

Consumer Behavior Research: Theoretical and Methodological Paradigms Trending

Investigación sobre el comportamiento del
consumidor: tendencias en paradigmas
teóricos y metodológicos

3



Abstract

The purpose of this chapter is to become a guide for future research agenda that allows researchers in marketing and other disciplines to find a way to drive research studies in consumer behavior. The text provides an interpretative analysis of the latest editorials, reviews and research articles published in top-tier consumer research journals. Journals such as the International Journal of Consumer Studies, Journal of Consumer Affairs, Journal of Consumer Behavior, Journal of Consumer Culture, Journal of Consumer Psychology, Journal of Consumer Research, and Psychology & Marketing among others were selected to offer a broad view of the challenges and research opportunities in this growing research area. Analyzed papers have been grouped by common topics into five theoretical streams (*homoeconomicus*, psychodynamic, behavioral, cognitive, and humanistic) and two methodological perspectives (positivist, interpretive). Results suggest strong affinity in recent papers to cognitive-humanistic-interpretive research focus, with online consumer behavior, transformative and culture consumer behavior and green consumption as main and commonly treated topics. Conclusions and future perspectives on consumer behavior research are, also presented.

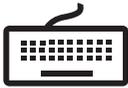
Keywords: Consumer behavior, literature review, positivism, interpretivism, perspectives.



Resumen

El objetivo de este capítulo es convertirse en una guía que permita a los investigadores en mercadeo y otras disciplinas encontrar una manera de impulsar la investigación sobre el comportamiento del consumidor. El texto presenta un análisis interpretativo de los últimos editoriales, reseñas y artículos de investigación publicados en revistas de primer nivel sobre el tema. Se seleccionaron revistas como *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, *Journal of Consumer Affairs*, *Journal of Consumer Behavior*, *Journal of Consumer Culture*, *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, *Journal of Consumer Research* y *Psychology & Marketing*, entre otras, para ofrecer una visión amplia de los desafíos y oportunidades de investigación en el área. Los artículos analizados fueron agrupados por temas en común en cinco corrientes teóricas (*homo economicus*, psicodinámica, conductual, cognitiva y humanísticas) y en dos perspectivas metodológicas (positivista, interpretativa). Los resultados sugieren una fuerte afinidad hacia el enfoque de investigación cognitiva-humanística-interpretativa en artículos recientes, mientras que el comportamiento del consumidor en línea, el comportamiento transformador del consumidor y el comportamiento cultural del consumidor y el consumo verde son los temas principales y comúnmente tratados. También se presentan conclusiones y perspectivas para el futuro de la investigación sobre el comportamiento del consumidor.

Palabras clave: Comportamiento del consumidor, reseña de literatura, positivismo, interpretativismo, perspectivas.



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Introduction

Consumer behavior as a discipline emerged in the 1960s and is characterized by two paradigms: A positivist (traditional dominant paradigm that assumes the consumer is rational) and a non-positivist (interpretive and postmodern perspective that assumes consumers construct meanings based on a subjective shared cultural experience) (Pachauri, 2001). This division in terms of the paradigmatic approach followed has repercussions in the methodological tactics applied.

Consumer behavior has been defined as the acquisition, consumption, and disposition of products, services, and ideas by consumers (Jacoby, Szybillo, & Berning, 1976). Other definitions add to products and services, the study of ideas and experiences and the satisfaction of needs and desires (Solomon, Russell-Bennett, & Previte, 2012). Similarly, Blackwell, Miniard, and Engel (2006) define consumer behavior as activities that people engage in when they obtain, consume and dispose of products and services. It includes all the factors that affect the way the consumer decides and reaches his purchase decision; not only at the time of purchase but also before the purchase and after the purchase. In sum, consumer behavior studies the relation of consumers with goods (Olshavsky, 1985).

Activities that can fall in the definition of consumer behavior mentioned in the previous paragraph are abundant, and after fifty years of research on the topic, the number of subjects covered by consumer research is very broad. With the years, consumer research has evolved, from resolving complaints to information searching, decision-making, consumer fraud, debt profiles, saving needs hierarchy, welfare reform, innovations diffusion, identity theft, financial literacy, and health-care reform (DeVaney, 2016). The purpose of consumer research is to solve consumer problems such as building an identity, pursuing consumer well-being, achieving meaningful social relationships, using household and global resources (time,

money, energy) effectively, and ensuring long-term health care adherence, among others (Peracchio, Luce, & McGill, 2014).

The methodological approach taken by consumer behavior researchers is also very varied, but has focused around experimental designs. Other approaches are more survey focused, and others use statistical or economic models (Luedicke, Thompson, & Giesler, 2010). However, a growing application of qualitative methods has led to some division between consumer behavior researchers based on methodological orientation into a positivist (quantitative) and interpretive (qualitative) split (Goulding, 1999). Although there are no boundaries in terms of which topics can be analyzed/studied with which method, this review attends the latest consumer research using these two broad classifications, based on most cited papers and intentionally looking for some approaches in both sides.

