sample surveys of consumer expenditures in the postwar period; the author urges workers in this field to give greater attention to achieving more comparability in the collection, summarization, and analysis of the data.

Eleanor M. Snyder's paper, "Impact of Long-Term Structural Changes on Family Expenditures, 1888-1950," should stimulate research by agricultural economists. Her purpose was to examine secular changes in consumption functions derived from eight cross-section surveys of urban families. Herculean efforts were obviously required to adjust data to comparable bases of price, income, and definitions of consumption categories. The data used were in published and unpublished tabulations for 1888-1890, 1901, 1909, 1918-19, 1935-36, 1941, 1944, and 1950. But no amount of patient research in the 1950's can make these surveys comparable in sample coverage and methods used in data collection.⁶ Therefore, Miss Snyder's hypothesis that secular changes in the level of urban family food expenditures are a stable function of variations over time in family size, income, and retail food prices cannot be definitively proved or disproved, in this reviewer's opinion. This hypothesis is important to projections of the demand for food and for food marketing services, but the extent of this review precludes further consideration.

Of even more direct interest to many agricultural economists is the Snyder assumption of secular stability in the relationship between total family food expenditures and expenditures for two subgroups—(1) meat, poultry, and fish and (2) sweets and beverages together. For this section of the analysis, Miss Snyder used spring data for 1935-36, 1942, 1945, and 1948. Perhaps a 13-year period is rather short to establish "secular stability." It includes less than two cattle cycles. Also, this reviewer remains dubious of conclusions drawn partly from the disparate samples of non-relief families in 1935-36. Before accepting this hypothesis about a stable share for meat, poultry,

⁶ For example, the 1935-36 Consumer Purchases Study excluded all persons receiving any relief. Also, the extent to which expenditures by urban clerical workers and wage earners are representative of those by all urban families probably changed considerably in the 62-year period.

and fish in total food expenditures (including alcoholic beverages), most agricultural economists will want to study prices and quantities consumed in the survey periods in relation to cattle and hog cycles and to changing marketing costs.

Other Contributions to *Why* Research

In the preceding sections, the main points covered by four recent books in the field of motivation research have been considered. Let us now turn to a number of other contributions made in this area. Here emphasis is placed upon the interest of agricultural economists in *why* research, taking a broad view of motivation research. Newman wrote, "Developing better concepts and conceptual schemes is important to marketing because progress consists of the evolution of new mental images of what things are or should be; more meaningful ways of looking at things . . . (10, p. 394)."

A contribution to the development of conceptual schemes in the area of motivation research has been made by James A. Bayton in his article, "Motivation, Cognition, Learning—Basic Factors in Consumer Behavior." (2)⁷ The article gives a comprehensive application of contemporary psychological theories to the analysis of consumer behavior. It calls attention to important psychological ideas necessary to understanding the behavior of consumers. "Human behavior can be grouped into three categories—motivation, cognition, and learning. Motivation refers to the drives, urges, wishes, or desires which initiate the sequence of events known as 'behavior.' Cognition is the area in which all of the mental phenomena (perception, memory, judging, thinking, etc.) are grouped. Learning refers to those changes in behavior which occur through time relative to external stimulus conditions. Each broad area is pertinent to particular problems of consumer behavior. All three together are pertinent to a comprehensive understanding of consumer behavior (2, p. 232)."

Perhaps most significant to agricultural economics research is Bayton's statement about competition that goes on within our mental processes. In many instances, he states, cognitive competition occurs between two or more generic categories before it occurs between goal-objects within a generic

⁷ The article received special recognition by the American Marketing Association.

category. For this reason, he suggests, perhaps not enough attention has been given to the psychological analysis of cognitive competition between generic categories. In other words, Bayton appears to argue that the preference for one food should not be studied in a vacuum, but in terms of its competition with other foods, and, likewise, that the competition between food and nonfood goods and services deserves intensive analysis.

Another contribution to *why* research is the address by C. Joseph Clawson, before the 1958 meeting of the Council on Consumer Information, "The Coming Break-Throughs in Motivation Research." (5) Clawson identifies seven needed break-throughs. Among these must be the uncovering of all the types of motives that affect purchase of a given product, not just the psychological or social motives. He too points out that there has been dangerous overemphasis on the social and biological motivations, with frequent disregard of economic motives.

Clawson believes that motivation research will become highly quantitative, in addition to providing qualitative insights. He makes this clear in the following statement:

"The pioneers of motivation research have made a contribution of tremendous value to the field of marketing research, but they have not gone nearly far enough. The most important of all break-throughs now needed is the quantification of findings. . . . Marketing executives have always needed and will continue to need to know how many people of what types in which regions feel what way, why, how intensely, and how much difference this makes in their behavior. The results which executives must explain, predict and control are quantitative ones, so the motives and other influences which cause these results must be expressed in quantitative terms too. Bright qualitative insights are welcome but far from sufficient for forecasting behavior and planning action to influence it (5, p. 3)."

