Faculty Working Papers

THE FUTURE OF BUYER BEHAVIOR THEORY

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The motivational force behind writing this paper can only be the need for venturesomeness. This need was aroused partly by the speculative nature of the topic itself, which is to predict the future of buyer behavior theory, and partly by the deft encouragement of the session chairman, Jerry Zaltman. I am quite certain that some of my colleagues will disagree with things I foresee in buyer behavior theory, while others are likely to approve my assertions about the future of buyer behavior theory. Like a good forecaster let me simply say that "I may be mistaken but I am never wrong."

Future predictions typically entail the utilization of the Bayes theorem in some way because essentially prognosis implies revising the prior probability based on the assessment of some symptoms currently manifested in the phenomenon to be forecasted. Future predictions are also typically hazardous to one's welfare in any discipline because often the prior probabilities are no better than random probabilities due to relatively short histories of the disciplines, and because the assessment of contemporary symptoms is very difficult due to the rapid and complex changes the discipline may be undergoing. Buyer behavior theory may very well present these problems.

My objective in this paper accordingly is to estimate the prior probability by very briefly reviewing the historical perspective of buyer behavior discipline and then focus on a number of current events which are likely to determine both the velocity and the direction of buyer behavior theory. I shall focus on changes in structure and content of the theory which are likely to arise during the current decade and, so to speak, go out on a limb in my speculative tree.

A Brief Historical Perspective of Buyer Behavior

In the last quarter of a century, in my opinion, we have come a long way from the dark ages of strictly sporadic and random research in buyer behavior. The cumulative research effort in buyer behavior, both academic and professional, theoretical and empirical, or published and unpublished, is indeed impressive as can be gauged from several recent reviews (Guest, 1962; Howard, 1965; Twedt, 1965; Burk, 1967; Sheth, 1967; and Perloff, 1968). A closer examination of these reviews clearly indicates that we can identify four distinct phases of differential thoughts and emphases in the discipline.

The Empirical - Inductive Phase

The decades of the thirties and forties seemed to be dominated by
strictly empirical research mostly conducted by or for the industry's marketing decisions and their impact in the market place. Furthermore, the major emphasis tended toward gauging the effects of distribution, advertising and promotion decisions.

Among the several distinct characteristics of this phase, we may list (1) dominance of economic theory of the firm and especially the concepts of monopolistic competition, marginal utility analysis, and welfare economics; (2) macro market analysis at the aggregate level or at best at some pre-defined segmented level; and (3) emphasis on market's behavior responses as opposed to psychological responses.

The only exception to the above characterization of this phase of buyer behavior discipline seemed to be the acceptance of motivation research in which both the concepts and the methods of clinical psychology were widely applied to the understanding of buyer behavior.

The Formative Phase

The decade of the fifties must be regarded as the formative years of buyer behavior in which several major elements cemented the foundation of buyer behavior theory.

The first such element was the shift from measurement of aggregate to individual buyer behavior. Two different groups of scholars simultaneously contributed toward bringing about this change. The first was the Lazarsfeld School of Sociologists interested in measuring total change in voting behavior based on longitudinal panels which led to the establishment of household consumer panels in buyer behavior. The second was the Katona School of Economic Psychologists interested in building better indicators of economic growth based on the micro data of household acquisitions and inventories of durable appliances.

The availability of data on household purchase behavior eventually led to the interest in developing quantitative measures of brand or store loyalty and switching behaviors which in turn brought the utilization of stochastic processes such as Markov chains.

A second major element of the fifties was the growing interest in providing explanations for buyer behavior differences based on the social environment of the consumer. This led to the borrowing of the concepts of social stratification, reference groups, role orientations and opinion leadership. The major discipline relied upon, therefore, tended to be sociology and economic anthropology. Even though the theorizing was un-systematic and less refined in these attempts, they should be regarded as the pioneering efforts in search for causal explanations from disciplines other than the economic theory.

