

## ***FOUR THEORIES WITH POTENTIAL FOR SUCCESS WITHIN THE RELATION PRACTICE WITH THE TOURISTIC PRODUCTS CONSUMER***

**Aurelia Dumitru, PhD Student; Marioara Avram, Prof., PhD; Marian Siminică, Prof., PhD  
University of Craiova**

*Abstract: This study explores the main theories with incidence in describing, explaining and predicting behavior of touristic services consumer's. The research method is of meta-analysis type. Our study assumes that consumers' perceptions and beliefs play an important role in the decision to become a beneficiary of a tourist service offered by a travel company or by a touristic services intermediary. The literature retains several models that explain the relationship between consumers' behavior and information promotion of touristic product. There are four theories underlying the action of implementing these models subsequent to the idea of consumer's behavior: Selective Attention Theory, Congruity Principle Balance Theory, Cognitive Dissonance Theory. After exploring the potential of these theories in order to generate a competitive advantage for tourism service providers it is concluded that the convergent use of these four theories of planning, organizing, implementing, managing and controlling the marketing touristic activities is the method with the most significant impact on the behavior of travel services consumer.*

Keywords: psychologic theories, touristic products, consumer, perception, behavior

### **1. Introduction**

Regarding the communication process specific to marketing activity, the initial interest of the receptor and his willingness to engage in projected relation of annunciator have a fairly low level. Therefore, the sent messages must have all the necessary qualities to attract attention of the message receiver to convince him (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010).

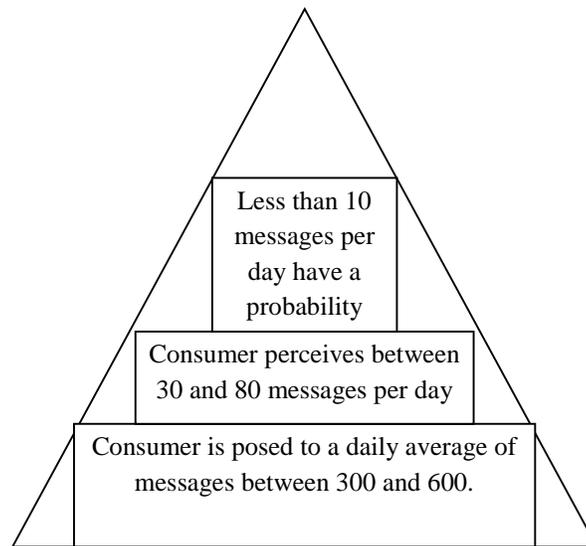
The communicational approach efficiency also depends on the fulfillment of the two requirements. On the one hand, communication cannot take place while the message, although enough persuasive, is able to attract the attention. On the other hand, even the message is such as designed to attract the attention of the recipient, the communication will not have the desired

effects if it is not also persuasive (Haynes, Flowers & Gurian, 2002; Gîrboveanu, 2005; Coman, 2009). From this perspective, the theories of knowing regarding perception, and those relating to the receptor's conviction is particularly important for professionals working in the field of communications of marketing. Studying the two phenomena (perception and conviction), scientists have developed a number of theories whose practical importance of marketing communications is undeniable. Among these, the most important are: Selective Attention Theory, Congruity Principle, Balance Theory, Cognitive Dissonance Theory.

## **2. Four Theories**

One of the major concerns of the marketers is to attract the public attention focused on the manufactured products, trademarks, or certain aspects of the organization. Attention involves allocation of the considered stimulus cognitive capacity it can be activated voluntarily or involuntarily. A fundamental characteristic of voluntary attention is selectivity. Thus, attention performs a filter system which has two main functions: the function of protecting and assisting of the consumers in decision making process. First, the phenomenon of selective attention performs a protective role: the consumer is always exposed to a huge number of messages particularly of a promotional nature; if they perceived these messages they would quickly reach saturation.