Another way to classify consumer behavior research is based on theoretical approaches and models across history. Commonly, economic antecedents of modern consumer behavior research are closer to neoclassical microeconomics of 19th century approach. Nevertheless, psychological, anthropological, and sociological applications have been included in consumer research, bringing new approaches like psychodynamic, humanistic, behavioral and cognitive models.

Based on this, the chapter goal is to provide a framework of the present and future trends of consumer behavior research, analyzing more important documents published in highly important journals for discipline. This analysis will be presented using two main categories: i) methodological approaches, considering positivist and interpretive paradigms, and ii) theoretical approaches, based on consumer behavior modeling categories. With this grouping, conclusions will be addressed to infer which methodological and theoretical approaches are becoming commonly used in consumer behavior research, and also which of it are becoming unused.

In this way, this chapter will be structured as follow. The first part will present the methodological considerations taken to aim the main goal. Then, traditional topics researched in consumer behavior that corresponds to a more positivist paradigm and with psychodynamic and behavioral theories will be shown. After this, the next part will present the interpretive paradigm with consumption, consumer culture research, transformative research, and anthropomorphism as main topics of demonstrated advances in cognitive and humanistic consumer behavior theories. Finally, we will draw some conclusions and future research implications.

Methodology

For this research, we follow the systematic literature review procedure proposed by Creswell (1997), following Cochrane Methodology recommendations (Green & Higgins, 2005). The methodological process is described in figure 3.1. First, we define the search criteria based on documents published in the main academic journals about consumer behavior indexed in the SCImago Journal & Country Rank 2017.

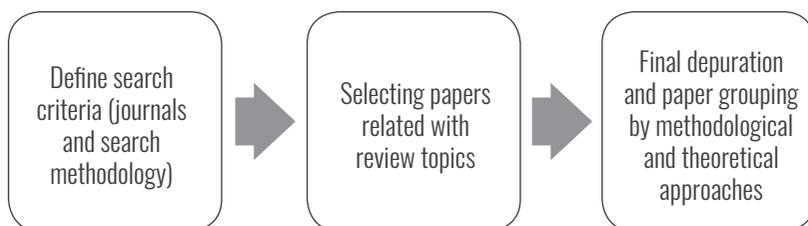


Figure 3.1 Methodological process of this literature review.

Source: authors.

As a result of this first stage, the following journals were selected for paper search and selection: *Journal of Consumer Research* (United States), Q1 in business; *Psychology and Marketing* (United States), Q1 in marketing; *Journal of Consumer Culture* (England), Q1 in cultural studies; *Journal of Consumer Psychology* (United States), Q1 in business; *International Journal of Consumer Studies* (England), Q3 in business; *Journal of Consumer Affairs* (United States), Q3 in business; and the *Journal of Consumer Behavior* (England), Q3 in business. The selection criteria included: tradition of journal, number of papers published, quartile, acceptance of qualitative and quantitative results (Green & Higgins, 2005).

Then, the second stage related to the search of documents focused on articles that alluded to methodologies and theories on consumer behavior, using terms as “consumer behavior”, “interpretive”, “positivist”, “model”, and “theoretical”, because this chapter interest was focused in the methodologies used in consumer behavior researches to find some topics similarities. Although documents from the last five years were prioritized (specifically since 2013).

From this, the third stage of the final selection of documents was developed. Papers were analyzed and grouped according to the methodologies, theories, and paradigms that were selected in its preparation. Finally, 152 papers of literature review and applied research documents were considered. The main criterion for grouping documents was the theoretical framework proposed by Bray (2008), based on the postulates by Schiffman and Kanuk (1994) and Foxall (1990), which include: main topics, research formulations and theoretical frameworks. Table 3.1 summarizes five theoretical categories taken for the papers classification.

From this classification, the articles were analyzed according to their closest methodological position between positivist or interpretive paradigm. Nevertheless, there are no limits written in stone that classify the methodologies as exclusive of either positivist or

interpretive position, we try to identify the work within either philosophy as suggested in literature (Davies & Fitchett, 2005). Main criteria for classifying selected research papers are described as presented in table 3.2.

Table 3.1. Theoretical categories for paper grouping

Theoretical category	Description
<i>Homoeconomicus</i>	Consumer is rational Utility maximization criteria Effort minimization criteria
Psychodynamic	Consumer behavior is subject to biological influence through instinct Based on environmental stimulus
Behavioral	Consumer behavior is explained by external events Consumption is often considered as a learned process Mental processes or internal states are frequently considered
Cognitive	Consumer acts as an information processor Intrapersonal cognition derives in consumption observed actions Attitudes, desires, needs, and motivations are important explanations of consumption actions
Humanistic	Consumption emerges as an introspective process related to emotions, egoism, and volition Attitudes, norms, expectations, and values help to explain consumer behavior

Source: authors based on Bray (2008), Foxall (1990), and Schiffman and Kanuk (1994).

