

**WHAT DO YOU FEEL BEFORE DECIDING YOUR PURCHASE? DISTINCTION
BETWEEN PROBLEM, NEED AND DESIRE IN CONSUMER PERCEPTION**

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1. INTRODUCTION

The first stage of the purchase decision process, in the literature, is commonly called “problem recognition” or “need recognition”. Sometimes the term “need” is confused with “desire” (Solomon, 2020).

Is it possible to say that problem, need, and desire are synonyms? If they are, it makes no difference which one is in the first stage of the buying process. However, if they are not, the fact that the individual has a problem, a need or a desire regarding a product will make a difference in their process of searching for information, internal and external, in choosing the best alternative and in the purchase decision. In this article, the term product is used in its broad definition, according to Kotler, Armstrong & Opresnik (2021, p. 234).

The authors of this article maintain that the terms cited are different, semantically, and syntactically, (Loureiro and Serralvo, 2020) and that each one represents a cognitive construction of the individual as a consumer, externalized through behaviours.

However, for not being able or not knowing how to distinguish each of these feelings, the individual will have difficulties in properly defining, in his mind, the expected characteristics of the product he wants. Consequently, the same difficulties will occur in the other stages of the decision process, which culminate in their purchase action, increasing the probability of dissatisfaction with the purchased product.

In view of the above, is it possible to know if the individual as a consumer, in his decision-making, is he able to distinguish whether the feeling that triggered his perception of lack for a product was a problem, a need or a desire?

Therefore, to guide the development of this article, its authors were guided by the following starting question:

Is the individual as a consumer, in his decision-making process, able to distinguish whether he is experiencing a problem, a need, or a consumer desire?

1.1 General and specific objective

Therefore, this article had the general objective of investigating whether the individual as a consumer perceives the feeling that triggers his perception of the lack of a product as a problem, a need, or a desire for consumption.

The unfolding of the general objective intended: i) to discuss the variables problem, need, and desire, with the purpose of establishing the distinction between each one of them, based on their definitions and concepts (bibliographic review); ii) verify whether the individual as a consumer feels able to distinguish what is a problem, a need, or a consumption desire and the influence on his purchase action (statistical techniques).

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Conceptualize, define; conceptualize and define or define and conceptualize: which way?

Before starting the theoretical review, distinguishing the idea of concept from the idea of definition, even if concisely, as they are often also considered synonymous, will contribute to the clarity of the content exposed here.

For Martins (2005, p. 29) “Concepts are words that express an intellectualized abstraction of the idea of a phenomenon or an observed object”. Arguing about the depth of this definition is beyond the scope of this article, but it is possible to infer that the process of observing involves the individual and his experience. The result of the observation is the “. . . description, classification, and prediction of knowable objects.” (Abbagnano, 2007, p. 164).

In this way, the concept of knowable objects, abstract or solid, are provisional truths, that is, they are subject to falsification along the lines proposed by Popper (1972).

Continuing with Martins (2005, p. 31) “To define is to determine the extension and understanding of an object or abstraction”, that is, here the author proposes to describe a certain observed object to differentiate it from others.

Therefore, the importance of this topic resides in the fact that the terms problem, need, desire and purchase action, central variables of this investigation, were conceptualized and defined based on a bibliographic review carried out by the authors of this article, with a view to obtaining the best approximation possible of its representative characteristics.

2.2 The problem as a trigger in the consumer's purchase decision process

Consulting the word problem, in the Portuguese Online Dictionary – DICIO, it is verified that it is a masculine noun meaning “Topic that is full of controversy, being therefore studied in a scientific or academic way” (Problem, 2022).

In DICIO, the word “uncertain” is one of the synonyms for the word “controversy” and what is uncertain has the character of indeterminate. For Dewey (1939, p. 107) a “. . . indeterminate situation becomes problematic in the very process of being subjected to investigation.

The way Dewey (1939) conceptualizes a problem can be presented through the situation in which a person decides to take a trip by car, from his city to another that is about 500km away and part of this route is on unpaved roads, scarce resources, and precarious cell phone signal.

During the trip, the person verifies that he has travelled around $\frac{1}{4}$ of the way and needs to fill up the vehicle but does not see an indication of a service station, as he is already on the unpaved part of the road and flanked by farms. This situation, although circumscribed, is still undetermined and becomes a problem that should be submitted to investigation.

However, Dewey (1939, p. 108) further states that: “A problem represents the partial transformation through the investigation of a problematic situation within a given situation”. By this the author means that a problem properly delineated is already half solved. The idea of delineation is understood here, as defined by Loureiro (2020).

Other problem concepts are those presented based on mathematics, methodology of academic works and in the field of administrative studies, exemplified in the sequence.

In mathematics, a problem refers to questions that can be stated in mathematical language or even analysed through mathematical methods, presenting a solution, several solutions or problems that remain open (Polya, 2004), that is, without solution.

From the point of view of the elaboration of scientific works such as, for example, dissertations, theses, scientific articles, etc., the problem results from “. . . an issue that intrinsically involves a theoretical or practical difficulty, for which a solution must be found” (Cervo, Bervian, & Da Silva, 2007, p. 75). So, recognizing this difficulty is the beginning of the path to finding a solution.

In the field of administrative studies, a problem refers to a situation of frustration, interest, challenge, curiosity, or irritation (Maximiano, 2011). This definition fits with the definition of problem mentioned by Cervo *et al.*, (2007).

The examples can be endless, but their intrinsic character will be the same, as it will guide their semantics, as if they were symbols (Kroeger, 2019) and it is hoped that they will be sufficient for the readers of this article.

Blackwell, Miniard & Engel (2005), when addressing the purchase decision process, talk about the magnitude of the discrepancy between the current state and the desired state of the consumer, which would be the starting point in which the consumer would perceive the lack of some product.

For there to be recognition of the lack of any product, the discrepancy must be above or exactly in the minimum proportion. As for the definition of proportion for this situation, the authors do not discuss it.

However, from the approach of Blackwell *et al.*, (2005), what deserves attention is the existence of a “trigger” or motivator for the individual to perceive that he lacks a product that will bring him back to a state of equilibrium.