The third distinct element was the initial introduction to formal model building of buyer responses to marketing stimuli based on the optimization theory of operations research and econometrics (see Bass, et.al., 1961 for examples). Simultaneously, the utility theorists in
economics were also formalizing Samuelson's revealed preference theory of consumption. The combined effect was the introduction of deductive formal model building based on normative axioms and assumptions. This was further facilitated by the feasibility of building complex simulation models with the use of the computer. Given the infant stage of buyer behavior theory development, it is quite surprising to observe that management science was adopted in buyer behavior so early in the game. It is therefore, not at all surprising that most efforts at normative-deductive model building met with failures and premature rejection. As we shall see later, this fact has had tremendous implications for the future of buyer behavior theory.

It must be pointed out that all through these formative years, the empirical research on buyer behavior continued to accelerate independently due to the availability of micro data and the computer facilities to analyze them.

The Middle-Range-Theory Phase

The first half of the sixties can best be described as the identification stage. Buyer behavior began to be understood for its own sake rather than from the point of view of the marketer or the government or some other entity with vested interests. In my opinion, this can be directly attributed to the intensive borrowing of theories and concepts from those branches of behavioral sciences which had emerged as "pure" disciplines themselves. This included experimental psychology with emphasis on learning and perception, social psychology with emphasis on cognitive consistency, and rural sociology with emphasis on adoption processes of innovative products, practices and services. For further discussion I must refer you to the excellent review provided by Burk (1967).

The intensive borrowing from the behavioral sciences by numerous researchers, each one interested in some aspect of buyer behavior and predisposed or trained in some branch of behavioral sciences, resulted in the development of well-identified middle-range theories of buyer behavior. Any examples must include Howard's learning theory, Bauer's perceived risk theory, and several researchers developing theories based on Festinger's cognitive dissonance, Lewin's field theory, opinion leadership, and innovativeness and even on several personality theories. As I pointed out elsewhere (Sheth, 1967), the outstanding characteristic of this borrowing phase was the partial explanations each theory provided to the otherwise complex phenomenon of buyer behavior especially the one related to the problem-solving and habitual buying decisions. Not very surprisingly, other types of buyer behaviors were neglected in these middle range theories including unplanned impulsive behavior, novelty-seeking and situationally-anchored behaviors because very little theorizing was offered by the behavioral sciences in these areas.

Even though the bulk of this era concentrated on building middle-range theories, the efforts to build formal models based on optimization theory including linear programming, on stochastic processes including Bernoulli and Markovian processes, and on heuristics and other Monte Carlo type techniques continued. In fact, the early sixties can be regarded as
the golden era of management science in buyer behavior as evidenced from

The Integrative-Comprehensive-Theory Phase

The last half of the sixties and early years of the seventies is best
identified with the emergence of comprehensive theories of buyer behavior.
This basically entailed integrating several middle-range theories which
had come to be accepted as well as putting together empirical research not
identified with any theory in buyer behavior. (Nicosia, 1966; Howard and
Sheth, 1969; Andreason, 1965; Engel, Blackwell & Kollat, 1968; Sheth,
1971; Sheth, 1972). In my opinion, the integrative-comprehensive theory
building brought three factors in the development of the discipline.
First, it emphasized the limitations of direct borrowing of theories from
behavioral sciences without first adapting them to the complexity of buyer
behavior. Furthermore, it established a precedent in reversing the process
of borrowing by first conceptualizing the buyer behavior phenomenon and
then searching for as many constructs as can be logically found in
behavioral and social sciences. Second, and perhaps most important, the
integrative-comprehensive theories brought to bear in buyer behavior the
self confidence of independently building theories of buyer behavior
in place of simply applying a social science theory to buyer behavior area
with or without modifications. This must be regarded as the genesis for
the emergence of buyer behavior as a discipline in itself rather than
simply a problem area which can be explained by some social science
discipline. Finally, they provided insights into building complex but
realistic formal models of buyer behavior which may have contributed toward
changing the traditional course of model building in terms of starting with
simple, unrealistic assumptions and relaxing them to make them realistic
as was true, for example, in utility theory (Katona, 1953).

During this phase, two other developments in buyer behavior theory
are worth noting. The first was discarding the deductive-normative model
building approach based on operations research methods in favor of
statistical inductive model building with the use of multivariate analysis
of large scale survey data. The second development was the broadening of
marketing and buyer behavior horizons to nontraditional areas such as
population control, nutrition, and public service delivery systems under
the pioneering efforts of Kotler and Zaltman.