Table 3.2. Methodological features considered for paper groupings

Features	Positivist	Interpretivist
Analytical preferred method	Quantitative	Qualitative
Usage on Consumer Behavior Theory	Testing theories for support real market usage	Analyze consumption as a whole
Method	Deductive method	Inductive method
Type of results	Inference (“why” questions)	Consumer subjective meanings (descriptive)
Subject under study	Consumer	Not restricted to consumers (groups, policies, ethics, and consumerism)
Quality criteria	Validity, generalization, reliability, and verification	Small samples or individuals sets

Source: authors based on Davies & Fitchett (2005).

As seen, positivists follow the principles of natural scientific research by testing theories through experiments to probe whether the theory is true or false (Hammersley, 1993; Kolakowski, 1993). This supports the idea of a single reality that is independent of human perception (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, & Jackson, 2012). Positivists follow a deductive method of research in the form of cause-effect relations. For example, stimulus A causes response B. Positivism can also answer the “why” question by making inferences about the causal factors of phenomena. Positivism can be used to predict human behavior. For positivists, the subject under study is the consumer, and its population of study has to meet the criteria of validity, generalization, reliability, and verification (Hogg & Maclaran, 2008).

The positivism philosophy typically follows quantitative research methods. Quantitative methods focus on the measurement of the constructs under study (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, & Jackson, 2012), discovers patterns in data (Babbie, 2015), and undertakes rigorous statistical tests (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009) to data collected by instruments that had been previously tested for reliability and validity. Positivist samples are generally highly structured, large, and tend to use structured questionnaires, but can also use qualitative research to become more effective (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, , 2009).

On the other hand, papers classified as part or closer to the interpretive paradigm consider research that is not restricted to the consumer but can research broader topics, such as public policy, ethics, and consumerism. Interpretivists want to understand consumption for its own sake, rather than because the knowledge generated can be applied by marketers (McGrath & Holbrook, 1996).

Interpretivists relies on small samples and qualitative methods. They use in-depth interviews, focus groups, and ethnography (Brown, 1993), analyzes consumption as part of a social and cultural world in which consumers live, and evaluate the external factors that affect consumers with the aid of sociology and anthropology. Interpretivists focus more on the individual and the uniqueness of a situation. Their analysis is based on interpretation rather than explanation (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009).

In the same way, interpretivists try to get as close as possible to the experiences lived by consumers, and they do it with the use of qualitative methods such as ethnography, in which the researcher exchanges information with individuals about the world in which they live (Gergen, 1985). For interpretive research, the sample size is not so important; the focus of inquiry becomes the consumers' "subjective" meanings and language or discourses (Buttle, 1989; Fuat-Firat, Dholakia, & Venkatesh, 1995). Although, the focus of interpretive research is not limited to an individual consumer but can also inquire about groups of consumers or specific communities.

Classifying Consumer Behavior Current Research by Theories and Methodologies

Consumer behavior researchers base their studies on a diverse set of literature. Not only reduced to psychology, marketing, and other disciplines, but also its own bibliographic base (Leong, 1989). Some of the theoretical frameworks used by consumer behavior researchers are Consumer Culture Theory (CCT), Information Processing Theory (IPT), Behavioral Decision Theory (BDT), Practice Theory (PT) and some specifically subjects like cognitive models, motivation, and persuasion. In the next years, researchers in consumer behavior can specialize in each of these theories or build linkages between them. Building bridges is a desirable road path (Peracchio, Luce, & McGill, 2014) and this review seeks to build this kind of relations. In this way, this section describes how consumer behavior current research could be classified into previously presented theoretical and methodological approaches.

Based on this, this section is divided into three parts. First, we will draw research with methodological issues related to positivism. Then, previous research with interpretive methodological features is analyzed. Finally, some research topics that count with mixed or multi-methodological designs are summarized. Table 3.3 synthesizes the main results obtained after grouping analyzed papers on topics, across methodologies and theories.

Positivist Consumer Behavior Research

Researches related to positivist methodologies are, for nature, associated with problems that require generalizations. For instance, statistical or mathematical formalization are shared characteristics on papers that cover topics as the country of origin, retail, choice and online consumer behavior. Nevertheless, topics treated commonly in consumer behavior seems to be focused on behavioral and psychodynamic theoretical frameworks.