As for the trigger, this article argues that there are three: problem, need and desire. There is still a mix between these triggers, but that is a discussion for another research opportunity.

The problem, as a trigger, has specificities that differentiate it from need and desire. It is expected that the individual as a consumer who properly delineates a problem, in order to distinguish it from a need or a desire, will expand his decision-making capacity by significantly reducing the risk of a purchase that makes him regret it (Loureiro, 2020).

Therefore, based on what has been exposed so far, the authors of this article maintain that the problem variable is a trigger of the individual's purchase decision process as a consumer and the definition proposed here, as a result of bibliographical research, is: "indeterminate situation that presents something observable outside the norm (anomaly, unverified facts, unknown areas or conflicting evidence), which can be transformed through investigation, resulting in solutions".

2.2.1 Hypothesis regarding the “problem” variable

H_p: considering that a problem does not comprise an individual's internal condition of dissatisfaction, nor is it the eagerness, emotionally charged with pleasure, so it is not a synonym of need or desire.

2.3 Need as a trigger in the consumer's purchase decision process

Need means “that which cannot be avoided” (Need, 2023). For example, breathing is a necessity.

According to Murray (1938), a pioneer in research on need, the acquisition attitude, that is, bargaining, bartering, working for money or goods, is also considered a need.

For Murray (1938, p. 54), need “. . . it is a hypothetical process whose occurrence is imagined with the purpose of explaining certain objective and subjective facts. He proposed dividing the need into two parts: a) primary needs, considered viscerogenic, originating in the viscera, internal organs of an individual (Viscera, 2023), with thirteen needs, among which are: water, food and sentience (p. 79); b) secondary needs, considered psychogenic, referring to psychogenesis, “studies of the psychic causes likely to explain a neurosis or a psychosis”

(Psychogenic, 2023), with twenty-eight needs, among which are: attitude of acquisition, conservative attitude and ordering attitude (p. 80-83).

According to Murray (1938, p. 81) some needs are innate, for example, air, water, and food. Others are learned, for example, infavoidance, which means the individual's need to avoid failure, shame, and humiliation; inviolacy, which means the need to prevent the depreciation of self-respect, to preserve the good name to be immune from criticism; defendance, which is the need to defend oneself against accusation and contempt.

Thus, when the individual feels hungry, an innate need, he will feel an imbalance between his current state, hunger, and his desired state, which is to satisfy hunger. To admit this situation as real is to recognize it, consequently, to recognize a need (Loureiro, 2020, p. 65).

Ryan and Deci (2000 and 2017), authors of the Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which is an approach to human motivation and personality, in their research pointed out three innate psychological needs of the individual, which are: competence, autonomy, and kinship (relatedness).

Deci and Ryan (1985, p. 38) state that “. . . self-determination is more than a capacity, it is also a need”.

For Ryan and Deci (2000), need can be defined as an energizing state that, once satisfied, leads to health and well-being, otherwise it will contribute to pathologies and malaise. In this definition, the authors consider both the physiological need (Hull, 1943) and the psychological need (Feldman, 2019).

Ryan and Deci (2000, p. 71) argue that “. . . social environments can facilitate or impede intrinsic motivation, supporting versus frustrating people's innate psychological needs”.

In this way, considering that the decision-making process concerns the “. . . a continuous course of interactions between environmental factors, cognitive and affective processes and behavioural actions” (Peter & Olson, 2009, p. 165), the individual as a consumer will be subject to the influences of external environments.

Another point of view regarding needs was developed by Maslow (1954), dividing them into physiological and psychological. The author speaks of primary needs as being physiological, for example, thirst, hunger, and sleep, and secondary needs as cultural (p. 20), those considered as immediate and more common needs, for example, clothes, vehicles, and friendships.

Maslow (1954) said that human needs obey, in a way, a hierarchy, calling it the hierarchy of human motives. In this way, an individual who was hungry would have his entire organism, and not part of it, focused on satisfying that need before, for example, satisfying his need for sex, since it would be the individual who would be hungry and not his stomach. The same would happen when, by hierarchy, it was the turn to satisfy the need for sex.

It is observed in the work of Ryan and Deci (2000 and 2017) and Maslow (1954) that needs are influenced by the means in which individuals act. Thus, it appears that although the individual recognizes a need until he can meet it, he will be facing a search situation, therefore, outlining it would contribute to satisfying it appropriately.

The terms desire and need are sometimes mixed up, implying that they are synonyms. Solomon (2002, p. 95, author's bold) referring to the first stage of the purchase decision process states that “Personal and cultural factors combine to create a **desire**, which is a manifestation of a need”.

On the other hand, Sheth *et al.* (2001, p. 59) distinguish need from desire. So, for authors need “. . . it is an unsatisfactory condition of a client, which leads him to an action that will make

that condition better". This moment for the individual represents a discomfort that will be reversed through his action to extinguish it. Desire "is the eagerness to obtain more satisfaction than is absolutely necessary to improve an unsatisfactory condition".

Both innate needs such as air, water, and food are innate (King, 2017) and learned needs, such as avoiding failure, not being disrespected and maintaining safety (Murray, 1938) are part of the daily demands of survival of the individual as a consumer, consequently, will be recognized and objects of your quest to satisfy them. This idea is secular and finds support in the words of Pflüger (1877, p. 57) when he stated that: "The cause of every need of the living being is also the cause of the satisfaction of that need".

Therefore, the need was considered in this article as a trigger of the individual's recognition of consumption and just like the recognition of a problem, need is an individual's cognitive construction and was defined by the authors of this article, based on their bibliographic review, as: "internal condition of dissatisfaction of the individual, due to the lack of something for his well-being, which leads him to a consumption action that will make this condition met".

2.3.1 Hypothesis regarding the "need" variable

H_n: considering that need does not comprise an indeterminate situation, which presents something observable outside the norm and is not even eagerness, affectively charged with pleasure, then it is not a synonym of problem or desire.