Assessment of History and Contemporary Signals

From the above brief historical review, it is my contention that
buyer behavior theory is a far cry from random thinking. Within a very
short period of time, we seem to have firmly laid the foundation for
building a distinct discipline of buyer behavior which will neither be a
subsystem of marketing nor that of any of the other older social sciences.
Even more pleasant observation is that we seem to have achieved better
with respect to richness of thinking, comprehensiveness of theorizing, and testing of theories in naturalistic and realistic settings than many of the older behavioral science disciplines in their comparative periods of development. And why should it not be that way? Unless the newer disciplines learn to avoid the trial-and-error learning of older disciplines similar to the experiences of developing nations, there is very little hope of uplifting ourselves from becoming strict problem-solvers for the government or the industry. In summary, the it is safe to predict that buyer behavior theory has nothing but a bright future.

However, an assessment of a number of contemporary events also indicate that the velocity of growth will not only be more rapid and diffused but is likely to significantly change the course of the growth curve. Rather than listing my assessment of these events and then forecasting the future directions of buyer behavior theory, I plan to devote the rest of the paper in detailing the major dimensions of future direction of the theory and link them to my assessment of contemporary events. The future developments are described below in terms of the following categories: (1) structural changes in buyer behavior theory, (2) broadening the horizons of relevance and applications of buyer behavior principles, and (3) active interest of other disciplines to borrow from buyer behavior theory.

Structural Changes in Buyer Behavior Theory

In the Bayesian crystal urn, I foresee four types of structural changes in the development of buyer behavior theory during the decade of the seventies. They are (1) establishing criteria to evaluate the relevance of different theories of buyer behavior, (2) constructing tests and scales to measure widely accepted hypothetical constructs in buyer behavior theory, (3) building complex formal but highly realistic and inductive models based on comprehensive theories of buyer behavior and, (4) theoretical and empirical research on nonpurposeful buyer behavior hopefully leading to a comprehensive theory.

Criteria for Evaluating Theories of Buyer Behavior

Although we have developed several theories of buyer behavior in both middle-range and comprehensive categories, surprisingly we have so far failed to develop widely accepted criteria with which to evaluate their usefulness or even relevance to buyer behavior. To be sure, existing theories are differentially accepted and diffused, but this seems to be based on tenuous factors such as the degree of face validity or predictive validity, the reputation of the author, the prestige of the institution, and ability to generate more research funds and comensurately more publicizing of the theory. In view of the fact that even greater number of researchers are likely to contribute in the coming years, I think the discipline is likely to experience personal rivalries and
showmanship among competing authors unless some evaluative criteria are developed and accepted. I foresee three different types of criteria emerging within the next five years in order to minimize the personal rivalry and showmanship mentioned above.

The first type of criteria seems already to be emerging in the form of the development of a meta theory of buyer behavior (Zaltman, Pinson, & Angelmar, 1972). In other words, theories of buyer behavior are likely to be critically examined, compared, and contrasted based on some fundamental judgments of philosophy of science. This type of criteria are strictly discipline-oriented and tend to emphasize the evaluation of the process of theorizing.

The second type of criteria, on the other hand, is likely to be pragmatic by being based on the usefulness of a theory of buyer behavior to solve specific problems. The emphasis in this type of evaluation is likely to be on the capability of a theory to enable the problem solver in achieving his own goals. What are the entities who are likely to increasingly utilize buyer behavior theories to help solve their problems? Obviously, the public policy makers, the business managers and consumer advocates seem the most likely entities. To the extent that each entity differs in its own perspective and activity, we are likely to see very different ways by which each entity is likely to put buyer behavior theories to its own use. For example, the research based on buyer behavior theories is likely to be very specific, ad hoc and symptomatic in the case of consumer advocates since typically they have tended to be issue-oriented. The public policy makers, on the other hand, are more likely to utilize comprehensive theories to conduct research on an exhaustive and systematic basis to search for the root causes of problematic symptoms pointed out by the consumer advocates. At least this is my hope. Finally, the marketing management is certainly likely to favor comprehensive theories of buyer behavior to understand and monitor market behavior simply because past experience has given enough evidence that middle range theories are not satisfactory.