Table 3.3. Main topics found in current consumer behavior research by methodologies and theories

Theoretical category	Positivist	Interpretive
Homoeconomicus	Consumer choice Prices	Consumer learning Critics on rational individual
Psychodynamic	Country of origin and brands	Environmental context Cultural consumption
Behavioral	Retail and point of sales Choice Online consumer behavior	Consumer neuroscience Consumer culture Anthropomorphism Online consumer behavior Attitudes and emotions Children as consumers
Cognitive	Retail and point of sales Choice Online consumer behavior	Consumer perceptions Prospect Theory
Humanistic	Food security Finance Green consumer behavior	Children as consumers Transformative consumer research Anti-consumption Consumer well-being Food security Finance Green consumer behavior

Source: authors based on literature.

Papers about the study of Country of Origin Effect and its effect on products and countries are more associated with psychodynamic theories because of its coverage of the influence of environmental stimuli. This research has given rise to multiple studies such as destination branding and its fit with personality (Hultman, Strandberg, Oghazi, & Mostaghel, 2017) or its effect on brand loyalty in the wine market (Bruwer & Buller, 2013; Bruwer, Buller, Saliba, & Li, 2014)

Retailing consumer behavior research is also a current topic in academic literature. With so many new technologies affecting the consumer at the point of sale, the study of how they are affecting the shopping experience is crucial. Causal designs not only correspond to a positivist point of view. These designs imply the usage of variables mainly related to the behavior and action of consumers. In this way, the behavioral theory is the principal associated stream of research. Some examples of research on this stream shows analysis related to the relationship of usage of mobile devices for retailing activities (Rippé, Weisfeld-Spolter, Yurova, Dubinsky, & Hale, 2017).

Another widely covered topic is related to atmospherics at the point of sales. This topic has been studied in marketing during decades (Kotler, 1973), but now includes so many climate elements that make necessarily more research to understand the impact of each feature separately and under which conditions it is more effective. The study of environmental elements in retail settings includes studies such as the congruence between music and flooring (Imschloss & Kuehnl, 2017) or weather harmony and its influence on store satisfaction and re-patronage intention (Garaus, 2017).

Besides topic of concern to positivist consumer behavior researchers is choice, a topic of high relevance given that the product we choose is the product we purchase. The study of choice tries to explain all the factors that affect consumers' real choices. The search to identify factors that affect choice has taken researches to study a wide variety of aspects, such as the effects of dynamic sensorimotor experiences (Kwon & Adaval, 2013); the value of mistakes in product choice (Reich, Kupor, Smith, Dahl, & Hoegg, 2018); the effect of advertising metaphors on choice and the moderating role of goal orientation in choice decisions (Kao, Zhang, Yu, & Wu, 2017); the role of negative publicity in consumer evaluations of sports stars and their sponsors (Yoon & Shin, 2017), or switching behavior as a function of the number of options available (Sharma & Nair, 2017).

Additionally, the growing importance of the internet has opened paved roads for researchers to study online consumer behavior. Positivist research developed on online consumer behavior is focused on understanding the importance of sharing information by network, but also how the information they are sharing is displayed. For example, if the information is presented in a summarized mean format it has a higher impact than if the information is in a distribution format. Online consumers want information that is easier to process (Kostyk, Niculescu, & Leonhardt, 2017).

In the same way, loyalty is a topic that has been widely studied by traditional positivist researchers. For any business, it is imperious to establish how to maintain current customers and attract new customers to buy their goods. Today, researchers are studying the effectiveness of monetary versus non-monetary loyalty programs (Ruzeviciute & Kamleitner, 2017), and have also focused their search on online allegiance behavior. For example, in the field of online games, online game social migration affects game devotion and addiction (Wei *et al.*, 2017).

Interpretive Consumer Behavior Research

Topics founded in this review on interpretive consumer behavior research seems to be focused on cognitive and humanistic theoretical categories. Specifically, comprehension of the consumer in context requires usage of methods that allow analyzing more depth and specific information. Advances in these methods, and the strong inclusion of methods from psychology, anthropology, and sociology, derives on coverage of topics as neuroscience, culture, transformation, among others.

Neuroscience applications to understand consumer behavior has been called consumer neuroscience. Neuroscience comes with a diverse toolbox to provide insights into the brains of consumers. Some of the most used observation devices are eye tracking, galvanic skin response (GSR) and functional magnetic resonance (fMRI).

For example, fMRI has been used to analyze the response of consumers to marketing, and how women respond to sexualized and domestic images of women (Vezich, Gunter, & Lieberman, 2017). fMRI has also been used to explain how some consumers of financial products tend to position themselves as preys, which causes them to judge the relationship with investors in negative terms (Mesly, 2017).

In this way, consumer behavior studies have been refurbished with neuroimaging and neuroscience techniques that have found answers to drivers of consumer choice and have started to explore the connections between our five senses and consumer behavior. Each study specializing in one of the senses such as the scent (Rimkute, Moraes, & Ferreira, 2016).

But comprehension of consumer behavior must also include the cultural context of consumption acts. Consumer culture theory addresses the sociocultural, experiential, symbolic, and ideological aspects of consumption (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). While consumer culture research is said to accept methodological pluralism, consumer culture research remains synonymous with interpretive research among many scholars (Horowitz, 2009). Consumer culture, research is usually based on theories and methodologies borrowed from cultural anthropology and sociology of consumption (Hämäläinen, 2014).