2.4 Desire as a trigger in the consumer's purchase decision process

Defining the desire construct is a complex task. Such complexity can be verified based on the work of Marks (2017, p.11) who mentions types of desires and cites some of them: "sexual desire, desire for self-respect, unconscious desire, competitive desire, higher order desire, desire to do something and, desire that has as its end the believed pleasure (Believed desire)".

In this sense, Maslow (1954) states that the careful analysis of the individual's daily desires allows verifying that they are means to an end, and not an end in itself. The author supports his statement by means of an example (p. 21): individuals want money, so they can buy a car, but on the other hand, individuals want a car because their neighbour has one and, in this way, they do not want to feel inferior to them, thus maintaining their self-esteem, consequently, being loved and respected by others.

Confronting the perspectives of Marks (2017) and Maslow (1954) it appears that the first analyses desire through typologies, while the second interprets it as a step that precedes the individual's real objective.

In the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2017, p. 1) there is a definition for the desire that expands the complexity of the term, as it brings it closer to the idea of a fractal. Thus: "To desire is to be in a certain state of mind". As it is a mental state, the possibility of effects is infinite, as an individual with desire will tend to act, feel and think according to its characteristics, which is why the purpose of researchers interested in the subject has been the development of theories that allow "frame" it to understand it, which demonstrates the breadth and complexity of the theme (Hofmann, Kotabe, Vohs, & Baumeister, 2015).

The mental state mentioned in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2017, p. 1) can be initiated by a psychological state involving motivation towards a specific stimulus or experience that is expected to be rewarding (Papies & Barsalou, 2015).

In the role of consumer, the individual is exposed to environmental stimuli such as advertisements, visual aesthetics, price, brand, invitations to tasting and people from their surroundings offering or disseminating their experiences with products (Hanna, Wozniak &

Hanna, 2013), consequently, the various effects of these exposures will result in endless states of mind that will reflect his desires and when one of them acts as a trigger, he will strive to satisfy it.

Desire is also related to the individual's cognition, according to the definition proposed by Kavanagh *et al.* (2005, p. 2): “We use desire in the sense of an affectively charged cognitive event, in which an object or activity associated with pleasure or relief from discomfort is in focal attention”.

The authors also inform that, despite having an affective quality, desire is not simply an emotion, although it is very similar to it, since “the psychological experience includes verbal images or thoughts about the attractive characteristics of appetizing objects or activities” and, therefore, end, that desire is conscious Kavanagh *et al.* 2005, p.2).

Desire as a cognitive event involves the process in which the individual, exposed to the infinite stimuli coming from the environment in which he lives, will perceive, learn, remember, and think about the information regarding the desired product and this process is loaded with emotions resulting from social exchanges. (Lawler, 2001; Sternberg, Sternberg, & Mio, 2012).

Therefore, desire as a trigger for the individual's decision-making process as a consumer was defined here, with relevant convergence with the definition by Kavanagh, *et al.* (2005, p. 2), as: “a cognitive event, the zeal, affectively charged, in which a good, service or activity associated with pleasure or relief from discomfort is in focal attention, in order to obtain more satisfaction than is absolutely necessary to improve an unsatisfactory condition”.

2.4.1 Hypothesis regarding the variable “desire”

Ha: considering that desire does not comprise an indeterminate situation, which presents something observable outside the norm and is not even an internal condition of dissatisfaction of the individual, so it is not a synonym of problem or need.

2.5 The consumer purchase decision-making process through models

2.5.1 The model as an abstraction of reality

The paths mentally taken by the individual in their buying process can be represented by means of models, which, according to the definition of Robbins, & Judge (2018, p. 26) “. . . it is an abstraction of reality, a simplified representation of some real-world phenomenon.”

In this sense, when Blackwell *et al.* (2005, p. 73) talk about the consumer decision process model they refer to what they called the “road map of the minds of consumers”, which they summarized in Figure 1.

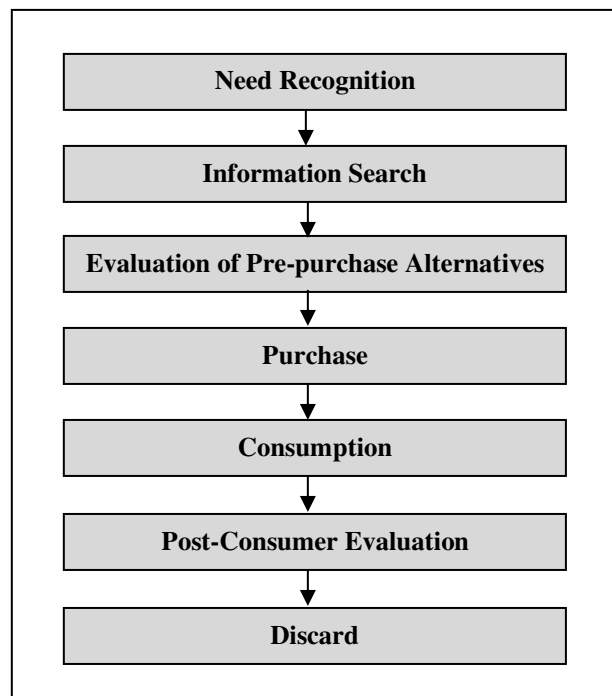
As previously mentioned, the authors of this work maintain that the other stages of the purchase process will be developed by the consumer based on the cognitive construction of the feeling that triggered his perception of need for some product.

The search for information, internal and external, the evaluation of alternatives, purchase, consumption, and post-purchase evaluation are stages resulting from the initial trigger, therefore, the lack of an appropriate delineation due to the lack of clear recognition of the initial feeling may have an expressive psychological cost for the individual in this process, and in the case of cognitive dissonance he may not only interrupt the process, but also make a purchase full of dissatisfaction and become a multiplier agent of criticism in relation to the purchased product.

In the model in Figure 1, in the first stage the authors use the term “necessity”, but it could be a problem or desire. For this reason, the suggestion is to use the term: “Recognition of

Consumption”. This term is generic, not meaning that consumption will be effective, but it avoids naming the consumer's perception without understanding what is actually going on in his mind.

