

# Economic Behaviour Faced with the Suggestologic Phenomenon

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## Abstract

*The motivational projectivity of the ego exerts an outstanding power on the individual who lets himself drawn to a provocative source, resulting in the fact that, at the same time with the selective orientation to the source of attraction, it ensures behaviour guidance in accordance with the irradiation of that source. Identifying the numerous variables that lead to the emergence of the idea of acquisition causes a change in the polarity centre which is made up of predispositions which suggestion receptiveness is based on. The suggestologic loyalty to products creates certain tense states which the existence of the motivational universe is based on, giving it a certain stability in time.*

**Key words:** *suggestion, consumer satisfaction, suggestologic communication, goods, marketing activity*

**JEL Classification:** *D03*

## Raising the Suggestion Concept to the Level of Knowledge

The modern concept of marketing starts from the premise that inside any economic activity there must be the desire to meet requirements and also to anticipate needs through the systematic monitoring and design of an adequate investigation set of tools.

Analysing marketing in the scope of the market phenomena also requires performing surveys in the depth of the people's economic behaviour, and surveys from the perspective of the suggestologic phenomenon perceived as a result of gaining the experience of a lifetime, under the influence of the mobility and plasticity of its needs.

Suggestion was used in times gone by with magic-religious purposes. Yet, the various forms of influence through suggestion remained, along the centuries, a secret held by magicians, priests or wizards.

The occultisation of these procedures, which has not yet been overcome nowadays, had, for a long time, a detrimental effect on researching certain practices which only starting from the 18th century began to be approached on a larger basis and in a more scientific manner.

Many sources regarding the use of suggestive techniques in remote times are lacunal and the new research has not been able to solve this problem, either. Yet, there is sufficient evidence, resulting from recent investigations, especially of the shamans' activity.

The concept of “suggestion” does not refer only to the scope of the existence of the goods, but it is extended into the ego of the economic subject, within the cognitive processes, namely the premises that lead to becoming aware of the act of purchasing.<sup>1</sup>

The intricate psychological processes, located between “entrances” and “exits”, cannot be emphasised, especially given the current level of human knowledge, since they actually occur in the so-called “black box” of the subconsciousness, which meets, every once in a while, the need for the absolute of the human dimension and for the natural of the real dimension. The inputs (price, quality, usefulness etc.) reach the level of the human psychic by means of suggestologic channels or simply through information propagation channels (advertising, knowledge etc.), causing certain “outputs” (product selection, purchase frequency etc.). All of these can be controlled to a larger or smaller extent through the accumulation of information which can be obtained from a variety of sources.

The economic subject has a behaviour directed towards meeting individual needs or those of the micro-group one belongs to. This behaviour is directly determined by the suggestion process which developed in close connection to the motivational research meant to explain the purchase and consumption decisions mechanism. Even if once the need appears the emphasis was placed on motivation, as a result of human’s intellectual energy resources, they gradually shifted towards comprising the cognitive components of human behaviour, representing more than a simple order mechanism<sup>2</sup>.

As a distinct field of knowledge, there appears the category of hypnotic practices considered unidimensional, thus representing a relatively stable emotional state towards a certain process.

Faria and Braid, expressing the psychological aspects involved in the hypnosis process, smoothed the understanding of suggestion factors. According to the Nancy school, suggestion is a principle that explains hypnosis and its related states. Hypnotic acts are, according to Bernheim, similar to, if not identical with various unconscious, involuntary acts which can be noticed in everyday life.

Suggestion is a very broad concept; it represents the idea which, once inside the brain, tends to materialise. Conceptualising the idea is the factor that makes us buy the respective product. It depends on the intensity with which it is experienced, on whether it is marginal or central, on whether it manages to ensure an independent existence.

Suggestion independence is given both by the purchase intentions and by researching the attitudes that must be directly subordinated to the category of products which meet various categories of needs.

From this point of view, suggestion is seen as an incitation likely to trigger spontaneous reactions, not mediated by the reflexive resorts of thought.<sup>3</sup> The subject of suggestive influence rarely realises the fact that he has alternatives not to react to the suggestion. We have three elements: the suggestive or elementally suggestive situation; the suggested behaviour; suggestibility or the subject’s willingness to react to the suggestion.

