

*The author identifies  
five kinds of motivating situations  
by which consumers may  
classify themselves.*

# Motivation Research Revisited

Geraldine Fennell

For a number of years motivation as an explicit focus for marketing research has been neglected. In the business community "motivation research" has come to refer to a specific research approach, inspired by a particular theory of motivational dynamics (Dichter, 1960, 1964; Martineau, 1957). As the methodology and its theoretical underpinning fell out of favor, motivation research largely disappeared from the marketing researcher's roster of research categories.

Interest in consumer motivations has not waned, however. Marketers of goods and services are as vitally interested today in the motivations of potential targets as they were in the heyday of "motivation research." Nevertheless, it is current practice to study and report on consumer motivations either in language close to that used in questionnaires—e.g., reasons for purchase interest or inferentially, through the descriptive labels applied to clusters of respondents in segmentation research.

Segmentation research appears to be today's preferred methodology for studying consumer motivation just as depth re-

search was the preferred methodology of the 1950s and early 1960s. One difference is worth noting, however. Whereas "motivation research" was, to a degree at least, grounded in a theory of motivation, segmentation research has been largely theory free. To the extent that segmentation research has theoretical underpinnings, the formulations have not been avowedly motivational. One reason is undoubtedly the absence of a comprehensive theory of consumer motivation that can guide the input and analysis of market segmentation research and permit the prediction of brand standing in relation to the motivational structure of the market. A second, related reason may be that the purposes for which segmentation studies are conducted require the investigation of a variety of consumer processes, of which only one could be called motivational. In the absence of a theoretical formulation of consumer motivation, the conceptual boundary between motivation and other psychological processes remains unclear.

This paper presents a conceptual framework within which a limited role is as-

signed to motivation as a determinant of brand choice, and it presents a generalized typology of consumer motivation. The discussion of motivation takes a position on three topics currently receiving attention in the psychological literature: (1) whether or not there is a need for the construct motivation; (2) the appropriate explanatory role for the construct motivation; and (3) the role of personality, situations, and their interaction in explaining behavior. In the three following sections of this paper each of these issues is briefly described and implications for marketing research practice are suggested.

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## Need for Motivation

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Given the value placed by science on simplicity and parsimony, it is reasonable to ask that a construct establish its claim to be retained, and that minimally it not duplicate the explanatory load carried by other constructs. In this area, some psychologists have questioned the need to retain the construct motivation (e.g., Bolles, 1967).

At its simplest level, the challenge to retaining the construct motivation takes the following form. We observe two individuals spending their summer Sunday afternoons; one reads, the other plays tennis. If we suggest that one is motivated to read, the other motivated to play tennis, a reinforcement theorist will say that the behaviors of reading and playing tennis are better explained by asserting that one individual has in the past been reinforced for reading, the other for playing tennis. The reinforcement theorist takes the position that the construct motivation is superfluous.

The argument can, however, be pursued. Further observation over a period of months reveals that the individual who reads on Sunday afternoon does so only during the months when his children are at camp; when his children are at home he plays tennis. We also observe that his three boys raise the noise level at home to a degree that makes a quiet afternoon of reading quite unthinkable. If we now assert that he plays tennis because he is motivated to get out of the house, a reinforcement theorist will agree that the former analysis in reinforcement terms was incomplete. The antecedent conditions for reinforcement were not specified. The reinforcement analysis may be amended along the following lines: given antecedent conditions of high noise level in the home, our subject has been reinforced in the past for playing tennis; given peace and quiet, he has been reinforced in the past for reading. Once again the behaviors of reading and playing tennis are better explained in reinforcement terms; the construct motivation adds nothing to the analysis. At this stage the issue reduces in large measure to one of personal theoretical preference: one may choose to study antecedent conditions for reinforcement or motivating situations. Reinforcement theorists and psychologists of other theoretical persuasions will undoubtedly decide this issue in their own good time and in the light of their particular concerns.

What then of the concerns of the marketing researcher? The marketing researcher

observes two individuals buying laundry detergent; one buys Brand A, the other buys Brand B. We investigate further and determine that the antecedent conditions for reinforcement of the first individual are an exceptionally dirty laundry, and for the second individual a light laundry consisting mainly of delicate fabrics.

Undoubtedly a simple analysis of brand used by condition of laundry will reveal that individuals who have exceptionally dirty laundry distribute their brand choice over a number of brands; likewise for individuals who have a light laundry of delicate fabrics. Individuals, then, experiencing identical antecedent conditions for reinforcement are apparently reinforced by different brands. This state of affairs is not necessarily a reflection on the reinforcement analysis per se. The introduction of additional variables—for example, brand

loyalty and brand perception—will no doubt increase explained variance.