Figure 1. How consumers make decisions for goods and services



Source: Blackwell, Miniard, & Angel (2005, p 73).

At the beginning of consumer behaviour studies, authors such as Nicosia (1966) and Howard and Sheth (1969) proposed more intricate models. Nicosia (1966) did not prioritize the occurrences that preceded the moment or cause of the beginning of the purchase process, but focused on reflecting the subsequent stages. On the other hand, Howard and Sheth (1969) worked the system as a whole: input, processing, and output.

Explaining his model, Nicosia (1966) states that it is a comprehensive scheme, composed of the consumer circuit, being basically a computer program. The scheme presents four fields (or blocks) that are functionally related. For the author, his model represents the structure of consumer behaviour, which is considered invariant, that is, constant.

According to the bibliographic research carried out for this topic, the work of Nicosia (1966) appears as a pioneer in the study of the consumer, although no mentions were identified regarding updates or applications of his model.

2.6 The purchase decision

In his 1999 book, “The network society”, Manuel Castells mentioned the shortening of distances as one of the pillars of globalization. This shortening brings with it the advancement of technology and the media (Castells, 1999).

Regarding communication, the role of media coverage (Ekström et al. 2016) has a relevant impact on decision-making, as the abyssal volume of information available can sometimes,

contrary to what is thought, confuse the unwary consumer, as to the condition that triggered his purchase process (Loureiro, 2020) at the risk of delaying or even aborting the purchase process.

Another point to be considered, because of shortening distances, is the acceleration of production processes and the consequent obsolescence of products, which no longer offer relevant differences in quality and prices, making consumers base their choices on variables that go beyond the traditionally used (Willman-livarinen, 2017).

Among the variables that go beyond the traditional ones used by the consumer, Willman-livarinen (2017) cite three: identity game (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010), social currency (Bourdieu, 1977) and private label (Khamis, Ang, & Welling, 2016; Whitmer, 2019).

In general terms, in order not to escape the focus of this article, the identity game is defined by Ibarra and Petriglieri (2010, p. 10) as: “. . . the involvement of people in a tentative but active judgment of possible future selves”. The focus of this concept resides in organizational strategic objectives, but its adjustment to consumer behaviour would be something like the individual centred on acquiring some product that is in accordance with his individuality, distinguishing him from other human beings with whom he shares the environment in which he lives.

When the individual bases his relationships and social influences on his purchasing power, represented as his assets and attributes, in order to obtain success, then he is resorting to the idea of social currency. This is a way for the individual to communicate his feelings to preserve or increase his reputation with his peers (Bourdieu, 1977).

Finally, selling oneself as an attractive product is a strategy for preserving the individual's “self” in the social and corporate environments in which he operates. With this self-promotion, the individual intends to be seen, requested, and rewarded (Whitmer, 2019).

But what are the traditional variables used by consumers in their decision-making process?

In the marketing and consumer behaviour literature, it is possible to find variables such as: price, quality, payment method, product availability, quantity, colours, size, etc. These and other variables are identifiable when the steps are unfolded, search for information and evaluation of alternatives, which are part of the consumer's purchase decision-making process (Kotler and Armstrong, 2021; Mothersbaugh, Hawkins, & Kleiser, 2020; Solomon, 2020).

All the variables mentioned here contribute to decision-making, but if the individual is camping in a region with scarce resources and realizes that he forgot his ignition mechanism, such as matches or lighter, to prepare food or warm up and faced with this “problem” getting another group next to him a box of matches will he care about the brand, size, colour or any other characteristic of the product?

This example demonstrates that, although the individual as a consumer can base his choices on variables other than the traditional ones, he will still fail to increase his satisfaction in acquiring the desired product, as he does not understand the feeling involved in his perceived scarcity.

It is possible for the consumer learns to have this fine-tuning in their decision-making, in order to identify their problem, their need and their desire for a product that maintains the balance between their current state and the desired one.

When it comes to organizational decision-making, there are several strategies. Turpin and Marais (2004) point out nine decision-making models: rational model, bounded rationality model, incrementalist view, view of organizational procedures, political view, garbage can model, perspective of individual differences, naturalistic decision-making, and approach from multiple perspectives.

The difference between the organizational decision-making models and the consumer model is that the former often relies on the support of a specialized team while the consumer, even having the possibility of resorting to his peers or specialists, most of the time, his decision is a solitary one and the responsibility for the outcome, both positive and negative, rests with him alone.

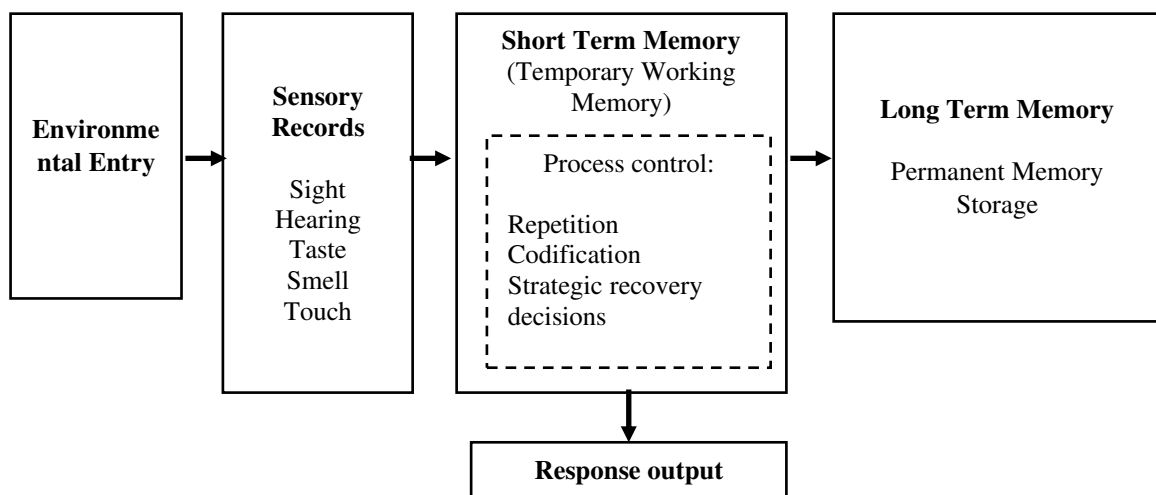
Decision-making models, both organizational and consumer, use stages. For example, in the rational model, focusing on organizations, Simon (1977) mentioned four stages: intelligence; drawing (or project); choice; revision. The consumer-focused model presented by Mowen and Minor (2003) has five steps: problem recognition; search (of information); evaluation of alternatives; choice; post-purchase evaluation.