The suggestive situation is a stimulus with provocative character likely to trigger inadequate reactions of the subject (negative suggestions not to buy a certain product because it is inadequate); reactions which increase the adequacy to reality (positive suggestions to buy a certain product because it is the best); neutral reactions (neutral suggestions). Suggestion is a phenomenon which can occur both when awake and under hypnosis; but it also represents the act through which an idea is awakened in the brain and accepted by it.

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<sup>1</sup> Enăchescu, C., *Neuropsychology*, Victor Publishing House, Bucharest, 1996.

<sup>2</sup> Cătoiu, I., Teodorescu, N., *Consumer Behaviour*, Economica Publishing House, Bucharest, 1997.

<sup>3</sup> Gheorghiu, M., D., *Intellectuals in the Field of Power*, Polirom Publishing House, Bucharest, 2007.

There are psychologists who include suggestion into the larger group of phenomena that influence human behaviour. Various aspects of changing attitudes and opinions, prestigious phenomena, conformism, as well as the suggestive manipulation of certain group norms have been studied. Jahoda (1989) emphasises the fact that suggestion was used at the beginning of the century as a tool in explaining almost every psycho-social phenomenon.

Experimental psychology emphasises the fact that we have a primary suggestibility which is measured through direct tests by means of which the subject was asked to perform a motive action.

Secondary suggestibility, measured through indirect sensorial tests and tertiary suggestibility which refers to changing attitudes and opinions as a result of a persuasive influence based on prestige. In the marketing environment there is an interdependent ratio between researching the attitudes and researching the intentions to buy (a company, through a close cooperation with a psychologist, can act at the level of each type of suggestibility to obtain an increase in sales).

## **The Buyer's Decision-Making Process**

The suggestibility phenomenon fosters the existence of clearer attitudes and therefore derives a relatively stable emotional state to a certain "object".

We must take into account the so-called moods or predispositions to suggestion. Behavioural factors can play a part in increasing the provocative character of the suggestive situation or, on the contrary, in the dynamics or neutralisation of its action power.

There must be an expectancy action to the stimulus (product): attitudes, reasons play a part in enhancing the provocative character of the suggestive situation. The product must meet the buyer's expectations and needs.

From the numerous variables that lead to the appearance of the idea of buying, the polarity centre is made up of a series of *predispositions* that are the basis of suggestion receptiveness:

1. *Imagination* is the human's capacity to create images and opinions of situations or persons and to invest in these images and opinions the feature of authenticity and likelihood, regardless of whether they mirror the reality adequately or not. The image is in fact an aspect of the consumer's behaviour, a result of the way in which the goods/services or the companies are perceived by the possible consumers.<sup>4</sup> In fact, it is interesting to analyse the way in which the image is created among the clients, as well as its evolution. Thus we establish the level of familiarisation with the product, the brand or the company, whose image is investigated, and also the way this image is represented in the consumer's mind. The image intensity measured by means of product selection clarity is related to the specificity vector which is given by the degree of distinguishing between closely-related products.
2. *Transposition* is based on the ability to imagine, also involving training the capacity for social empathy, imitation and learning; it is the syndrome of features that allow the individual to switch spontaneously or deliberately from a way of living and behaving to another. For this type of suggestion it is recommended to carry out a longitudinal research which allows one to establish the correlation between the intensity of the spontaneous or deliberate shift from a way of living to another, as well as to establish the degree to which the transposition becomes fact in a given period of time.

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<sup>4</sup> Cătoi u, I., Teodorescu, N., *Consumer Behaviour*, Economica Publishing House, Bucharest, 1997, p. 32

3. *Conformity* is the individuals' willingness to harmonise their opinions, attitudes with those of the group they are part of. The conformity tendency varies from one individual to another and takes a wide variety of forms. Attitudes are the result of influences exerted by skills, habits and reasons on a single behavioural component, with an increased stability in time and thus create the predisposition to act on the basis of certain beliefs.
4. *Subordination* is the mood that mediates the non-critical submission to stimuli outside or inside the individual, stimuli which aim directly or indirectly, intentionally or not, at directing his behaviour. Although he has the freedom to decide, the person feels half-forced to react in accordance with the indications which he is sent or which he sends to himself. The tendency to be subordinated to other persons or situations is seen to various extents in all people, including those that are characterised by a very keen critical sense or by voluntary and authoritarian character. The approach to suggestion through subordination can become multi-dimensional par excellence as a result of a system of dynamic relations between the perception, information, attitude, motivation and emotional display processes, which characterise the individual's integration in the world of the set of consumer goods existing in a society at a given moment, through individual or group decision-making acts regarding them. Subordination is based on the needs for self-protection (protection of the ego), namely, avoiding the discomfort brought about by contradicting the other and getting out of ambiguous situations through solutions that are more difficult to take over as such from others.
5. *Captivation* is a predisposition through which the selective orientation of the person to a provocative source is ensured, resulting in the fact that the person lets himself drawn into and even absorbed by the respective source. Certain situations exert an outstanding fascination or seduction on the individual. The individual lets himself carried away by others' ideas because they come close to his, or maybe because they come from persons he likes. Large companies hire renowned personalities (very popular personalities) to promote their products (image). The most representative characteristic of this feature is that, together with the selective direction to the attraction source, it provides behaviour guidance in accordance with the irradiation exerted by this source<sup>5</sup>.

