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Adults' Educational Needs and Continuous Professional Development

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Abstract

In order to decide on an education necessity, one has to answer the question "What and who do we organize a certain educational process or system for and why do we organize it in a certain way and not otherwise?". In order to decide on an education necessity one must also answer the question "What social problems does the educational process or system we devised solve?". The problem of permanent vocational training is important in sustaining the vocational conversion of the working class. A change of views and mentality is desirable regarding vocational training, in the sense that people need to be more aware of the importance of permanent learning, more motivated in order to broaden their horizon and more willing to develop their professional skills.

Keywords: *lifelong learning, globalization, network.*

1. Introduction

National economies and even national cultures are prove to globalization. By this, we mean that the activities of the society (politics, economy, culture, sports, etc.) work closely depending on each other, at international level in real time. This phenomenon has been recently made possible due to the infrastructure offered by communication and IT. Globalization involves a high cultural and civilization level of different people, which is impossible to achieve without an efficient and modern education system.

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2. The behavior of the consumer of vocational training services

The modern concept of marketing starts from the premise that the activity of any organization should be directed towards meeting the requirements - actual and potential - of consumers with maximum efficiency [4].

Consequently, any organization that bases its activity on marketing principles needs to know and anticipate the needs of consumers, as well as its purchasing and consumption behavior. Consumer behavior - an essential component of human behavior - can be defined as representing the totality of individual or group decision-making, directly related to the acquisition and use of goods and services, in order to meet current and future needs, including decision-making processes that precede and determine these acts [14].

Under current circumstances, it is normal to assume that marketing is constantly pursuing consumers' needs as a basic element in developing the right strategy that will lead to consumer satisfaction. But it needs to be taken into account that needs are a changing social category that is never satisfied [2].

In the relevant published literature, consumer behavior is structured on two basic components, with important implications in education, namely purchasing behavior and consumption behavior. Thus, in most cases, buying behavior is specific to prescribers, in the case of trainers who decide on the need for services for their trainees, buying these services on their behalf, or even other people (family members), while the final consumer is characterised by the specific consumer behavior. It is therefore necessary to study the behavior of the various decision-makers involved: prescribers, those who recommend consumption or use of the service, opinion leaders, people who, through their social position, have an influence on consumer behavior, family members or groups the individual belongs to [13]. Therefore, studying the behavior of the consumer of education services should not be limited to the individual as the final consumer, but should also focus on studying the relationship between the provider and the consumer and, in particular, on the set of factors that can influence this behavior.

2.1 Particularities of the consumer of training services

Consumers of training services differ from those of other goods and services, due to certain peculiarities resulting from the specificity of the market, the supplier-client relations and the way of organizing the education system. Unlike other areas where, as a rule, the number of consumers is limited in training, anyone can become theoretically the consumer at a time,

so the potential market is very high. However, institutions involved in adult education do not perceive consumers in this way. Traditionally, individuals are not considered to be consumers of training services until the need for training or the desire to evolve in their careers, although many of them find out from other colleagues or other sources the opportunities offered by the qualification/retraining. This restricts marketing to adult vocational training.

There are also training services that are not used due to an emergency such as unemployment or the possibility of becoming unemployed in the near future, but due to some consumer wishes for career promotion, in which case private firms or institutions. Education institutions that access European funds for adult training are profit-oriented and appeal to various marketing techniques to attract consumers and meet consumer needs and wishes through sustained promotion.

The main elements that differentiate the consumer of educational services from other consumers (in the case of employees) are [11]:

- the employer decides what is best for the consumer, what are the courses he / she needs; Due to the intervention of the payer - in general, the consumer often has no knowledge of the price, which is not one of the elements underlying the purchase of the service. This situation also generates positive aspects, which consist in providing training services independent of the consumer's ability to pay. On the other hand, only a few providers of training services can use the price as a marketing tool in the fight with competition, the most advantageous are the state institutions that have accessed U.E. and can offer free courses especially if there are long-term partnerships with employers or already established networks [9]; Access to training services is based on the referral and referral system by employers, which is why the target of marketing is not always the end consumer, but firms that could send their own staff to start-up-retraining training;

- Another differentiation factor is the lack of information about the attributes of the training service and its quality. There is no basis in assessing the quality of services offered to adults, the consumer will differentiate organizations from what he / she "hears" to other colleagues, friends, and not by factors such as training of trainers, managerial team competence, length of courses, adults after work schedule, the existence of nationally recognized degrees etc .