Researchers of consumption have studied it in different economic activities: the use of cars and motorbikes (Hansen, 2017); the transformation of tequila into a higher status liquor (Gaytán, 2017); touring (Sonnenburg & Wee, 2015); seafood (Christenson, O’Kane, Farmery, & McManus, 2017); special diets (Parviainen, Elorinne, & Väisänen, 2017); fruits (Silvestre-Godinho & Batista-Alves, 2017), clothes (Karademir-Hazir, 2017); and the evolution of video game sellings (Kuo, Hiler, & Lutz, 2017). Consumer culture behavior theories have been also used to understand people who pay for a painful experience (Scott, Cayla, Cova, Fischer, & Kozinets, 2017), how product aesthetics can discourage the use of a product or lower its

enjoyment (Wu, Samper, Morales, & Fitzsimons, 2017) or why video game users obtain value from the negative, spiritual-like aspects of the video game story (Brock, 2017).

Another theory that has been used to provide explanations for consumer preference from interpretive methodologies is anthropomorphism (Maeng & Aggarwal, 2017). One of the reasons is because consumers tend to humanize brands. Brands are now part of us and our lives and we establish human like relations with them as we would with other human beings (MacInnis & Folkes, 2017). We want them so much to be humans, that we personify machines and gadgets (Mourey *et al.*, 2017) so we can relate more to them. Brands with human-like features can be useful in the aid of socially excluded consumers to establish interpersonal connections (Chen, Wan, & Levy, 2017). However, the connection with human-like objects is not always positive, for example, female mannequins can have a negative impact on consumers that have a low self-esteem (Argo, Dahl, Peracchio, & Adaval, 2018).

Applications of interpretive methodologies also show important findings for the analysis of different consumer behavior in uncluttered online research highways. Since consumers behave differently online, we need to understand how different groups perform. For example, gender and age can be a determinant in consumer attitudes toward digital piracy (Tjiptono, Arli, & Viviea, 2016) as young Taiwanese students are open to illegal downloading of pop music because they believe they will not get caught (Pai & Chie, 2017). As a result, different groups have different levels of sensitivity to share personal data (Milne, Pettinico, Hajjat, & Markos, 2017) and based on consumer segments in social commerce, researchers have been able to classify them into social patrons, wary explorers, and sporadic explorers (Nadeem, Juntunen, & Juntunen, 2017). Another example shows how offline word of mouth can be an effective tool to create loyal customers, but online word of mouth does not translate into patronizing behavior, at least for Indian online shoppers (Mishra & Mishra, 2011).

Other topics related to the influence of information and communication technologies in consumer behavior conduct to analyze specific online influences in the way we behave. One curious example is shown in a research that seeks to demonstrate if triathletes sharing news online or an average consumer commenting on daily feelings and activities is related to performance and satisfaction with sporting events (Prado-Gascó, Calabuig-Moreno, Añó-Sanz, Núñez-Pomar, & Crespo-Hervás, 2017).

But if one subject is clear reference to define the interpretative approach in theories of consumer behavior within the cognitive theoretical approach of cognitive, that is the attitudinal and emotional impact on consumption. Attitude research has been for a long time the cornerstone of behavioral studies. Attitudes continue bringing insight to understand behavior, for example, some researchers are theories to understand consumer attitudes towards cow's milk alternatives and variants (Kempen *et al.*, 2017). Others are deepening the understanding of risky attitudes and behaviors such as combining alcohol and energy drinks (Cornil, Chandon, & Krishna, 2017). It means is not only understanding attitudes is important, but also how these are transferred from one generation to the other (Britt, 2016). How to influence attitudes is crucial, and sometimes unexpected factors can be used in their modification, such as using music tempo to modify attitudes using advertising (Stewart & Koh, 2017).

Attitudes are connected with the mood; the difference is that attitudes are long lasting while the mood is a transient affective state. Consumer researchers have also pursued the understanding of how mood affects choice and preference. For example, how being in a positive mood increase choice deferral (Etkin, Ghosh, Dahl, & Laboo, 2018) Attitudes transform into goals (Perugini & Bagozzi, 2001), and understanding goals has become a field of study in its own. Today, researchers are studying how goal specificity shapes motivation (Wallace, Etkin, Gita, & Bagchi, 2018) and how to help consumers to keep progress with their goals (Koo & Fishbach, 2012).

Some researchers separate the study of attitudes from emotions. Emotions have become key to understand why some marketing messages are more impactful than others are. For example, in the recall of social ads (Missaglia, Oppo, & Mauri, 2017), how certain emotions can promote certain behaviors such as feeling powerful and increased savings in the bank (Garbinsky, Klesse, & Aaker, 2014) or determining female consumer emotions when considering garments to size (Kasambala, Kempen, & Pandarum, 2016).