The final type of criteria is likely to emerge from the efforts to generalize a theory to diverse and nontraditional areas of buyer behavior. The greater the ability of a theory to extend itself with a minimum number of modifications to the unexplored areas of buyer behavior such as search for information process or to nontraditional areas such as product utility and value formation, the greater is likely to be its popularity and diffusion. However, the diffusion of the theory is likely to be evaluated in terms of specific criteria similar to the criteria in statistics for parameter estimation procedures.

It is my hope that with the development of agreed-upon criteria in buyer behavior, we will see greater rigor and deductive logic in future theories of buyer behavior.

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**Standardized Measurement of Buyer Behavior Constructs**

Even though we are still striving to develop better theories of buyer
behavior, I think we have a consensus on several hypothetical constructs in buyer behavior. These include the constructs of brand and store loyalty, behavioral intentions or buyer plans, predispositions toward choice alternatives, and perceptual biases in selective exposure and processing of information just to name a few. In addition, there seems to be a basic understanding that individual differences in buyer behavior are likely to be determined by constructs such as the life cycle, life style, socioeconomic status and role orientation differences among consumers. Secondly, we have recently tended to follow the psychometric tradition of data analysis especially with the use of multivariate methods which has brought to our attention the need for better and isomorphic measures of the above mentioned constructs which we strive to relate to one another in order to describe and explain buyer behavior.

I, therefore, foresee major research effort in buyer behavior channeled toward developing standardized scales for many of the constructs in buyer behavior mentioned above. I also think that this research effort is likely to be heavily influenced by the psychometric theories of scaling. Several important implications emerge from this forecast. First, we are likely to become more skeptical of the direct use of standardized sales and tests developed for comparable constructs in behavioral sciences. For example, in the area of attitudes, it is more likely that we will question the measurement procedures proposed in expectancy-value models in social psychology. Thus, we are likely to separate theories from measurement as we continue to borrow from the behavioral and social sciences. Second, the buyer behavior theory is very likely to become more mathematical and formal due to the research thrust in measurement and development of tests for the constructs. Finally, the development of standardized tests is likely to augment the empirical research in the unexplored areas of buyer behavior because research efforts will tend to be routinized as it is true today in some branches of psychology.

Quantitative Modeling of Buyer Behavior

In the distant future, I foresee reemergence of quantitative model building in buyer behavior. In other words, it will be quite some time before good mathematical models of buyer behavior are likely to emerge. Furthermore, the model building effort is likely to be distinctly different from what has been historically attempted in marketing. First, the models are likely to be problem-oriented instead of technique-oriented. Thus, by definition, they will be empirical in nature summarizing the efforts to research a problem area with the use of existing theories of buyer behavior. For example, a number of researchers are currently applying various theories of buyer behavior to understand how advertising works, how public delivery systems can be made more efficient in health, education and welfare, and how future transportation and communication needs can be fully met without endangering the environment. Second, the models are likely to utilize several statistical techniques in some sort of sequential multistage process rather than try to fit the empirical problem into a single technique such as mathematical programming or multidimensional scaling. Finally, the quantitative models of buyer behavior will be more positive rather than normative. In other words, we are more likely to see
predictive models of buyer behavior and less likely to see control models. Accordingly, the model building effort will coincide with testing and continuous updating. Furthermore, the adaptive control concepts are likely to be at the core of the updating process. In short, Bayesian philosophy is likely to dominate the model building effort replacing the search for optimality.

I also think that a number of researchers will attempt to decompose agreed-upon comprehensive theories of buyer behavior into smaller theories and develop models for them. We have already seen some efforts in this direction in regard to information processing and attitude structure subsystems of buyer behavior.