Because of selective attention, the consumer will receive only the messages of interest. Studies performed in the US have established the amount of advertising that is average posed the consumer and how they get to influence the behavior. The research results carried out are shown schematically in Figure 1.



*Figure 1. Advertising messages mortality*

The presented data in the Figure 1. should be considered only in terms of size, they are not generally valid. Overall, the number of messages that the consumer is posed in average varies from country to country depending on the volume of advertising investments, and the advertising pressure varies from one individual to another depending on his lifestyle and living environment. Whatever the actual extent of the phenomenon should be, filtration of advertisements must not be neglected by annunciators and their collaborators of advertising service providers. To have as much chance of survival, a message must be equipped with a number of exceptional qualities.

Outside the protective role, the selective attention fulfills also another function, namely to assist the consumer in making purchasing decision. For each individual, behavior towards a particular message varies depending on how it is perceived regarding its usefulness. From this point of view, the consumer relationship with a marketing communications specific message is subject of the influence of two factors: the implication degree in relation with considered stimulation and the risk degree associated to product acquisition that means the object of communication (Ogarca, 2007; Voinea, 2015; Stănescu, 2015; Smarandache, 2015). Designing any kind of communicational approach requires knowledge, by experts, of how the transmitted messages can influence consumer behavior. Besides, in marketing, communication is not a casual act; being subordinated to some clear objectives, regardless of the nature of the used techniques, it is subject to rules that correspond to the different types of behavior.

The specialty literature indicates the existence of several models that explain how individuals behave in relation to promotional messages. These models are based on fundamental theories and models that describe and analyze consumer behavior.

The complexity of the purchasing act, as the possibility of its studying from the perspective of several disciplines like experimental psychology, psychoanalysis, psychosociology or neuro-psychology or sociology make it impossible enunciation of a general theory of consumer behavior. Over the time there have been developed different theoretical models that contribute, each in its own way, to a better understanding of the purchasing process.

There were models such as the Marshallian, Pavlovian, Freudian or Veblenian, designed in a relatively independent manner, without their authors to consider the existent interrelationships in defining the behavioral processes. However, in conditions that no theory has no way to claim to be universal, each can be considered the best in a given situation. For instance, a consumer's decision to purchase a particular product can be primarily rational or may be taken from automatism. Also, as well a product may be elected because it addresses psychological needs, because his possession allows the affirmation of a certain status or belonging to a socio-cultural group, or because it corresponds to the value system or consumer's lifestyle.

Without contradicting, the theories dovetail, widening the area of relationship interpretation established between the consumer and communications efforts. Note also that, in conditions that advertising is still the most popular communication technique, most experts relate to it when address behavioral theories. According to behavioral theories and models there are several advertising approaches, of which the most important are:

- a. rational approach,
- b. behavioral approach,
- c. psychological approach,
- d. psychosocial approach.

### **2.1. Selective Attention Theory**

Involvement represents the personal perception level regarding the importance and/or interest evoked by a stimulus. Generally, the experts estimate that the degree of personal

involvement depends on the type of product, purchasing specific situation, consumer's personality and communication with him. As much the degree of involvement in relation with the stimulus is higher, the consumer will be more willing to pay attention to the message, considering it useful in purchasing making decision (Treisman, 1964; Treisman & Gelade, 1980; Duncan, 1984; Cowan, 1988; Lavie, Hirst, De Fockert & Viding, 2004). Regarding the risk that the consumer associates to the purchase decision, specialists say that it acts to filter the messages. To reduce the effects of perceived risk, so the made decision to be most comfortable (but not necessarily the best of rationally), the consumer selects information and, sometimes, he even distorts them. At the same time, however, face to face with the risk, the consumer will look for information that will be numerous and more credible.