The study of emotions has also been subclassified into positive and negative emotions. Some researchers have isolated each negative emotion according to the product of consumer setting. For example, to study embarrassment in products (Londono, Davies, & Elms, 2017), service encounters (Kilian, Steinmann, & Hammes, 2018), and how men and women cope with the embarrassment of buying condoms (Arndt & Ekebas-Turedi, 2017). An additional powerful negative emotion is guilt (Arlı, Leo, & Tjiptono, 2016), since guilt and moral identity also help consumers to connect with ethical brands (Newman & Trump, 2017).

Another topic of growing importance in consumer behavior is the study of children as consumers (Pourali, Zadeh, & Yahyaei, 2016). Children are an important market segment and many companies target their marketing efforts at them. This can be very profitable for companies, but could also become a menace to children, who are more vulnerable to marketing tricks and manipulation. This is why it is very important to understand how brand awareness is developed in children (Aktaş-Arnas, Taş, & Gürgah-Oğul, 2016) and how parents and children live shopping experience (Gram & Grønhoj, 2016). Some of these topics include positivist methodological issues that show how mixed methodologies can work to expand the comprehension of behaviors in particular segments of consumers.

Combining topics like online consumer behavior and segments as children are also taking relevance. Children are now part of social networks and we need to understand how they are affected by

them in terms of their social identity, self-esteem, and anticipated emotions. Social networks are affecting children commitment and desire to recommend brands (Hook, Baxter, & Kulczynski, 2016). Similarly, social network games for children are also loaded with advertising messages which affect their purchase intention (Vanwesenbeeck, Ponnet, & Walrave, 2017)

Discussions about ethical consumerism and development of consumer behavior practical implications allow to get topics associated with humanistic consumer behavior theories. One important example in child population recognizes that these segments are defenseless against marketing campaigns offering “delicious food” which can trigger childhood obesity problems. Therefore, researchers are studying which are the policy and marketing changes needed to control childhood obesity (Dumitrescu, ShawHugner, & Shultz., 2016). The targets are not only children but also children’s parents, who are influenced to purchase functional or not functional foods (Annunziata, Vecchi, & Kraus, 2016). The abuse of marketing messages targeted to children could make them more materialistic. Therefore, researchers have studied how materialism develops in children and how materialism is reinforced and perpetuated in adulthood (Richins, 2017).

Another demonstration of advances in humanistic consumer behavior theories is shown in Transformative Consumer Research (TCR), which is defined as an academic, theory-based research that examines individual and group-level problems and opportunities related to consumption, with the goal of improving consumer well-being (Ozanne, Mick, Pechman, & Pettigrew, 2013). It takes advantage of the transformative potential of the human condition (Firat & Dholakia, 2017).

More examples of TCR consumer research are based on the study of possessions and self (Belk, 1988). It is important to understand how these possessions can benefit us or become our doom. Understanding how we relate to possessions helps to improve our consumer experiences, for example how couples talk about their

shared self, possessions and consumption experiences (Wong, Hogg, & Vanharanta, 2016).

TCR shows that transforming the consumption enables us to change people's beliefs. A paper shows how the belief that people can make a new start can be the beginning of a new life is related to brand perception (Wei *et al.*, 2017). Other paper shows how brands affect life satisfaction and relationships (Brick, Fitzsimons, Chartrand, Fitzsimons, 2017). Research has demonstrated brands are working for consumers' health and well-being. For example, researchers have studied how branded fitness such as CrossFit and Bikram yoga get into consumers' everyday life (Powers & Greenwell, 2016).

Humanistic paradigm and theories of consumer research that uses interpretive methodologies are available also on topics like online sustainable consumption and recycling practices (Eden, 2017). Research also shows how to improve working environments of visiting coffee shops, where consumers can concentrate more on their job than in an open office (Mehta, Zhu, & Cheema, 2012). Consumers could perceive the benefit of giving experiential gifts friends in an attempt to nurture strong social relationships, as a sample of how consumer research can change daily life interactions (Chan & Mogilner 2016).

On the other hand, when consumption is not adequately managed it can lead to negative behaviors, such as the irresponsible consumption of Botox (Cook & Dwyer, 2017) or the social ritual of vaping (also known as the use and consumption of e-cigarettes) (Yule & Tinson, 2017). The knowledge gained by understanding the transformation of consumption could be used to change of consumption patterns in China (Zhang, 2017); stop the violence generated by Black Friday sales (Smith & Raymen, 2017) or manage responsibly alcohol-related advertisements in women's magazines (Törrönen & Rolando, 2016).