In both cases, each of the model steps can be studied individually, but the central question considered in this article is that little attention has been given to the aspects that configure the antecedents of the first stage, specifically: the individual's cognition as a consumer.

The authors of this work maintain that the individual's decision-making as a consumer is a process developed based on three feelings: problem, need and desire (not necessarily in that order). The construction of each of these feelings occurs through the individual's cognition and it is known (without intending to go deeper into the subject), through neuroscience, that learning, and memory are involved in this process.

Figure 2 demonstrates how the construction of memories occurs through the flow of information, which begins in the environments in which the individual as a consumer interacts.

Figure 2. Memory System in terms of Information Flow



Source: Loureiro 2020. Adapted from Atkinson and Shiffrin (1971, p. 3).

Learning refers to the “. . . change in behaviour that results from acquiring knowledge about the world. . .” and memory refers to “. . . to the process by which this knowledge [about the world] is encoded, stored, and later retrieved.” (Kandel et al. 2021, p. 1291).

Thus, if the individual as a consumer has a need, but buys the product with the desired characteristics, then there will be a high probability of dissatisfaction or financial losses, as he was not able to understand the feeling that triggered his purchase process.

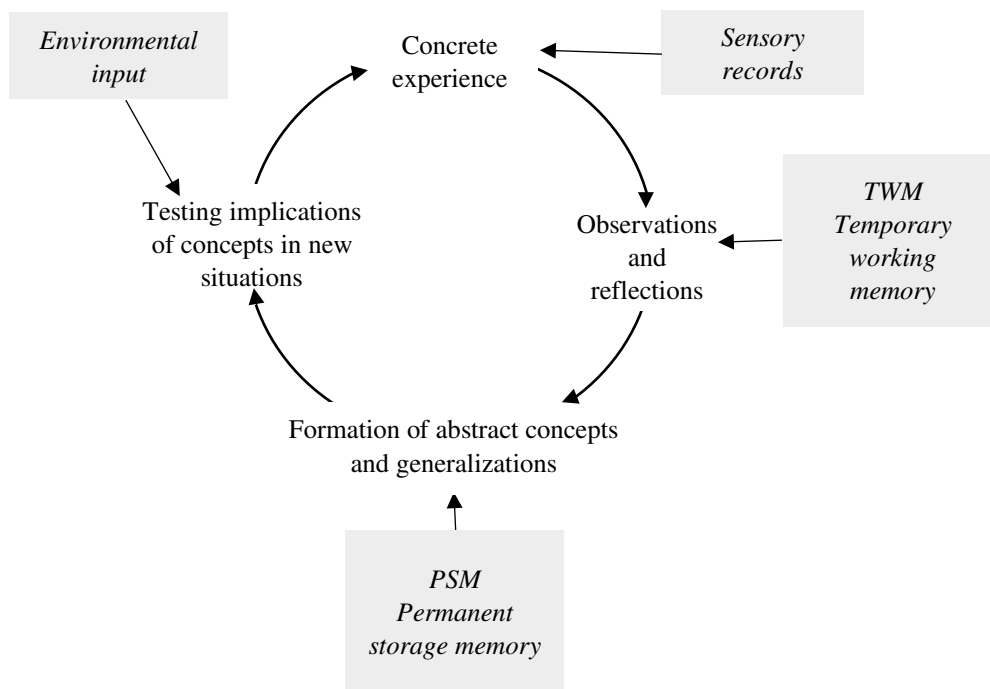
Learning plays an important role in the decision-making process. The individual can learn by his own will, that is, he searches for information to build his memories or to be taught by others, which also implies his acceptance, because otherwise he will block his learning system, which involves experiences. Figure 3 represents a learning model.

In the model in Figure 3, it is verified that the individual interacting in the environments will experience new situations and his concrete experiences are the result of sensory records, based on which he will build memories, which may be temporary or permanent.

In this learning process, it is important to emphasize that: memories are recoverable. Talking about memory retrieval requires considering that encoding and retrieval is an interactive process (Tulving, 1983; Brown & Craik, 2000; King, 2017).

But it is a fact that the memory recovery process is not as simple as it seems. Brown and Craik (2000) state that recovery also depends on the person's mental condition at the time of encoding the information. This reinforces the importance of individuals knowing the feelings that trigger their decision-making.

Figure 3. Learning Model



Source: Loureiro (2020), based on Kolb (2015, p. 4) and Norris (2017, p. 5).

Therefore, it is highlighted at this point that: if the individual as a consumer learns and retains in his permanent memory what a problem, need and, desire mean and is able to recover this knowledge in an appropriate way, when applying it in his decision-making he will avoid purchase dissatisfaction.

2.6.1 Hypothesis regarding the variable “purchase action”

H_a: the individual as a consumer in his purchase action does not clearly perceive whether he is facing a feeling of problem, need or desire.

3. METHODS

3.1 Empirical Study: defining the sample used

This item was dedicated to the specification of the sample used for this study.

Considering the objective of the authors of this article to deepen the study referring to the first stage of the consumer's purchase decision process based on the variables, problem, need and desire, which would require a long period, it was decided to divide it in accordance with the life stages of human beings, considering three of them, namely: adolescence, adulthood and old age. There is the first phase, childhood, but this is not relevant for the purposes of this article.

Thus, for this article, adulthood was considered, which according to Bogin (2021), this phase begins at 18 years for women and 20 years for men and does not establish a limit, that is, it lasts until the individual's death. The clipping used comprised individuals of both sexes aged between 18 and 35, as Bogin (2021) considers this age group to be the one with maximum performance and residents of Brazil.