Research on Nonpurposeful Behavior

Based on the historical review, it is fair to state that we have so far concentrated on habitual, purposeful and problem-solving buyer behavior. Furthermore, we have developed several fairly comprehensive theories to explain it. However, the nonpurposeful behavior has received relatively little attention in the past, and it is, therefore, likely to emerge as the major substantive area of empirical research and theory building. By nonpurposeful behavior, I am primarily referring to curiosity, novelty seeking and exploratory behavior as well as cue-triggered impulsive buyer behavior. Some theorizing on this aspect of buyer behavior based on Berlyne's theory is recently developed by several researchers (Howard and Sheth 1969, Hansen 1972, Venkatesan 1972). However, considerable work still remains to be done especially in terms of gathering empirical data before a good systematic theory of nonpurposeful behavior can be developed.

It seems inevitable but to speculate that any comprehensive theory of nonpurposeful behavior will be extremely difficult to build and when built, it will more heavily depend on the typology of situational influences surrounding the nonpurposeful behavior than on the personal attributes of the buyer.

Broadening the Horizons of Buyer Behavior

Simultaneously with the structural changes in buyer behavior theory, I foresee rapid applications of buyer behavior concepts to three broadly-defined substantive problem areas. These are (1) cross-cultural buyer behavior research required by the emergence of multinational corporations, (2) public policy research on marketing institutions and practices required by increased concern in consumer welfare on the part of regulatory agencies, and (3) extension of buyer behavior to nontraditional areas of societal problems directly attributed to mass consumption nature of our society. I expect bulk of applied research in buyer behavior limited to these problem areas in the coming decade.
Cross-Cultural Buyer Behavior

I foresee extensive applied research in buyer behavior across different cultures simply because of the increased multinational characterization of most large business corporations. With the maturity of many foreign markets, the multinational corporations have become sensitive to the marketing-orientation in their efforts to diffuse products and services on a worldwide basis. The need to understand the impact of cultures on buyer behavior is obvious. In fact, it is surprising to observe how little attention has been paid to assess cultural influences on buyer behavior despite the fact that the United States is recognized to be the melting pot of diverse ethnical groups.

I think research on cross-cultural buyer behavior is likely to go through the same stages as what buyer behavior theory itself has gone through. First, there will be clusterings of studies mostly localized to some industries and some countries. Given the pattern of multinational business expansion, it is logical to presume that cross-cultural studies will be concentrated in European markets and with respect to nondurable consumer goods. Second, we should expect the development of several middle-range theories of cross-cultural buyer behavior based on the research in the first stage. Furthermore, the middle-range theories will be generated by the marketing practitioners and not by the academicians due to substantial costs involved in cross-cultural research. Of course, the academic scholars are likely to be instrumental in guiding the marketing practice's efforts to build middle-range theories. Finally, I foresee the eventual emergence of several comprehensive theories of buyer behavior. These will mostly constitute efforts to integrate both diverse middle-range theories and existing empirical research in cross-cultural buyer behavior. Furthermore, I also think that there will be virtually no differences between cross-cultural theories and domestic theories of buyer behavior in their structure.

Public Policy Research

It is but inevitable to foresee rapid applications of buyer behavior theories for the purpose of better regulation of marketing practices and institutions. Perhaps the single most factor for this observation is the singular inadequacy of the traditional concepts of micro economic theories to properly guide the function of regulation. A related reason is the divorce of marketing from economics during the past two decades. A second major factor is the increased pragmatism recently exhibited by the regulatory agencies such as the FTC and the FDA. This has brought home the need for empirical research on buyer behavior at the micro level both before and after major regulatory decisions, for example, the policy of corrective advertising, in order to ensure that desired consequences follow from them. Finally, the recent emergence of consumerism is likely to encourage the public policy makers to conduct fundamental research on buyer behavior in the hopes of producing good legislative policies.
The bulk of research in buyer behavior for public policy is likely to be problem-oriented, and most of the problems are likely to emerge from the negative side effects of mass marketing and mass consumption, for example, mass media effects on the citizen's values.