The risk that consumer associates to purchase of a product depends on the nature of the product, consumer expectations, its experience and personality characteristics of each individual. There are mainly three categories of risk: physical risk, related to the physical-chemical characteristics and using characteristics of the product, financial risk linked to product price, maintenance costs and buyer resources and psychological risk, linked to the affective dimension and symbolic of the product (Vasile & Grabara, 2014).

In searching for information which would ensure the reduction of the perceived risk, the consumer will give more importance to individual sources. Therefore, in case of products with a high perceived risk it is appropriate the use of communication techniques that involve sending messages through individual channels, such as representatives of the sales force, skilled as prescribers, opinion leaders or their relatives, friends and knowledge. Instead, techniques such as advertising, which conveys messages through non-personal channels have a less important role, in particular they contribute to create a favorable context for the product purchase.

## **2.2. Congruity Principle**

The Congruity Principle was developed by C. Osgood and P. Tannenbaum (Osgood & Tannenbaum, 1955) who determined that the assessments change always occurs towards increasing congruity with the circumstance of the existing reference.

This principle can be used in marketing communications in messages building that allows changing the consumer attitudes towards desired by the annunciator (Tannenbaum & Gengel, 1966; Tannenbaum, 1967; Hastorf, Osgood & Ono, 1966; Buckley, Cross & De Mattos, 2015).

To determine which direction will change the attitude as following a dissonant statement should be evaluated the existing attitudes - which can be positive, neutral or negative, as well the nature of the statement which can be favorable or unfavorable. When the attitude regarding two stimuli is same or opposite, then the nature of the statement determines congruity or non-congruity (Budică & Dumitru-Traistaru, 2015; Voinea, Busu, Opran & Vladutescu, 2015) . Alternatively, if the attitude towards one of the stimuli is neutral, while the attitude towards other stimulus is positive or negative, then a message capable of causing a strong emotion will influence the neutral attitude. However, the assessments regarding two stimuli tend to change in congruity direction.

### **2.3. Balance Theory**

Balance Theory, called by some authors also Cognitive Consistency Theory was established by Fritz Heider, one of the founders of social psychology (Fritz, 1958). This theory is based on the individual's cognitive consistency, i.e. the human inclination to maintain a logical and consistent set of interrelated attitudes (Heider, 1988; Boss & Kleinert, 2015). When an individual is receiving new information, he tries to integrate it into the existing cognitive structure. If the received information matches with the previous knowledge, then it is maintained the steady state. Adversely, if the information disturbs him, affecting his cognitive organization, the individual will try to solve the problem and to restore the balance. This process of information assimilation was appointed by specialists the conflict solving paradigm.

The steady state does not represent a favorable framework for a change. Studies performed by researchers showed that the individual attitudes can be changed by creating a cognitive imbalance. Thus, deliberately creating a state of cognitive inconsistency, a capable annunciator can influence consumers to change their attitudes. Such an approach must be driven but very carefully: to give birth, through communication, to a state of imbalance, can be extremely risky, especially if it is not provided also a solution for imbalance solving. There is in

this case the possibility that the created state to provoke a negative attitude relative to the transmitter.

#### **2.4. Cognitive Dissonance Theory**

Cognitive Dissonance Theory refers to the psychological discomfort that occurs when there is a logical inconsistency between the cognitive elements (Festinger, 1962; Harmon-Jones & Mills, 1999). These are situations where the consumer receives messages that disturb his opinions and attitude, causing him to question the choices he made. In terms of marketing communications, cognitive dissonance has interest insofar as is strong enough to cause a change in consumer's attitude and behavior. Cognitive dissonance does not always appear in any act of purchase. To produce the phenomenon must be performed three conditions: the element around which is created the dissonance to be sufficiently involved for the consumer, and information source must be credible. From the moment of the beginning to confront the dissonant factor, the consumer acts to reduce the stress created that, on long-term is unbearable. For this, he can choose one of the following solutions:

- avoiding, even disruptive information reject;
- seeking for other information that reduce the disagreeable impact of initial information;
- discussing the credibility of the dissonant information source;
- profound change of opinions, attitudes or even consumer's behavior.