The point at issue for the marketing researcher appears to be primarily a pragmatic one. Given the specific objectives for which his research is planned and conducted, will the marketing researcher find it more convenient to study motivating situations or antecedent conditions for reinforcement? Consider the situation in which a new brand entry in a product category is contemplated. The marketing researcher may find it more convenient at first to address the issue: what are the motivating situations in which users of this product find themselves? He then asks: Are the current brand offerings well-tailored to these motivating situations or do some consumers find themselves making do with existing brands? In a situation, then, where the task is essentially to determine the characteristics of a brand that will reinforce purchase behavior, the marketing researcher may find it intuitively more meaningful to conceptualize his problem initially as one of isolating and describing the motivating situations in which consumers find themselves.

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### Explanatory Role for Motivation

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Psychologists who are not averse to retaining the construct use motivation in reference to the activation and direction of behavior or in reference to the activation of behavior (Cofer, 1972). Briefly stated, "activation" is concerned with the question: Why does behavior occur? and "direction" is concerned with the question: Given the many forms behavior can take, why does it take this form? Psychologists who restrict the use of motivation to the activation of behavior (Why does it occur?) do so because they believe other constructs, principally learning constructs, can deal adequately with the direction of behavior (Why in this form?).

Minimally, a motivational analysis of behavior addresses the conditions under which behavior is activated, triggered, aroused, or instigated. Following, it is suggested that a general direction for be-



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havior is implicit in the various activating conditions. However, the position is taken that the specific direction of behavior (brand choice, in this case) is determined only in part by motivation and that other psychological processes enter the determination of the specific behavior selected. These other psychological processes can be described in learning and perception terms, or alternatively in terms of the affective and cognitive components of brand attitude.

To the extent that the activation of behavior is of interest to marketing researchers, it may be found convenient to have available a term that has unique reference to behavior activation. Motivation offers much in the way of intuitive meaning and usage to recommend it for this purpose. Of the other major psychological constructs such as learning, perception, attitude, and personality, none has developed connotations of behavior activation.

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### Personality and Situation

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The construct motivation has been extensively used in the work of personality theorists. Freudian theory, which provided the theoretical direction for motivation research of the 50s and 60s, is a theory of personality development. In common with other major theorists in this field, Freud proposed an interpretation of personality in terms of one unifying motivational theme. For Freud it was channelization of the libido; for Alder it was striving for superiority (Ansbacher and Ansbacher, 1956); for Fromm escape from loneliness (1941); for Sullivan the need for human relationships (1953); and for Horney coping with anxiety (1937).

The experimental approach to the study of personality has in recent years provided insight into the manner in which individual predispositions to respond show themselves in overt behavior. The importance of this insight can scarcely be overrated. To predict behavior, one must measure more than just predisposition to respond. He must also ascertain whether the particular situation is perceived as one that engages

the measured predisposition (Mischel, 1968, 1973; Bowers, 1973). Individuals classified as comparable in terms of measured predisposition behave differently in different situations. These differences are a function of the degree to which the situation engages the behavioral predisposition. For example, individuals high in need for achievement show achievement-related behavior in situations they perceive as ego-involving or evaluative, but not in situations they perceive as non-evaluative (Atkinson, 1953).

The immediate implication for marketing research is to focus attention on the consumer's perception of the product-use situation. It matters little that a housewife scores high on need for approval if she does not perceive doing the laundry as a situation that engages her need for approval. This important insight suggests that when only personality predisposition is measured, marketing research practice falls short of the mark. The evidence attests to the meager explanatory power of personality constructs for consumer behavior (Kassarjian, 1973).

Psychologists who study the effect of personality predisposition on behavior have attempted to integrate situational factors into their research, and the need for situational sampling is emphasized (e.g., Bowers, 1973). The idea of situational sampling raises at once the question of a definition of the population of situations to be sampled. If marketing researchers are to integrate a situational focus into the study of consumer motivation, a classification of motivating situations is called for. The availability of such a classification for use in motivation research will allow the consumer to tell us how he or she perceives the product-use situation in motivational terms.

To summarize the discussion: There is a unique niche for motivation among the explanatory constructs that organize consumer behavior, and among the corresponding areas of consumer information that researchers need to investigate. Conceptually, motivation encompasses the conditions for behavior activation, one of

the determinants of brand choice. The empirical question for motivation research is the identification of the conditions that activate brand purchase. This view of motivation calls for analysis of the conditions that activate behavior, a requirement that dovetails with the need to include situation as well as personality variables as behavioral determinants. The resulting motivational typology is stated in terms of situation types, not person types.