"The leading idea" is one of the fundamental characteristics of suggestibility. It must be formulated in accurate terms and it must be imposed in the promotion campaign.

Any person has, to a larger or smaller extent, the moods above. These moods are complementary, namely they are integrated into larger systems such the mechanisms to protect the ego.

A special part in exploring the suggestion techniques is filled by the motivational projectivity of the behaviour of the ego whose purpose is to investigate areas of behavioural processes that are in fact inaccessible through classical approaches. Thus, areas of the human psychic, which are closely connected to the subjects' personality are explored, and the direct approaches can be considered undesirable by them.

There is a connection between the receptiveness to suggestion and the internal submission of certain personal constructs. Personal constructs are a cognitive way typical of the individual to set order into his world. Personal constructs are the ideas or concepts that make a type of behaviour differ from another, which make the individual be what he is now, in other words they make them have certain attitudes, beliefs, opinions and act according to them.

Suggestive influence acts when a relevant, but still unchecked, element also appears with a personal construct. The construct changes once presented with a material of opposite content.

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<sup>5</sup> Cătoiu, I. et al., *Marketing research*, Uranus Publishing House, Bucharest, 2002.

The communicator's qualities and charm increase the communication effectiveness in that they draw the receiver's message from the message that is sent.

Lundy, in 1989, presents a series of *techniques* meant to facilitate the suggestive influence upon communication:

- repetition of the message;
- the use of an increased number of arguments in favour of what we want to suggest;
- the source of influence that sends the message must be an expert in the field and, at the same time, an attractive person;
- the use of creating emotional reactions in the message receiver;
- the use of a context that produces positive emotions (agreeable environment, music);
- the use of certain messages that stimulate anxiety, these must not be excessively high because otherwise the subject no longer receives the message and as a result he cannot be influenced any more;
- direct influence using "face to face" tactics is more efficient than the indirect one;
- the use of surprise tactics increases the chance for positive influence.

We must also pay attention to a series of *characteristics* of the subject-receiver, which increase the chance to change the suggestion situation into suggested behaviour:

- simple suggestive messages have increased effects on less intelligent subjects, which complex messages have larger effects on the intelligent ones.
- the persons with low self-esteem usually are more suggestible than those with a high self-esteem level;
- the emotionally involved persons end up impressing themselves with their own arguments, and believing in them.<sup>6</sup>

A more rapid change in attitudes to a product occurs when there appears an increased discrepancy between the original attitude and the one we want to seed. The discrepancy must not be so big as to cause the lack of credulity or a negative attitude to the communicator:

- the subjects that have been asked to be more careful in the communication content were more easily influenced because they shifted their attention from the internal confirmation process of the existing persons' constructs;
- in order to be more easily influenced, the subject must become inwardly passive.

The suggested answer is the final link of the suggestion endeavour, respectively the reaction of the subject to those that have been suggested. This answer is not always visible and checkable, the vast majority of negative suggestion influences remaining hidden.

By means of suggestions, one can actually influence positively or negatively almost all the psychic processes and functions, and also the physiological functions of the body. Suggestibility is the subjects' capacity to react to suggestion. It represents that private manifestation of the influence that ensures the transformation of the suggestion situation into a suggested behaviour.

The suggestion phenomenon is an induced situation which points to a path to follow (achieving a certain behaviour type/buying a certain product), requiring that the person submit to it without using the critical resorts of reason. The research into the way in which these variable act is hindered by the fact that the human's mental processes cannot be seen directly, but they can only be deduced from postulating certain hypothetical variables present in the mind of the ego

<sup>6</sup> Enăchescu, C., *Neuropsychology*, Victor Publishing House, Bucharest, 1996.

and which result in a certain behaviour. The sensorial inputs are those that cause the emotional phenomenon that can be perceived only at a certain level of experience in the marketing activity.