Cognitive Dissonance Theory finds practical applications also in marketing communications. One of the most important aspects in this respect is objectives realism of the communication approaches. It is good that annunciater to not propose a radical change in attitude or behavior of purchase if this change could generate a strong state of psychological discomfort. To protect himself, the consumer will not pay attention or credibility to a discordant message.

The usefulness of cognitive dissonance theory also concerns issues such as the source attributes and the content of the message (Smarandache & Vlăduțescu, 2014; Smarandache, Vlăduțescu, Dima & Voinea, 2015). Thus, that the message to have the desired effects of the transmitter, it is good to come from a credible source. From this point of view is important the transmitters organization credibility, and in situations where the consumer does not perceive it as a communication source it is good to be chosen communication relays with great credibility

(opinion leaders, specialists, etc.), concerning the message content, in some cases it is recommended the use of rational arguments, provided to the consumer in order to help him to justify the made purchases because of irrational reasons. The cognitive dissonance phenomenon has importance also on the communicational approaches organization domain. Annunciators which aim to cause radical changes in attitude or behavior of consumers using the cognitive dissonance must consider that, often the consumer resists to dissonant messages. Therefore, it is good that communication effort to be sustainable and to have continuity (Vlăduțescu, 2013a; Vlăduțescu, 2013b; Negrea, 2013; Voinea, 2013).

### 3. Conclusions

It is important to be added that in domain of marketing communications practical applicability of cognitive dissonance theory beyond the interest of organizations which want to change consumer's attitudes and behavior in a favorable direction for them. The phenomenon can be exploited also by those annunciators who want to maintain attracted customers. To do this, in post-purchase period, they will act on marketing communications plan, providing to consumer's information to help them to justify their choice.

### BIBLIOGRAPHY:

1. Boss, M., & Kleinert, J. (2015). Explaining social contagion in sport applying Heider's balance theory: First experimental results. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 16, 160-169.
2. Buckley, P. J., Cross, A., & De Mattos, C. (2015). The principle of congruity in the analysis of international business cooperation. *International Business Review*.
3. Budica, I., Busu, O. V., Dumitru, A., & Purcaru, M. L. (2015). Waste management as commitment and duty of citizens. *Polish Journal of Management Studies*, 11.
4. Coman, C. (2009). *Comunicarea de criză: Tehnici și strategii*. Polirom.

5. Cowan, N. (1988). Evolving conceptions of memory storage, selective attention, and their mutual constraints within the human information-processing system. *Psychological bulletin*, 104(2), 163.
6. Duncan, J. (1984). Selective attention and the organization of visual information. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 113(4), 501.
7. Festinger, L. (1962). *A theory of cognitive dissonance* (Vol. 2). Stanford university press.
8. Fritz, H. (1958). The psychology of interpersonal relations. *The Journal of Marketing*, 56, 322.
9. Gîrboveanu, S. R. (2005). *Comunicare și negociere în afaceri*. Craiova: Universitaria.
10. Dima, I. C., Grabara, J., & Vlăduțescu, S. (2014). Comparative Study on Online Education in Romania and Poland in Terms of Current Globalization. *Polish Journal of Management Studies*, 10(1).
11. Harmon-Jones, E. E., & Mills, J. E. (1999). Cognitive dissonance: Progress on a pivotal theory in social psychology. In *Scientific Conferences Program, 1997, U Texas, Arlington, TX, US; This volume is based on papers presented at a 2-day conference at the University of Texas at Arlington, winter 1997*. American Psychological Association.
12. Hastorf, A. H., Osgood, C. E., & Ono, H. (1966). The semantics of facial expressions and the prediction of the meanings of stereoscopically fused facial expressions. *Scandinavian journal of psychology*, 7(1), 179-188.
13. Haynes, A. A., Flowers, J. F., & Gurian, P. H. (2002). Getting the Message Out: Candidate Communication Strategy During the Invisible Primary. *Political Research Quarterly*, 55(3), 633-652.
14. Heider, F. (1988). *Balance theory* (Vol. 4). Springer Verlag.
15. Kotler, P., & Armstrong, G. (2010). *Principles of marketing*. Pearson Education.
16. Lavie, N., Hirst, A., De Fockert, J. W., & Viding, E. (2004). Load theory of selective attention and cognitive control. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 133(3), 339.