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### Motivational Typology

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Consumers of goods and services perceive themselves to be in one of five motivating situations, each of which has an activating condition and behavior mode. The motivating situations are distinguished in terms of the perceived situational element that activates situation-characteristic behavior. The five categories of situation perception and behavior activated are shown in Table 1.

The temptation to label the categories in a form similar to that used in segmentation research (e.g., Escapers, Preventers, etc.) has been resisted in the interest of underscoring that this is a typology of situations (as perceived by consumers). There may or may not be a tendency for consumers to perceive the product use situation in a consistent manner across products. That question is an empirical one that will have low priority for the consumer researcher customarily engaged in investigating product categories, one at a time.

**Aversive Elements/Escape.** The consumer whose behavior mode is escape is motivated to buy a product to solve (escape from) salient problems. The product-use situation is perceived as containing aversive elements primarily. The aversive elements in this situation are not perceived as preventable; they are present and must be dealt with (escaped from). Examples are: laundry perceived as extra dirty, headaches or stomach upsets perceived as especially severe or frequent. The consumer for whom this is the relevant product-use situation seeks brands offering specialized product or packaging benefits

in line with the perceived aversive elements.

**Anticipated Aversive Elements/Prevention.** The consumer whose behavior mode is prevention is motivated to buy a product to ward off an undesirable situation. He perceives the product-use situation not as containing strongly aversive elements (requiring escape), but rather he is motivated by the possible failure to deal appropriately with the situation. Action to prevent or avoid the occurrence of problems is indicated here. In more general terms the product-use situation is anxiety-arousing, and the product is used primarily to reduce anxiety. Examples are fear of censure if the laundry is not up to socially acceptable standards, concern over social inadequacy if the headache, tension, or stomach upset is not overcome. The consumer for whom this is the relevant product-use situation seeks brands offering social or psychological benefits.

Included here are perceptions of the product-use situation as an occasion for praise, prestige, affection, eminence, esteem. Although these are pleasant outcomes, they are included here and are excluded from the Positive Elements category in Table 1 because they are motivationally equivalent to perceptions of the situation as an occasion for preventing blame or loss of prestige, affection, eminence, esteem.

**Normal Depletion/Maintenance.** The consumer whose behavior mode is maintenance is motivated to buy the product because supplies have become depleted or to use the product because normal departure from a maintenance-level has occurred. He perceives the product-use situation as one of simple maintenance. Examples are doing the laundry because the clothes are soiled, taking a headache remedy because one has a headache. This consumer is likely to have a low level of involvement and interest in the product category and he may not be very brand conscious.

**Product-Related Aversive Elements/Conflict Resolution.** The consumer whose behavior mode is conflict resolution is mo-

tivated to avoid potential problems inherent in the consumption of the product itself. For this consumer, the salient feature of the product-use situation is potentially negative outcomes originating in the product itself. Examples are concern that a laundry detergent may damage the fabric or that a headache or stomach remedy may have side effects. This consumer seeks brands offering product-in-use assurances.

**Positive Elements/Diversion Enjoyment.** The consumer whose behavior mode is diversion and enjoyment is motivated to buy the product primarily because he sees the product-use situation as offering an opportunity for fun, novelty, complexity, and aesthetic or sensory pleasure. Examples are dishwashing detergent with fresh scent, alphabet breakfast cereal, airlines with kimonoed stewardesses and exotic food.

This motivating situation may be thought of as analogous to Maslow's (1954) self-actualizing motive, assumed to arise when physiological, safety, belongingness, love, and esteem needs have been satisfied. The assumption in the present instance is not the prior satisfaction, but the relative unimportance of these other needs. The analogy may be helpful in clarifying that the Positive Elements activating condition is one in which the consumer perceives the product-use situa-

tion as offering an opportunity for aesthetic, cognitive, and sensory enjoyment.

## Product Applications

**Perception of Product-Use Situation.** Generalization and abstraction go hand in hand, and inevitably the typology is stated at a level of abstraction that requires translation into the specific problems and benefits appropriate to individual product categories. The typology serves as a framework for writing the interview guide used in exploratory research, as well as the input items used in survey research. The specification that motivation be measured in terms of consumer perception of the product-use situation acts as a reminder to formulate the usual input sources—personality constructs, lifestyles, and other psychographic variables—in terms specifically tailored to the product under study. The motivational categories provide a checklist to ensure that possibly relevant situation perceptions are covered.