A topic treated in a special issue in the Journal of Consumer Affairs is anti-consumption and consumer well-being (Lee & Youn,

2015), clearly related to humanistic consumer behavior. Anti-consumption includes boycotting, consumer resistance, activism, culture jamming, dissatisfaction, complaining behavior, undesired self, organizational dis-identification, voluntary simplification, and brand avoidance and centers on the reasons against consumption (Chatzidakis & Lee 2013; Lee, Bhatt, & Suri, 2018). Anti-consumption could become a problem even for iconic brands such as Nutella. Nutella has been under attack thanks to its association with the use of palm oil. Until now, it has been strong enough to resist anti-consumption claims but such disputes can cause the brand to lose part of its strength (Cova & D'Antone, 2016).

In a more recent stream, topics as food security, finance, and green consumer behavior are becoming common and widely researched. About food security, more than 800 million in the world suffer from insufficient food. This topic attracts the interest of researchers of very different disciplines. Research that helps to minimize the risk factor and keep people from starving are desperately needed becomes relevant and important in practical life. More research is needed to understand the success of school breakfast programs (Fletcher & Frisvold, 2017), the effectiveness of government food assistance (Nielsen, Seay, & Wilmarth, 2017) or how marital status affects food insecurity (Men, 2017).

Financial topics on consumer behavior emerge with economic crisis generating financial difficulties for consumers. Understanding how these financial problems affect consumers is crucial to design financial services that respond to their needs. Especially when consumers are feeling credit constrained (Pereira, Coelho, & Lourenço, 2017) or lack of financial literacy, they are in need of financial advice (Gerrans & Hershey, 2017). Research also focuses on understanding how financially literate are women (Bucher-Koenen, Lusardi, Alessie, & van Rooji, 2017) and how parents' financial behavior affects their children's financial behavior (Tang, 2017). Only incorporating this knowledge, we will be able to develop interventions that are able to create more financially savy consumers that are able

to make better financial decisions and even save time while doing their taxes (Grinstein-Weiss, Russel, Gale, Key & Ariely, 2017).

Finally, green consumer behavior seems to be the mainstream of research that integrates positivist and interpretive paradigms. Starting from the comprehension of how consumers are becoming increasingly aware of green issues and show a growing preference for green goods and services over those conventionally produced, consumer behavior research tries to understand the attitudinal changes and influences that are developing new consumer lifestyles. Green consumer behavior is defined as the “preference and use of products that are friendly to the environment” (Leonidou, Katsikeas, Fotiadis & Christodoulides, 2010). Green consumption also refers to the acceptance or support of goods and services that are recyclable and environmentally friendly (Huang, Lin, Lai, & Lin, 2014).

A wide variety of behaviors can be studied under the green umbrella, recent research has focused on the reactions that consumers have against the consumption of not so green products (Lee, Bath & Suri, 2018), how they make an effort to be green by saving electricity, and replacing old appliances (Nakamura, 2016), and how lifestyle changes can be originated from life-changing diseases, such as heart disease and depression (Rana & Paul, 2017). Fashion, a widely studied topic in consumer behavior has also benefited from the green movement. Researches have studied the effect of knowledge on decision-making in the context of organic cotton clothing (Rana & Paul, 2017) and interventions to encourage the use of more sustainable clothing (Harris, Roby & Dibb, 2016).

For researchers, it is very important to understand why consumers go green since this will be the key to influence behavioral changes. Another topic of interest is the understanding of how consumers can become agents of change. For example, how female consumers can act as agents of change to transform the environmental sustainability landscape (D’Souza & Taghian, 2017). Examples like this show how green consumer research become an important factor

to understand green behavior as social norms (Culiberg & Elgaard-Gambier, 2016). Although consumers, in general, want to be green, they are influenced by social norms, and even though they openly say they want to protect the environment, the reality is quite different. Price becomes an important factor to explain why green consumption is not mainstream. A big reason has to do with consumer perceptions about the price of green products in general, but research opportunities are open to study specific types of green products such as organic food in particular (Aschemann-Witzel & Zielke, 2017) or types of products such as virtue and vice foods (van Doorn & Verhoef, 2011).

Marketing managers are taking notes of these findings and researchers are suggesting ways to promote green consumption (Jo & Shin, 2017). Changes in consumer behavior can result in benefits for both consumers and the environment. For example, reducing the laundering frequency to prolong the life of denim jeans (McQueen, Batcheller, Moran, Zhang & Hooper, 2017). In fashion industry, designers are considering innovations that influence attitudes towards organic and eco-friendly apparel (Matthews and Rothenberg 2017). Another stream of research studies how information provided to the consumer at the point of purchase can change its green behavior. For example, the carbon information on vegetables and how it affects the buying process (Lampert, Menrad, Emberger-Klein, 2017).

Conclusions and Future Directions

Even in areas where much research has been done, such as attitudes, emotions, positive or negative emotions, researchers continue to find new approaches, to keep deepening the knowledge of consumer behavior. Similarly, all the factors that explain consumers' choice. However, there will always be a new category or a combination of categories to study, questions about how to modify behavior and its evolution.

