



WINNING THROUGH DEFINING THE CUSTOMERS NEEDS

Marketing managers and researchers are driven by the need to understand and meet the needs of a continually changing consumer market place. The consumer marketplace is a melting pot of individualism, ethnic diversity, and changing consumer needs and values. Sub-culture has been noted to be one determinant of media use, attitudes towards advertising, purchase behavior and shopping preferences (Bush, Smith, & Martin, 1999; Donthu and Cherian, 1992; Kim and Kang, 2001).

Park, Jaworski, and MacInnis, (1986) distinguish three categories of consumer need: functional needs, social needs, and experiential needs. As defined by Park et al., (1986) functional needs are those needs that motivate the search for products that solve consumption-related problems (current problem, prevent a potential problem, resolve conflict). Individual consumer needs make up important market segments that provide opportunities for the business community to produce tailored products and focused marketing communication strategies.

Understanding the influence of needs segmentation on product consumption allows marketers to expand the scope of their marketing analyses to identify needs analysis as potential market segments. These potential market segments may provide additional opportunities for future new product development and other target communication strategies. Indeed, according to Hawkins, Best & Coney (1992, p.32-57), consumers develop needs, values and beliefs, as a result of either a native culture or in the cultures with which the consumer is associated. Kamakura and Novak (1992) maintain that values serve to guide actions, attitudes, judgments, and comparisons across specific objects and situations.

Thus, understanding the needs that direct consumer product consumption and the reasons consumers prefer specific individual brands to satisfy needs will allow organizations the ability to build value-based brand strategies for identifying consumers.



In closing, the proposition of individual needs being a representation of self-identified groups may provide additional opportunities to understand the purchase behavior of various sub-cultures and their influence on product consumption. Therefore, effective needs segmentation can allow marketers to adapt their programs to the specific needs and values of individual sub-cultures, thus providing positioning opportunities around individual consumers who identify with various needs-satisfaction groups.

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