**Buyer Behavior Research on Social and Environmental Problems**

Perhaps the most critical applications of buyer behavior theories are likely to emerge from the research on social and environmental problems. We have already witnessed some utilization of marketing and buyer behavior concepts to social problems of less developed economies, for example, population explosion and malnutrition. However, the societal and environmental problems directly related to mass consumption and mass production are closer to home for most people working in consumer behavior. These problem areas include environmental and social pollution, welfare of minorities, and delivery of public services such as education and health. The greater social consciousness in solving these problems fortunately seems to be transcending the vested interests of the components of our mass production and mass consumption system so that research in these areas will tend to be nonpartisan.

In addition to the broadening of the horizons of buyer behavior, I foresee two subtle and indirect benefits arising from the research on social and environmental problems. The first is the separation of buyer behavior theory from marketing theory. In other words, I foresee emergence of greater respectability of buyer behavior theory by its extension to socially relevant issues. It is surprising, on reflection, to see how much psychology has suffered from the crisis of relevance because it emerged as a discipline in those areas of research which were not considered relevant or essential to mass consumption societies.

The second benefit is the rapid cross-fertilization of philosophy, theory and methodology between natural sciences and buyer behavior theory. I think it is simply inevitable that we will be working together with researchers from hard sciences such as physics, mechanics and biochemistry in search for solution of social and environmental problems. Thus, rather than borrowing from the other social sciences, it is likely that we will be borrowing the philosophy and methodology from the hard sciences. To me, this appears to be an unique opportunity for buyer behavior theory to elevate itself to a more mature level.

**Borrowing From Buyer Behavior Theory**

Historically, we have borrowed a great deal from other disciplines to build buyer behavior theory. However, I think within a decade, it is very likely that other disciplines will be actively interested in buyer behavior and consequently borrow from it a set of concepts and research tools. Implicit in this prediction is my conviction that we either already have or will very soon have richness of thinking, variety of methodology and respectability of the discipline to motivate other disciplines to search for relevant concepts and methods from buyer behavior. It is interesting,
therefore, to speculate which disciplines are likely to borrow what from buyer behavior theory. I have described below three types of borrowing activities: (1) less mature disciplines of social science borrowing the methodology of research in buyer behavior, (2) older social sciences borrowing concepts and theories of buyer behavior, and (3) hard sciences borrowing both the theory and methodology of buyer behavior discipline.

**Less Mature Social Sciences**

Relative to some mature social sciences such as macroeconomics and experimental psychology, the buyer behavior discipline looks less mature. By the same token, there are many other social sciences which are even less mature than buyer behavior. I include political science, parts of sociology, history, religion, home economics, law, and public health in the category of less mature disciplines in social sciences. Just as we have borrowed from psychology and economics, I believe these disciplines are likely to borrow from us. In fact, this is already evident from the recent trend of citing marketing and buyer behavior references in these disciplines.

The less mature social sciences are likely to borrow the research methods identified and routinely utilized in buyer behavior. This includes longitudinal panels, cost-oriented sampling procedures, the survey methods of data collection, and the use of multivariate methods. In addition, there is always the possibility of utilizing marketing strategies and tactics to diffuse radical innovations in each of those disciplines.

**Mature Social Sciences**

Some of my colleagues may not agree with me, but, I think many of the traditional social sciences to which we owe so much are likely to at first participate in understanding of buyer behavior, and eventually to borrow from it. My prediction is based upon two facts. First, these traditional disciplines are currently facing the crisis of relevance because foundations of their theory and research have been based on less critical areas of human behavior. I include experimental psychology, social psychology and small group theory among others who have encountered this crisis in recent years. Second, many of the traditional disciplines have built formal models of behavior which have tended to be unrealistic or have become obsolete due to unprecedented technological change in our society in the last thirty years. I include the utility theory, micro theory of the firm and allied areas of economics and decision making as illustrative of this type of social sciences. In their search for societally relevant and useful problem areas, and to build realistic theories to help solve them the probability is extremely high that buyer behavior will become center of attention because social problems of a mass consumption society tend to be directly reflected in it.