The positivist paradigm in consumer behavior is an inheritance of classical and neoclassical theories of economics. Today, this legacy can be seen in the choice of economic variables and utility-based conditions as experimental treatments to explain purchases, but with the influence of psychology applications on consumer behavior research. Positivists strive to maximize impartiality and objectivity. From an axiological standpoint (values), the positivist approach pretends to be unbiased. In this way, standardize descriptions of behavior become a challenge for researchers identified with positivist methodologies or with affiliation with behavioral and psychodynamic theoretical paradigms.

The methodological toolbox of interpretivists is wide. They can use introspective methods such as researchers' life experiences (Wallendorf & Brucks, 1993) to provide for an empirically based and methodologically rigorous understanding of consumers (Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1989). Interpretivists borrows from hermeneutics, understand how consumers understand (Arnold and Fischer 1994), and use consumer semiotics to improve the understanding of signs, symbols, and significance (Mick, 1986). Interpretivists use critical theory to revise consumer marketing assumptions (Alvesson, 1994) and revise how knowledge is generated (Anderson, 1986). Similarly, they obtain valuable information by analyzing the consumer's discourse within the marketing context (Elliott, 1996). We could also add grounded theory to the list of interpretive research methodologies (Goulding 1998; Goulding 1999) and qualitative research techniques such as narrative theory and dimensional analysis (Shankar & Goulding, 2001). These methodologies are good postmodern alternatives to research the consumer (Sherry, 1991). Interpretive suggest that in a postmodern era, marketing organizations have to reconsider their consumer conceptions and market to consumers that are moved by external forces (Fuat-Firat, Dholakia, & Venkatesh, 1995).

Some methodologies can be used by both positivists and interpretivists, such as observational techniques which are not exclusively

the domain of either type of researchers (Grove & Fisk, 1992). In the future, we will see these limits becoming blurrier, especially with developments in evolutionary psychology, an interdisciplinary approach that allows us to think outside the box (Demirdjian & Mokatsian, 2014).

The changes in modern times, for example with increased levels of innovation, unethical behavior (Arli & Pekerti, 2017), bad service in the health system, the health insurance system (Fitzgerald & Bias, 2016), or increased caloric knowledge (Harris & Thomas, 2017) allow new opportunities to research how consumers behave and experience the process before, during and after purchasing a product or service. We still need to know in more detail how behavior occurs under different conditions, and environments. Each setting proposed new conditions that need to be explored, whether it is in the bank, purchasing clothes or going to the medical doctor.

Three big changes were highlighted in this research, given a large amount of research surrounding traditional topics. The first is the surge of the green consumer movement. Changes in values towards green products and services offers. The second one is the online consumer. The third one is children as consumers.

The importance that retailers and the retail setting have in purchases makes of retail an essential area of research. For researchers that want a qualitative, anthropological approach to research, the consumer culture research movement and the transformative consumer research offers wide avenues for inquiry. Other areas identified of interest for consumer researchers were anthropomorphism, food insecurity, finance, country of origin and consumer neuroscience.

Future research in consumer behavior will have to deal with all the changes that affect the modern consumer. Changes like the lack of leisure time and its negative and positive repercussions for brands. For example, brands that save time soar with lack of leisure time (Bellezza, Paharia & Keinan, 2016). Demographic changes brought

by the new millennium bring changes to consumer behavior. The increasing number of couples that face a challenge when children leave home and face the empty nest, deserves a closer look at how it affects their lifestyle (da Silva, Slongo & Antunes Rhode, 2016). New homes also have new household members, pets. For marketers selling products for pets, understanding co-consumption between consumers and their pets provides inspiration for new products and services that understand this relationship (Kylkilahti, Syrjälä, Autio, Kuismin, & Autio, 2016).

Changes in the political environment will require research that understands populist movements. Initial studies have used pieces of literature on optimism, motivated reasoning and forgetting, survey and prediction pool biases, the effective bases for decisions, and the potential for social performance and media influence to provide some explanations (Dahl, Fischer, Johar & Morwitz, 2017).

In the current and future economic climate, the economic crisis is common. Thinking how economic crisis affects prices and consumer behavior is important (Berdysheva & Romanova 2017). Crisis can affect all the marketing mix variables and the value chain. Supply can be affected by a crisis and crisis-proof practice community-supported agriculture (Blättel-Mink, Boddenberg, Gunkel, Schmitz & Vaessen, 2017) need to be encouraged.

Whatever will be the predominant topics or research streams followed in consumer behavior, researchers must consider that methodological approaches are more than a choice task. Current research invites to consider mixed and multi-methodological approaches to build strong, wider, and inclusive consumer behavior theories. Also, in this way, keep advance on contributions related including theoretical paradigms previously worked will assure consumer behavior gets better descriptions and models for consumption phenomena in permanent change.



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