The attractiveness of this age group resides in the fact that the individual included in it is young, engaged in his/her personal and financial independence, in evolving in his professional career, and in many cases, in the search for a relationship, therefore, he acts strongly as an active consumer. (Sampieri, Collado, & Lucio, 2013; Joshi, 2019; Santrock, 2019).

3.2 Data Collection Instrument

In the development of the Delineation Theory – TD, Loureiro (2020) created a scale for data collection and analysis. From this scale, items related to the variables, problem, need, desire, and purchase decision were used, as they met the purpose of this article.

The items were developed according to the criteria for creating and testing scales proposed in Netemeyer, Bearden, & Sharma (2003); Costa (2011); Bearden, Netemeyer, & Haws (2011); DeVellis, & Thorpe (2022), among other authors. Details of the procedures for constructing the scale can be found in Loureiro (2020).

Regarding the sample size, *G*Power*, version 3.1.9.7, was used, which is a user-friendly software available free of charge on the internet. To use it, some parameters are required.

Thus, the effect size used here was the average = 0.15 (Cohen, 1988), the alpha was 0.05 (Fisher, 1956), as for the power of the test, Cohen (1988) points to 80% as an appropriate percentage. Regarding the number of predictors, four predictors were considered, that is, the variables problem, need, desire, and purchase action.

The output from *G*Power* 3.1.9.7 states the sample size at 85 as appropriate for this study. Ringle, Silva and Bido (2014) suggest doubling or even tripling this value. Thus, for this article, 160 cases were chosen.

3.3 Considerations regarding the statistical technique

Resuming some points of this article, its authors maintain that the individual as a consumer will recognize his need for a product based on the feeling of problem, need or desire, but that, commonly, these feelings are not properly interpreted by him in the purchase decision. They also argue that the literature that deals with consumer behaviour studies uses these feelings as synonyms, therefore, they do not emphasize the individual importance of each one.

In this way, the proposal discussed here comprises: i) verifying, through the scale developed by Loureiro (2020), whether the variables, problem, need, and desire are synonyms; ii) if there is a correlation between each of these variables with the purchase decision variable.

Given the above, the statistics that met these requirements were: Exploratory Factor Analysis - EFA and Spearman's correlation coefficient, which is a non-parametric test, since the data used here did not present a normal distribution (Hair, Babin, Anderson, & Black, 2019).

4. RESULTS ANALYSIS

The scale used was the one developed by Loureiro (2020). The abbreviations use was CN = Consumption Need; CD = Consumption Desire; CP = Consumption Problem, maintaining the pattern used in Loureiro (2020).

Table 1 presents the values resulting from the various rounds using the AFE statistical technique.

Table 1. Factor Analysis Summary with the Sample of 160 Respondents

Summary of Analyses with Variables: CN, CD and CP				
KMO	,736			
Bartlett	Sig. ($p < 0,001$)			
Variables	SAM	Communalities	Rotating Load	
CN_1	,780	,615	,675	
CN_2	,674	,719	,831	
CN_3	,596	,719	,840	
CD_11	,734	,728	,843	
CD_12	,797	,541	,666	
CD_14	,721	,736	,833	
CP_17	,740	,697	,815	
CP_18	,783	,666	,784	
CP_20	,810	,516	,704	
Retained Factors	3			
Total Variance Explained	65,957%			
Residual	47%			
Reliability	,758 (Substantial)			

Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from the SPSS software output, version 23 (2023).

According to Table 1, the values are in accordance with what is mentioned in the literature, that is: KMO above 0.5, the significance level of Bartlett's sphericity test has $p\text{-value} = .000$, which led to the rejection of the null hypothesis that the correlation matrix is the identity. The two tests corroborated the use of factor analysis. The Sample Adequacy Measure - SAM values are all above 0.5, and the communalities follow the same criteria and have an average of 0.66.

The total explained variance was 65.957%, the residuals 47%, that is, below the minimum limit suggested in Field (2018) which is 50% and reliability, through Cronbach's alpha, of 0.758 which in the literature is classified as substantial (Landis & Koch, 1977).

The importance of the results presented in Table 1 resides in the fact that the use of the scale developed by Loureiro (2020) proved to be appropriate for the sample of this article, as it presents values consistent with those suggested in the literature.

However, considering that the objective of this stage of the research was to verify if each of the variables was valid, then, it was necessary to carry out the analysis of the factor correlation matrix.

This matrix allows checking whether there is independence between the analysed factors. In the positive case, the result is an identity matrix in which all factors have correlation coefficients equal to zero.

Table 2 presents the results of the correlation matrix of the factors analysed here.

Table 2. Factor Correlation Matrix

		REGR factor score 1 for analysis 1	REGR factor score 2 for analysis 1	REGR factor score 3 for analysis 1
REGR factor score 1 for analysis 1	Pearson Correlation	1	,000	,000
	Sig. (bilateral)		1,000	1,000
	N	160	160	160
REGR factor score 2 for analysis 1	Pearson Correlation	,000	1	,000
	Sig. (bilateral)	1,000		1,000
	N	160	160	160
REGR factor score 3 for analysis 1	Pearson Correlation	,000	,000	1
	Sig. (bilateral)	1,000	1,000	
	N	160	160	160

Source: SPSS software output, version 23 (2023).

As can be seen in Table 2, the values of the correlations are equal to zero, which allows us to state that the factors, problem, need, and desire are independent, that is, they measure different aspects of each feeling and, therefore, they are not synonymous.

Once this stage of the research was completed, the next step was to verify the starting question proposed here, namely:

Is the individual as a consumer, in his decision-making process, able to distinguish whether he is experiencing a problem, a need or a consumer desire?

For this stage of the research, the scale developed by Loureiro (2020) was used again, this time to obtain the items related to the purchase decision variable.

In Loureiro (2020), during the refinement of the scale, through the EFA, for the purchase decision variable, two factors were obtained: the first factor, with 4 items, was called “Purchase Decision” (the name was kept of the analysed variable), which in this research refers to the decision-making variable; the second factor, with 2 items, was called “Purchase Criteria”. For this research, the factor of interest was the so-called Purchase Decision.