These aspects must be taken into account when we talk about the marketing activity, in which it is aimed to differentiate between the mix components for certain targeted consumer segments.

Communication within the suggestion process can be thought highly of, not because of its importance, but because of the unlimited search for answers given by the suggested human element.

The buyer's decision-making process can be simulated and especially suggested by means of testing the possible reactions thereof in facing various messages (promotional ones), but also from the point of view of the relationships between him and the environment.

People have various value systems which guide and develop their propensity for certain goods differently, and especially those for the creation and perpetuation of the consumption need. Thus, preferences will be different both from one individual to another, and for one and the same individual, under different space and time conditions. Practically, preferences surface differently according to the overall usefulness level.

Preferences also surface according to the suggestion level which develops differently from one person to another. Some of us have a keen sense of suggestive immunity, but others are not willing to be immunised entirely and therefore there occurs the buying phenomenon, located at various levels.

Meeting the various needs for goods often emphasises the half-saturated and repeated character of consumption needs. Yet, there are half-shared elements for a certain social group related to the way in which the propensities for certain goods or services are organised.

They are generally under the emblematic sign of certain traditions, habits, customs, which depend on the specificity of a certain geographic region or on factors of a complex psycho-social nature which mixes with a social group's level of culture and civilisation.

The buyer's selection of a combination from the multitude of combinations of accessible (admitted) goods depends on his tastes and habits, on the manner in which to be suggested or not by other entities, depends on his own ego and last but not least on the social groups' perception level.

For example, in analysing two combinations of goods  $X = (x_1, x_2, \dots, x_n)$  and  $Y = (y_1, y_2, \dots, y_n)$ , the consumer performs one of the following reasoning:

- Combination „X” is preferred;
- Combination „Y” is preferred;
- Combinations „X” and „Y” are preferred as much (equivalent, equal in value, as useful)<sup>7</sup>.

Thus, in the set of goods, we define the following preference relationship: “more preferred than” or “equal value”. This is one of the contemporary microeconomic concepts, developed and updated; perceived as an absolute of the individual suggested by different levels of comparison and purchase.

Consumer satisfaction is directly linked with a product's usefulness or uselessness. The usefulness of a product also has a strong subjective load, which influences the consumers directly and differently.

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<sup>7</sup> Cătoiu, I., Teodorescu, N., *Consumer Behaviour*, Economica Publishing House, Bucharest, 1997.

The diversity of the consumption needs thus emphasises the wide variety of people's preferences and implicitly the variety of consumption models.

In each product there is a quantitative level which, once it is reached, maximises consumer satisfaction. Continuing to consume after that quantitative segment will lead to a gradual decrease in satisfaction, down to reaching a limit equivalent to dissatisfaction.

In broad term, suggestology is a purely phenomenal occurrence, directly imperceptible, but recognisable through its exterior display. In its case (the case of suggestology) the object becomes the subject of reflection and it is deciphered in an absolute way through the reflexive analysis of its meaning. Thus, the subject does not show up as certain appearances from which we deduce the objective reality; it appears as an "objective unreality" of the subjective intra-suggestologic content.

There is the supposition that the features that define an individual's personality influence both his perceptual suggestologic mechanism and the motivational mechanism thereof, but also his purchase and consumption behaviour. What is not clearly known yet refers to the nature of these connections, to the succession in their achievement.

Numerous aspects of the marketing activity have been investigated, based on personality traits.

Among these, the following are worth mentioning: the suggestologic loyalty to products and product brands, the attitude to products and service and the way in which their image is created amount the consumers, the reaction to the way in which products are packed, the loyalty to the distribution units, to the promotional activity.

The consumer is a universe of more or less suggestologic motivations, which cannot be seen directly, which hinders their notice. The other ones are generated by the consumer's living in society and aim at meeting the psychological needs thereof. Any person needs not only the material goods that ensure the survival, but also the aspiration to consideration or the need not to be despised, so as to be able to become a universal complete unit.

The tense states at the basis of suggestions are expressions of the existence of certain needs associated with the consumer, organised into a system that consequently grants the suggestion a relative stability in time.