17. Negrea, Xenia (2013). Hard news, news value and fait divers in Romanian press. In I. Boldea (Ed.), *Studies on Literature, Discourse and Multicultural Dialogue: Communication and Public Relations* (pp. 153-160). Tirgu Mures: Arhipelag XXI.
18. Ogarca, R. F. (2007). The Influence of Culture on Decision Making. *Revista tinerilor economiști*, (9), 73-80.
19. Osgood, C. E., & Tannenbaum, P. H. (1955). The principle of congruity in the prediction of attitude change. *Psychological review*, 62(1), 42.
20. Smarandache, F. (2015). Neutrosophic social structures specificities. *Social Sciences and Education Research Review*, 2(1), 3.
21. Smarandache, F., & Vlăduțescu, Ș. (2014). Towards a Practical Communication Intervention. *Revista de cercetare și intervenție socială*, (46), 243-254.
22. Smarandache, F., Vlăduțescu, Ș., Dima, I. C., & Voinea, D. V. (2015, October). An Operational View in Computational Construction of Information. In *Applied Mechanics and Materials* (Vol. 795, pp. 201-208). Trans Tech Publications.
23. Stănescu, G. C. (2015). Telejustice - a phenomenon at the border between the right to information of the public and the right to image of accused persons. *Social Sciences and Education Research Review*, 2(1), 91.
24. Tannenbaum, P. H. (1967). The congruity principle revisited: Studies in the reduction, induction, and generalization of persuasion. *Advances in experimental social psychology*, 3, 271-320.
25. Tannenbaum, P. H., & Gengel, R. W. (1966). Generalization of attitude change through congruity principle relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 3(3), 299.
26. Treisman, A. M., & Gelade, G. (1980). A feature-integration theory of attention. *Cognitive psychology*, 12(1), 97-136.
27. Treisman, A., 1964. Selective attention in man. *British Medical Bulletin*, 20, 12-16.
28. Vasile, E., & Grabara, I. (2014). Agricultural exploitation from the perspective of Romania's integration into the European Union. *Polish Journal of Management Studies*, 10(2).

29. Vlăduțescu, Ștefan (2013a). A battle with uncertainty 1 of communication as an academic discipline: title uncertainty. In I. Boldea (Ed.), *Studies on Literature, Discourse and Multicultural Dialogue: Communication and Public Relations* (pp. 493-504). Tirgu Mures: Arhipelag XXI.
30. Vlăduțescu, Ștefan (2013b). Communicative message as nuclear thinking of an aspirational desire. In I. Boldea (Ed.), *Studies on Literature, Discourse and Multicultural Dialogue: Communication and Public Relations* (pp. 212-218). Tirgu Mures: Arhipelag XXI.
31. Voinea, D. V. (2015). The journalists' obligation of protecting the victims of sexual assault. *Social Sciences and Education Research Review*, 2(1), 101.
32. Voinea, D. V., Busu, O. V., Opran, E. R., & Vladutescu, S. (2015). Embarrassments in managerial communication. *Polish Journal of Management Studies*, 11.
33. Voinea, Dan-Valeriu (2013). Analysis of the socio-demographic, cultural and economic status of Romanian immigrants in Illinois. In Iulian Boldea (Ed.), *Studies on Literature, Discourse and Multicultural Dialogue: History* (pp. 121-130). Tirgu Mures: Arhipelag XXI.