Table 3 shows the load, commonality, alpha value, and wording of each item.

Table 3. Final Scale of the Purchase Decision Variable (PD)

Wording, Loading, and Commonality of Each Item		
Factor 1: Purchase Decision (PD), (4 items, alpha = ,842)	Loading	Commonality
PD_49: After choosing the brand, the characteristics, the payment method, and the place where I want to buy the product, I decide on my purchase.	,877	,771
PD_55: After analysing the information and alternatives regarding the product, I make my choice.	,817	,667
PD_53: After analysing the alternatives to the product I want, I feel confident in making my choice.	,807	,731
PD_52: I decide to buy the product only after evaluating the brand, price, features, and available location alternatives.	,698	,629

Source: Adapted by the authors based on Loureiro (2020).

The next step was to perform the correlation between the variables, Consumption Need – CN; Consumption Desire – DC; Consumption Problem – PC and the Purchase Decision variable – PD.

To facilitate the analysis and discussion of the results, correlations were made between the variables, CN, CD and CP with the PD variable, individually. Table 4 presents the correlation between the CN and PD variables.

Table 4. Correlation between CN and PD variables

Correlation Matrix		CN.1	CN.2	CN.3	PD.49	PD.52	PD.53	PD.55
CN.1	Spearman's rho	—						
	p-value	—						
CN.2	Spearman's rho	0.397	—					
	p-value	<.001	—					
CN.3	Spearman's rho	0.356	0.556	—				
	p-value	<.001	<.001	—				
PD.49	Spearman's rho	0.177	0.175	0.032	—			
	p-value	0.025	0.027	0.689	—			
PD.52	Spearman's rho	0.181	-0.057	-0.105	0.443	—		
	p-value	0.022	0.476	0.187	<.001	—		
PD.53	Spearman's rho	0.265	0.006	-0.109	0.543	0.457	—	
	p-value	<.001	0.944	0.172	<.001	<.001	—	
PD.55	Spearman's rho	0.282	-0.017	0.001	0.477	0.450	0.550	—
	p-value	<.001	0.828	0.995	<.001	<.001	<.001	—

Source: Jamovi software output data, version 2.3.21 (2023).

Analysing item CN.1 of Table 4, it is verified that all *p values* are below 0.05, demonstrating that they are significant, as this is the initial correlation criterion (Anderson *et al.*, 2020).

However, having a significant *p-value* is necessary, but not sufficient, as the next step is to verify the strength of the correlation and its effect for the purposes of this research.

Thus, according to Table 4, although the *p values* between item CN.1 and items PD.49, PD.52, PD.53 and PD.55 are less than 0.05, the strength of the correlations are considered in the literature as “weak”, (CN.1, PD.55) = 0.282; (CN.1, PD.53) = 0.265 and “very weak”, (CN.1, PD.52) = 0.181; (CN.1, PD.49) = 0.177 (Dancey, & Reidy, 2017).

Proceeding in the same way with the items CN.2 and CN.3, it is verified that the correlation between the items of CN.2 and PD.49 has *p* less than 0.001, but a “very weak” correlation, the others have higher *p* than 0.05 and in these cases the null hypothesis is confirmed, that is, there is no difference between the analysed groups (Gravetter, Wallnau, Forzano, & Witnauer, 2021).

Given the above, unlike what is commonly sought in correlational statistics, which is *p* less than 0.001 and “strong” or “very strong” correlations, the fact that this does not occur between items CN.1, CN.2 and CN.3 and items PD.49, PD.52, PD.53 and PD.55 demonstrate that the individual, in his purchase decision, does not clearly perceive whether he is experiencing a need for consumption.

The same analysis procedure was performed with the data referring to the CD variable items with the PD variable items. The results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Correlation between CD and PD variables

Correlation Matrix		CD.11	CD.12	CD.14	PD.49	PD.52	PD.53	PD.55
CD.11	Spearman's rho	—						
	p-value	—						
CD.12	Spearman's rho	0.415	—					
	p-value	< .001	—					
CD.14	Spearman's rho	0.592	0.409	—				
	p-value	< .001	< .001	—				
PD.49	Spearman's rho	0.437	0.444	0.368	—			
	p-value	< .001	< .001	< .001	—			
PD.52	Spearman's rho	0.242	0.294	0.251	0.443	—		
	p-value	0.002	< .001	0.001	< .001	—		
PD.53	Spearman's rho	0.327	0.236	0.266	0.543	0.457	—	
	p-value	< .001	0.003	< .001	< .001	< .001	—	
PD.55	Spearman's rho	0.289	0.257	0.279	0.477	0.450	0.550	—
	p-value	< .001	0.001	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001	—

Source: Jamovi software output data, version 2.3.21 (2023).

In the case of the output data in Table 5, it is verified that all *p values* are below 0.05, indicating that there is a correlation between the items, however, as in the previous analysis, it is necessary to consider the strength of this correlation so that the analysis be complete.

Item CD.11 has its highest correlation strength with item PD.49 = 0.437 considered “moderate”, the others are all “weak”. The status of item CD.12 is like that of item CD.11. As for item CD.14, all correlations are “weak”.

Thus, based on the information in Table 5, it is possible to infer that the individual as a consumer, in his purchase decision, has a weak perception of desire for consumption, that is, he does not distinguish this feeling with quality.

Finally, Table 6 presents the correlations between the items of the CP variable and the items of the PD variable.

As shown in Table 6, the item PC.17, when correlated with the items of the CD variable, presents two “moderate” correlations, (PC.17, CD.52) = 0.475 and (PC.17, CD.55) = 0.422 and the other two “weak”. Item PC.18 also has two “moderate” correlations, (PC.18, CD.52) = 0.437 and (PC.18, CD.55) = 0.403 and two “weak” ones. Item PC.20, in turn, has only one “moderate” and three “weak” correlations.