- limited capacity in assessing the outcome of the service, both because of the lack of information and the high level of competence of certain services; There is no data base available to the trainee where it can analyze the degree of employment of the graduates of the institution;

- the consumer of training services, as opposed to other consumers of goods and services, also faces a number of emotional factors, because

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for the unemployed adults, finding a job is vital for the well-being of the family, It attaches greater importance to the courses performed, especially if there is a chance to find a job immediately after the courses are completed (but there are, but not a few cases, the mandatory participation in the courses offered by Regional Labor Office, the only reason most of the time of participating in training courses).

Table 1. Differences between consumers of training services and other consumers of goods and services

Characteristics	The consumer of educational services	The consumer of services, other than educational services
Awareness of need	Rarely, except for the unemployed	Often
Involvement in the decision to purchase the service	Rarely. Often for those who want to evolve in their career	Often
Decision making	On subjective grounds, because there are no databases where they might be informed	Objectivity
Price knowledge	Not enough if the employer pays. Many if they have to pay for themselves	Many
Making the decision based on the price	Rarely if the employer pays	Often
Involvement of the paying third party	Often for the employees and the unemployed	Rarely
The use of the reference system	Often	Often
Possibility to choose between various options	Limited	Unlimited
Knowledge of attributes service	Few	Many
Ability to judge the quality of service	Reduced	High
Ability to evaluate the outcome	Reduced, there are no information	High
Target of marketing	Not always Always in private institutions	Always
Applying classic marketing techniques	Rarely Often in private institutions	Often

2.2. The consumer of continuous professional training services

Generally, when talking about consumers, we look at individuals, but also organizations and staff appear in this posture, each of these categories having different needs and behaviors.

Also, depending on the needs that are encountered at the market level, there are four categories of consumers:

- the first category, the most vulnerable, consists of the unemployed or social workers who need counseling and initiation, qualification and retraining courses;
- the second category consists of those who come to training because they want to learn new things for their own personal or professional development;
- the third category consists of those who need training because employers want to specialize them for another job or those who want to be very well informed in the field they have already chosen;
- the fourth category is made up of people who do not use training, but which often study by themselves, such as a foreign language.

Because of these considerations, authors identifies several types of buyers and training service users [9]:

1. The potential consumer is represented by any individual who might buy a service; Theoretically in education anybody can be the potential consumer;
2. the buyer is the person responsible for acquiring learning-training programs (employers, state institutions involved in social protection).
3. The client is an effective consumer, but he uses the services offered by training firms or training schools. This implies rather continuous and personal relationships than impersonal and sporadic relationships; The term customer can be used especially in the case of the relationship between the consumer and schools.

Other consumer categories such as trainers, schools or training firms, AJOFM, other organizations involved in adult education, etc. appear in education, although educators are rather As providers of training services, they may also appear as consumers for certain goods and services. Thus, training firms require the services of certain outside trainers in the case of required trades and where there are no trainers already employed by the firm, the work of these trainers depends on the references from their colleagues, sometimes even after the references of the trainees who had family members who came in contact with those people.

2.3 Factors that influence the behavior of the consumer of professional training services

Consumer behavior is the result of a complex of factors that act with different intensities. Knowing the system of factors acting in close interrelation and mutual interconditioning, we can establish how they act. The place and role they have in the system are viewed differently and that is why we encounter different classifications of these factors in the relevant published literature [12].

In his broad analysis of consumer behavior, Ph. Kotler starts from the analysis of the factors that influence him [7] (Fig. 1)

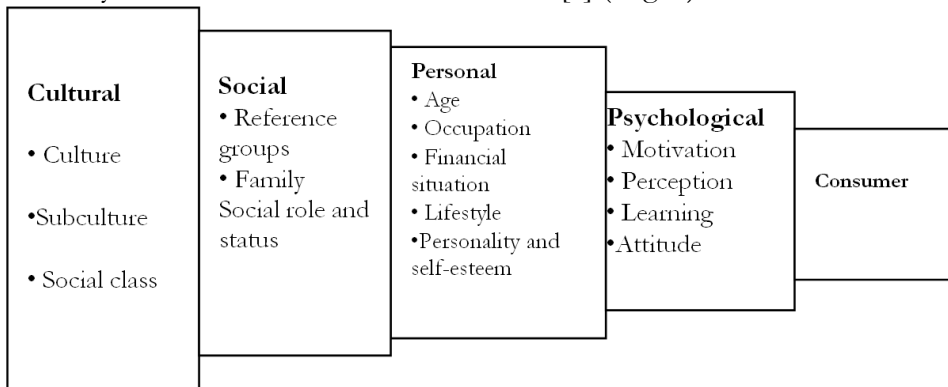


Figure 1. Factors influencing purchasing and consumption behavior

The classification of I. Cătoiu and N. Teodorescu is particularly interesting by the way of approach; who consider that the purchasing behavior is influenced by two types of variables: directly observable and deduced through inferential research. As a result, it classifies the factors of influence of the consumer behavior thus [14] (fig. 2):