**Brand Choice Within Motivating Situation.** In the present formulation, brand perception (e.g., Does Brand A offer what I want?) and brand evaluation (e.g., Does Brand A deliver what I want?) as well as motivation (perception of the product-use situation) determine brand choice. An important consideration here is the degree to which brands are unambiguously posi-

Table 1

### Typology of Motivating Situations\*

<i>Situation Perception</i>	<i>Behavior Activated</i>
1. Aversive Elements	Escape
2. Anticipated Aversive Elements	Prevention
3. Normal Depletion	Maintenance
4. Product Related Aversive Elements	Conflict Resolution
5. Positive Elements	Diversion and Enjoyment

\*The typology originates in the three classic paradigms of instrumental conditioning (Kimble, 1961), the experimental study of conflict (Miller, 1944), and of exploratory behavior (Berlyne, 1960; Fiske and Maddi, 1961; Fowler, 1965).

tioned in relation to the various activating conditions. Unambiguous positioning is clearly a two-way street, reflecting on the one hand the positioning stance of marketing management and, on the other, what the consumer chooses to perceive and take away from the brand's message.

**Motivational Profiles of Products.** The stage of brand differentiation reached, as well as a product's essential function, determine its motivational profile expressed in terms of the proportion of the market in each of the motivational categories. Consumer perception of the product-use situation is multidetermined. In addition to personality, lifestyle, stage in life-cycle, family size, and other demographic variables, feedback from advertising and from the range of brand offerings helps structure the consumer's perception of the product-use situation. In a particular product category, brand differentiation may not have proceeded to the stage where the range of brand offerings responds to all typology categories. In this event, consumers' perceptions may not be maximally differentiated. Even assuming brand offerings tailored to all typology categories, product profiles will likely show different motivational configurations, reflecting the product's essential function. Drug remedies compared with food products, for example, may have relatively more of their consumers at the problem-oriented end of the typology than in the Positive Elements category.

Among many aids to unravelling the mystique of creativity in product idea generation, Ramond (1974) offers a multi-dimensional taxonomy of products—one dimension being product complexity expressed in terms of number of rewards. Product profiles stated in terms of the motivational typology may serve as one approach to locating products on Ramond's dimension of psychological complexity.

**Comparison With Teleometric Model**

It is of interest to compare the theoretically-based motivational typology pre-

sented here with an empirically derived teleometric typology (Pernica, 1974). At the conceptual level, Pernica's teleometric dimensions of choice criteria can be considered side by side with the behavior modes in the present model. Behavior mode characterizes the behavior elicited by the activating condition; teleometric dimension characterizes the goal-fulfilling product benefit for each segment in Pernica's model. Examination of the items relating to beliefs about the product-use situation for each of Pernica's four teleometric segments suggests the correspondences with the present typology shown in Table 2.

Pernica did not find a segment corresponding to the Positive Elements category in the present model. This may be because his model was originally derived from studies in drug remedy markets where the range of brand offerings at the present time include only one brand that could be regarded as being positioned against consumers in the Positive Elements category.

**Summary**

Marketing researchers frequently are called upon to identify and describe the motivational structure of the market for a product or service. It has been suggested that it may be convenient to use motivation to refer to the conditions under which

brand purchase behavior is activated and to the general direction of the behavior activated.

Five motivating situations have been identified, each consisting of an activating condition and behavior mode. Motivation is operationalized by permitting consumers to classify themselves in terms of perceived activating condition—i.e., in terms of the product-use situation as perceived by the consumer.

Each motivating situation specifies a general direction for consumer purchase behavior. Brand choice within the motivating situation is determined by the cognitive and affective components of brand attitude.

It is assumed that personality predispositions are reflected in the consumer's self-classification in terms of perceived activating condition for the product under study. This situational emphasis of the motivational typology is expected to increase the ability of personality constructs to explain brand purchase.

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Table 2

**Comparison of Motivating Situations and Teleometric Dimensions\***

Motivating Situations		Teleometric Dimensions*
Activating Condition	Behavior Mode	
Aversive Elements	Escape	Extreme Gratification
Anticipated Aversive Elements	Prevention	Lifestyle Enhancement
Normal Depletion	Maintenance	Simple Need
Product Related Aversive Elements	Conflict Resolution	Concerns
Positive Elements	Diversion and Enjoyment	

\*Pernica (1974)

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