

Consumers and Voters' Choice: Two Different Contexts with a Powerful Behavioural Parallel

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Abstract : What consumers choose to buy and who voters select on election days are two questions that have captivated the interest of both academics and practitioners for many decades. The importance of understanding what influences the behavior of those groups and whether or not we can predict or control it fuels a steady stream of research in a range of fields. By looking only at the past 40 years, more than 70 thousand scientific papers have been published in each field - consumer behavior and political psychology, respectively. From marketing, economics, and the science of persuasion to political and cognitive psychology - we have all remained heavily engaged. The ever-evolving technology, inevitable socio-cultural shifts, global economic conditions, and much more play an important role in choice-equations regardless of context. On one hand, this makes the research efforts always relevant and needed. On the other, the relatively low number of cross-field collaborations, which seem to be picking up only in more in recent years, makes the existing findings isolated into framed bubbles. By performing systematic research across both areas of psychology and building a parallel between theories and factors of influence, however, we find that there is not only a definitive common ground between the behaviors of consumers and voters but that we are moving towards a global model of choice. This means that the lines between contexts are fading which has a direct implication on what we should focus on when predicting or navigating buyers and voters' behavior. Internal and external factors in four main categories determine the choices we make as consumers and as voters. Together, personal, psychological, social, and cultural create a holistic framework through which all stimuli in relation to a particular product or a political party get filtered. The analogy "consumer-voter" solidifies further. Leading academics suggest that this fundamental parallel is the key to managing successfully political and consumer brands alike. However, we distinguish additional four key stimuli that relate to those factor categories (1/ opportunity costs; 2/the memory of the past; 3/recognisable figures/faces and 4/conflict) arguing that the level of expertise a person has determines the prevalence of factors or specific stimuli. Our efforts take into account global trends such as the establishment of "celebrity politics" and the image of "ethically concerned consumer brands" which bridge the gap between contexts to an even greater extent. Scientists and practitioners are pushed to accept the transformative nature of both fields in social psychology. Existing blind spots as well as the limited number of research conducted outside the American and European societies open up space for more collaborative efforts in this highly demanding and lucrative field. A mixed method of research tests three main hypotheses, the first two of which are focused on the level of irrelevance of context when comparing voting or consumer behavior - both from the factors and stimuli lenses, the third on determining whether or not the level of expertise in any field skews the weight of what prism we are more likely to choose when evaluating options.

Keywords : buyers' behaviour, decision-making, voters' behaviour, social psychology

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