Table 6. Correlation between CP and PD variables

Correlation Matrix		CP.17	CP.18	CP.20	PD.49	PD.52	PD.53	PD.55
CP.17	Spearman's rho	—						
	p-value	—						
CP.18	Spearman's rho	0.553	—					
	p-value	<.001	—					
CP.20	Spearman's rho	0.434	0.401	—				
	p-value	<.001	<.001	—				
PD.49	Spearman's rho	0.388	0.399	0.310	—			
	p-value	<.001	<.001	<.001	—			
PD.52	Spearman's rho	0.475	0.437	0.457	0.443	—		
	p-value	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	—		
PD.53	Spearman's rho	0.398	0.361	0.212	0.543	0.457	—	
	p-value	<.001	<.001	0.007	<.001	<.001	—	
PD.55	Spearman's rho	0.422	0.403	0.324	0.477	0.450	0.550	—
	p-value	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	—

Source: Jamovi software output data, version 2.3.21 (2023).

As with the items of the other two variables, CD and CN, the data of the items of the variable PD also allow inferring that the individual as a consumer does not properly feel that in his purchase decision, he is facing a consumption problem.

Analysing Tables 4, 5 and 6, it was possible to verify that the problem variable had the highest number of “moderate” correlations with the purchase decision variable, five. The desire variable presented two “moderate” correlations and in the case of the need variable, there were no “moderate” correlations, only “weak” and “very weak”.

This fact, although it requires further research on this point, allows us to infer that, in general, the individual as a consumer, even if moderately, understands decision-making as being a problem and not a solution to his needs.

These findings allowed us to state that the hypotheses elaborated for this research were supported, as shown in Table 7.

Table 7. Validation of hypotheses

Objective	Hypothesis	Validation
Check if the problem variable is synonymous with need or desire	H_p: considering that a problem does not comprise an individual's internal condition of dissatisfaction, nor is it the eagerness, emotionally charged with pleasure, so it is not a synonym of need or desire.	Supported
Check if the variable need is synonymous with problem or desire	H_n: considering that need does not comprise an indeterminate situation, which presents something observable outside the norm and is not even eagerness, affectively charged with pleasure, then it is not a synonym of problem or desire.	Supported
Verificar se a variável desejo é sinônimo de problema ou necessidade	H_a: considerando que, desejo não compreende uma situação indeterminada, que apresenta algo observável fora da norma e nem é uma condição interna de insatisfação do indivíduo, então, não é um sinônimo de problema ou necessidade.	Supported
Check if the purchase action variable is correlated with the variables, problem, need and desire.	H_a: considering that desire does not comprise an indeterminate situation, which presents something observable outside the norm and is not even an internal condition of dissatisfaction of the individual, so it is not a synonym of problem or need.	Supported

Source: Prepared by the authors (2023).

Therefore, the findings of the present research pointed out that the variables, problem, need, and desire are not synonymous and there is no robust correlation between them and the purchase decision variable, so the individual as a consumer cannot clearly distinguish the feeling that triggered his purchase action.

5. CONCLUSION

Studying the individual and his interactions with the environments in which he lives is a complex process, so it is important to cut out the content to be investigated, so that the researcher feels comfortable in his methodological procedures and has clarity in his inferences.

It was no different in this article, the authors revisited their studies on consumer behaviour, starting by distinguishing the triggers that trigger the individual's purchase decision as a consumer.

The neurosciences have vehemently permeated scientific fields such as psychology, education, economics, and it is no different from the field of knowledge of consumer behaviour.

Specifically, studies of the individual as a consumer point to the need for researchers to adjust their market studies with the cognitive issues that underlie the individual's brain. Understanding the feelings that precede your decision-making is among the primary tasks.

The authors of this article believe that with their objective of investigating whether the individual as a consumer can differentiate whether, in his purchase decision process, he is imbued with the feeling of a problem, need or desire for consumption, it will contribute for researchers to deepen their knowledge in relation to the satisfaction and dissatisfaction dichotomy in the acquisition and consumption of products.

The unfolding of this objective proposed to verify whether problem, need and desire were synonyms, as the literature on consumer behaviour does not consider this detail, alternating between the three. The research findings pointed out that they are not synonyms.

Another point was to verify whether the individual as a consumer was able to distinguish between these three feelings as triggers for his purchase action. The findings indicated that he cannot make this distinction clearly, as the correlations found between his purchase action and the three feelings were considered “weak” and, sometimes, “very weak”.

In this sense, the objectives proposed for this research were fulfilled and the content developed here is available to academia, marketing professionals and society.

For academia, this content intends to contribute to the evolution of the field of consumer behaviour studies, proposing that the purchase decision process be revisited, but now with a neuroscience bias, expanding the search for understanding the cognition/behaviour relationship of the individual as a consumer.

For marketing professionals, it is expected that, in the development and positioning of new products, for advertising pieces and marketing strategies, the research findings presented here are considered, in the sense of increasing attention to ethical, environmental and satisfaction issues of its audiences in terms of product offerings.

And for society, through campaigns, courses, training aimed at highlighting the importance of delineation in the purchase process, in the sense of mitigating or avoiding waste due to the volume of product disposal, repetitive purchases due to dissatisfaction and anxiety or even the practice of accumulation of products that will not even be used by the consumer.

Another point that should be mentioned is the methodological procedures used. Certainly, the use of only two statistics, in this case the EFA and the Spearman correlation, may appear to be little robust to the proposal presented here.

However, this work presented an excerpt whose objective was to circumscribe the link between cognition and behaviour of the individual as a consumer, specifically, in the first stage of the buying process and the statistical techniques used met the investigation purposes.

In order to fulfil the objectives, the scale developed by Loureiro (2020) and the two techniques mentioned here were used, but as a suggestion for the improvement of this study, the experiment would be appropriate in this same cut, which was not carried out on this occasion due to time and resource issues, which constitute research limitations for this article.

The authors of this article encourage those interested in the subject to deepen their research on this topic or derive from it, other lines of investigation in the field of consumer behaviour.

Therefore, it is recorded here that this work does not exhaust the possibilities of analysis of the first stage of the consumer's purchase decision process and any contribution offered for its improvement will be welcome.

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