The marketing activity must envisage the features of various categories of needs as well as the strong interaction between them. In order to motivate suggestology through the marketing activity, it is also important to dichotomise the products into fundamental and selective ones. The fundamental ones are associated with the idea of meeting the need for a product or service, and the selective ones are the basis for choosing a variety, a brand of the respective product or service (this aspect is very important especially in the promotional activity).

The reasons underlying the purchase and the consumption behaviour can be associated with the idea of rationality and emotion.

The rationality vector, being associated with the consumer's reason, develops a higher level of suggestibility which becomes functionally sustainable and last but not least economical. Emotion is closely related to meeting some of the individual's psychological needs, which are dominant in the case of new or luxury products.

## **The Multi-Dimensional Character of Suggestology**

Suggestions have a strong multi-dimensional character, being created between the biological and the social, between inner drives and knowledge, between the subjective need and value as a reference system, between the relationships with the objects and the connections with people,

therefore they cannot be reduced to the level of a bottom line, neither can they be raised to the level of the higher limit of determination and influence<sup>8</sup>.

Stimuli in the marketing environment refer to product or services features such as quality, price, differentiation and availability on the market. The stimuli associated with suggestion create a unitary set which can be significant or symbolic. Significant suggestion is caused by the physical existence of the products and services. Symbolic suggestion is caused by linguistic or visual representations of the products and their features resulting from the performed promotional activities.

The research carried out in this field of suggestology is not as elaborate as to allow for a clear approach to the product market influencing or not the consumer. What can be said is that the one who purchases a product can be influenced directly or indirectly through the so-called hetero-suggestions (suggestions made by another person). When the purchase act is performed influences are often felt as to the purchased good, its quality, influences which come unwillingly from other subjects, different from the former. Thus, he can buy a larger quantity of products than the one he needs because hetero-suggestion becomes a routine that we see more and more often.

Suggestions must observe the following *conditions*:

- they must be accepted by the subject;
- they must be in accordance with the persons' system of values;
- they must not be too long;
- they must be expressed in positive terms;
- they must be eloquent.

Only when these suggestologic features are accepted can we say that the plan for a marketing success has been achieved. The products were accepted and thus the purchase of good X is no longer an issue, since it has become "the most preferred".

The success of the launch of a product on a market and its unlimited sale consists in fact in the success of the directly influencing the consumer to purchase it. A direct suggestion where the desire to influence is obvious has no chances for success, since it has a negative effect. In addition to an indirect suggestion resulting from the very presentation of advertisements is meant to render absolute the information intake which eventually leads to achieving the objective. Even if the intension to influence remains hidden, indirect suggestions are those that help products and services to sell. The more convinced the individual is of the need for certain products through direct or indirect suggestologic practices, the more the desire to diversify the ranges of products will increase.

The polarity profile being thus determined, all we have to do is to project the subjects' reasons or attitudes, most often without their realising this. The technique is justified by the fact that we explore areas of the human psychic that are closely linked to the subjects' personalities, and the direct approaches could be considered undesirable by them.

Suggestology and its universe are created as a starting point and as an action point, but also as a final point in order to witness an evolution both for the national economy as a whole, and for the world economy.

The development of the operational complete set of suggestologic techniques can be a starting point in organising the economic and social mechanism which is the essence of marketing, which comes up with a perspective and set of activities specific to the market economy.

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<sup>8</sup> Kreindler, A., Apostol, V., *The Brain and Mental Activity*, Scientific Publishing House, Bucharest, 1978.

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5. Kreindler, A., Apostol, V., *The Brain and Mental Activity*, Scientific Publishing House, Bucharest, 1978.

## Comportamentul economic față în față cu fenomenul sugestiologic

### Rezumat

*Proiectivitatea motivațională a comportamentului eului exercită o forță deosebită asupra individului care se lasă atras spre o sursă provocativă având drept rezultat faptul că o dată cu orientarea selectivă spre sursa de atracție, ea asigură dirijarea conduitei în conformitate cu iradierea exercitată de această sursă. Identificarea numeroaselor variabile care duc la apariția ideii de achiziție determină schimbarea centrului de polaritate care este constituit din predispoziții ce stau la baza receptivității sugestiei. Fidelitatea sugestiologică față de produse creează anumite stări tensionate care stau la baza existenței universului motivațional, oferindu-i o anumită stabilitate în timp.*