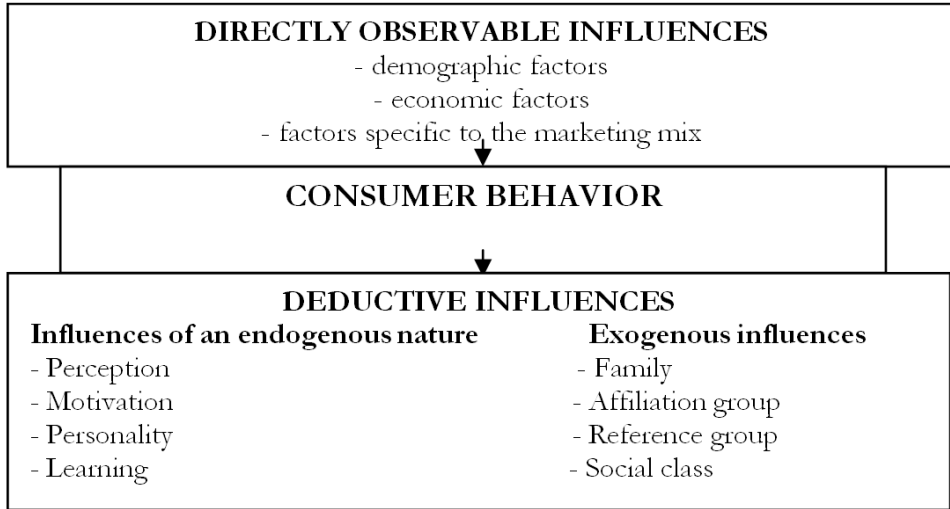


Figure 2. Factors of influence of consumer behavior
Source: Cătoi, I; Teodorescu, N., *Op. Cit.*, P. 41

Regardless of the classification, it is important to note that none of the sequential treatment factors can explain the behavior of the consumer on its own. The intersection area of these categories of variables is the one that can explain the concrete manifestation of the individual in the purchasing and consumption decision process.

Consumers form some dominant beliefs about educational products and services. Because the cognitive system can retain a relatively small number of information, dominant beliefs are used by the consumer to analyze the products and services offered. Typically, dominant beliefs will be those that consumers will retain as the most important, but will only be the ones most exposed.

Learning reflects an observable or unobservable change in an individual's behavior due to the gaining of experience that leads to an increase in the possibility that an act may be repeated. The practical significance of marketing learning theory is that some principles can be applied in the design of marketing policy. This can "build" the demand for a product by associating it with strong motives, providing a positive reinforcement.

A new educational institution, for example, can enter the market by resorting to the same motivations as its competitors, because - as a rule - buyers are more willing to shift their loyalty to a similar brand than to resort to another.

3. Conclusions

Awareness of the role of the staff by the educational organizations required its treatment in the marketing optics, so that the concept of internal marketing was introduced in literature and practice. In staff-based services, its role is very important, because its preparation, behavior and availability often depends on how the quality of service is perceived. That is why the staff is subject to specific strategies focusing on the recruitment, selection and engagement of the best staff, continuous training, motivation, as well as stimulating communication within the organization. And staff must perceive clients as allies in the effort to continuously improve their work. The process thus represents the main objective provider of customer service experience. Knowing this, a successful provider makes conscious process from the process the most spectacular element of the marketing mix. Partnerships and projects are key factors for ensuring the success of many organizations.

It highlights the importance of the use of educational marketing in educational institutions, namely the comparison of the actions taken by the educational institution with the assumed mission, objectives and goals. The use of marketing tools allows the design of educational products appropriate to a reality existing in the environment where the consumer of educational services develops and who will benefit from them. Many institutions make decisions about the design of educational products, without linking what the institution provides and what society expects, a lack of efficiency that is reflected in today's results.

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