Clawson joins a number of other writers already cited in emphasizing the need of motivation research for an improved framework of theoretical concepts. This framework must specify all interacting variables involved, ranging from price, income and present supply, to subconscious and concealed motivations. When the variables and their related topical areas are clearly specified for the product and its problem, the selection of re-

search tools becomes much easier. Clawson thinks that this framework will be developed in a situation in which social scientists from different fields and even physical scientists sit down to work out a unified doctrine as well as a research plan to test and improve it. He sees the possibility, even the probability, that this development is coming in a few of the largest business firms in the country and, even more probably, in the leading universities.

Newman certainly agrees with Clawson in noting the trend toward viewing buying and consumption in the context of total human behavior of which they are a part. This current trend in marketing research for business firms is reminiscent of the approach of the Committee on Food Habits of the National Research Council during World War II. The membership of this committee, first organized in 1940, represented the fields of anthropology, psychology, sociology, home economics, physiological psychology, and public health. Curiously enough, it apparently included an economist only for a brief interim.

For this committee, Kurt Lewin made a study of food habits which was reported in a paper entitled "Forces Behind Food Habits and Methods of Change." The content of the following quotation is remarkably similar to the ideas of present day motivation researchers who take a broad view of their subject. "The question [he writes] 'why people eat what they eat' is rather complex, involving both cultural and psychological aspects (such as traditional foods and individual preferences caused by childhood experiences), as well as problems of transportation, availability of food in a particular area, and economic considerations . . . (9, pp. 36-37)."

A routine bibliographic search for material on food habits, consumer behavior, and consumer preferences revealed to this writer a striking shift in emphasis during the last 20 years. After World War I, interest in food habits had developed out of concern for the poor diets of certain segments of our population and led to the large-scale consumer surveys of the 1930's and early World War II period, and to the work of the Committee on Food Habits. Since the end of World War II, few writings on food habits have appeared, but the literature on consumer preferences and motivation research has snowballed.

Research Needs

The ideas of any researcher are as influenced by motivation, cognition, and learning as are those of consumers. This researcher rationalizes the presentation of her research needs in these terms: The *motivation* comes from the desire to encourage and persuade her colleagues in the U.S. Department of Agriculture who represent other social science disciplines and researchers in agricultural colleges and in food marketing agencies to help in the search for more adequate explanations of changes in food consumption. The *cognition* of the need for such research has grown out of study of data from the 1955 Survey of Household Food Consumption in connection with trends in food consumption. And this economist has *learned* from 15 years' work on analysis of food consumption that we are only on the threshold of understanding why food consumption changes or does not change.

Some of the research needs of workers in this area are:

- (1) Duplication and amplification of Kurt Lewin's research as described in the paper referred to earlier, which used methods of cultural anthropology and psychology (*a*) to measure the homogeneity of food habits of households grouped according to economic and social characteristics; (*b*) to develop frames of reference for evaluating particular foods, such as expense, health, taste, and status; (*c*) to determine how groups of households put foods into these frames of reference; (*d*) to study conflicts in motivations of consumer buying.
- (2) A formulation of food groupings having high "within" substitutability, but low outside competition. This would expedite the study of competition among foods. It would be based on research developed under (1).
- (3) Study of competition between food and nonfood goods and services in terms of the frequencies of specified patterns and conditions under which major groups of households shop within set budgets for food, or according to quantities of individual foods desired. These would repeat and further develop the type of research undertaken by Warren J. Bilkey (3).

- (4) Study of food habits and motivations of food consumption by high-income and well-educated households. The question here is whether such households buy all the kinds and quantities of foods they want or whether they feel restricted in choice by price or cost. Such research would provide a guide to possible future patterns of consumption when more of the population achieve these characteristics.
- (5) A picture of decision-making for food comparable to that developed for durable goods by Katona and Mueller (8). This would help answer questions about the reaction of groups of households to short-run changes in price and supplies of major types of foods.
- (6) The interrelationships and substitutions between eating at home and eating away from home. This would supply information about whether people eating a given meal out eat what they would eat at home or if they alter their meals at home to supplement meals eaten out.

In conclusion, it is suggested that interested agricultural economists in the States might form teams of researchers with other social scientists to tackle one of these problems, or even parts of one. Eventually it should be possible to coordinate small-scale case studies so as to obtain overall answers. Perhaps the recommendation of the *Manual for the Study of Food Habits* should be followed, ". . . it seems to be a definite responsibility of workers in fields like food habits, while they are exploring new problems and new methods, to build up a systematic mass of material which has been collected with impartiality and a fair degree of uniformity (6, p. 19)."

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