Due to the problem-solving interests of these traditional social
sciences, I believe the traditional disciplines are likely to be more interested in the theoretical concepts and substantive findings than in the research methodology of buyer behavior. This looks also plausible in view of the fact that the traditional disciplines tend to be rich in methodology. I think buyer behavior has a lot to offer to the utility theory in economics from its thinking on choice behavior anchored to cognitive-evaluative structures. Similarly, I think we have a lot to offer to social psychology both in theory and research methodology in terms of conducting complex longitudinal studies of attitude change and brand choice behavior in naturalistic settings. Third, the growing literature and theory on diffusion of innovations in buyer behavior may well enable rural sociology to rethink diffusion theory. Finally, the recent emergence of efforts to build test batteries to measure life styles in buyer behavior is likely to significantly alter the thrust of personality tests in clinical psychology.

Although, most of the borrowing from buyer behavior by the traditional social sciences is likely to be with respect to concepts and substantive findings, there are certain areas of research methodology which may also be useful to them. These include the survey research aspects entailed in the design and execution of large scale studies in naturalistic settings.

### Hard Sciences

By hard sciences, I mean natural sciences and engineering based on physics, mechanics, chemistry and biochemistry. The hard sciences have reached a level of maturity in their own disciplines to an extent whereby it is inevitable for them to broaden their horizons. I expect them, therefore, to concern themselves with the problem of social consequences arising from technology and depletion of natural resources. This includes, for example, areas of pollution of resources, urban planning, and the like. Recently, we have witnessed research undertakings by the hard sciences in those areas of social concern which typically have been the domain of social scientists. It seems inevitable, therefore, that sooner or later, the hard sciences are likely to be exposed to, and interested in buyer behavior. When that happens, it is equally inevitable that they will extensively borrow both the substantive findings and research methodology, because the newer research areas will force them to examine alternative theories and methodology. For it is generally conceded that the concepts of hard sciences may only be analogously related to social problems.

### Conclusions and Discussions

In this paper, I have attempted to speculate on the future of buyer behavior theory. My speculations were limited to forecasting major directions which it is likely to take in the coming decade. These
predictions were based on the reviewing of historical perspective of buyer behavior theory and taking into account the contemporary events. I have suggested that four major changes are likely to occur in the structure of buyer behavior theory. They are (1) development of criteria to evaluate theories of buyer behavior, (2) construction of standardized tests and scales to measure buyer behavior constructs, (3) complex model building in an inductive manner with the use of several statistical procedures, and (4) research emphasis on nonpurposeful behavior. Second, I have suggested three major ways by which buyer behavior theory is likely to broaden its horizons, namely (1) development of cross-cultural theories of buyer behavior, (2) research and theories of buyer behavior for public policy purposes, and (3) research on social and environmental problems created by mass consumption societies. Third, I have predicted that a number of other disciplines will actively engage in buyer behavior and, therefore, substantially borrow research methodology and theory typically identified with buyer behavior theory. Specifically, I have suggested that (1) less mature social sciences such as political science, law, education and public health will borrow research methodology, (2) more mature and older social sciences are likely to borrow the concepts and theories from buyer behavior in their efforts to become more relevant and realistic disciplines, and (3) some natural sciences will borrow both methodology and theory from buyer behavior in the process of broadening their horizons to understand social consequences of technology.

Despite the bright predictions for the future of buyer behavior theory, I think there are some identifiable ailments in today's theories of buyer behavior which may impede the achievement of these predictions. First, most theories look upon buyer behavior as the consequence of some form of the decision-making process, and thus implicitly concede that buyer behavior consists of only goad-directed behavior. This may very well restrict the horizons to which buyer behavior theory can be broadened. Second, a large number of theories of buyer behavior often examine the buyer decision process from the point of view of marketing. While marketing management has made the greatest use of findings and concepts of buyer behavior, there is no reason why others from different viewpoints cannot utilize the same concepts and findings. Not only has this tendency made buyer behavior theory somewhat myopic, it has produced a terminology and vocabularily for buyer behavior which impedes its extension to nontraditional areas. Third, it seems that most theories of buyer behavior tend to overemphasize the process leading upto behavior and underemphasize the buying behavior or the antecedent and subsequent events which surround the behavior. Unless we consciously strive to remove these ailments, buyer behavior theory may take longer time to gain respectability across disciplines.

Footnotes

1. Jagdish N. Sheth is Professor of Business and Research Professor at the University of Illinois
References


