

Brief Research on Consumer Behavior

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ABSTRACT

Analyzing academic contributions to a specific area of research provides valuable insights into how it has evolved over a defined period. The approach was to briefly discuss content analysis and its application in scholarly literature review studies. The methodology used here involves the classification of topics to evaluate key trends in consumer behavior literature. It includes a ranking of topics published, typology of the published articles, the research classification in terms of methodologies, and analysis techniques. The most cited articles in the field and within each journal are also examined. The comprehensive literature review of consumer behavior research undertaken in this article could advance the discipline of consumer behavior research by elucidating the evolution of consumer behavior literature in the studied period.

Keywords: consumer behavior, content analysis, literature review, consumer behavior research, trends

INTRODUCTION

Consumer behavior has always been an area of major interest for social science researchers, witnessing an explosion over the past 50 years (MacInnis & Folkes, 2010). Accordingly, literature on this topic has been the center of attention in a number of previous studies (Arndt, 1986; Battalio et al., 1974; Belk et al., 2012; Hameed, Waqas, Aslam, Bilal, & Umair, 2014; Hawkins & Mothersbaugh, 2009; Howard & Sheth, 1968; Robertson & Kassarian, 1991; Solomon, 2013). Literature on consumer behavior is diverse and extensive as changes in society, economics, and technology affect the way consumers behave.

Inevitably, these changes lead to changed consumer behavior studies by which, when, how, and why the topics are studied. Like any other discipline, systematic analysis of the knowledge development status of consumer behavior field is critical in ensuring its future growth (Williams & Plouffe, 2007). It is of a greater importance for a field of research such as consumer behavior that, as MacInnis and Folkes (2010) claimed, is thriving by the growing number of articles and topics examined. One way of conducting this systematic analysis is through studying scholarly literature, which can illustrate a discipline's intellectual history (Pasadeos, Phelps, & Kim, 1998). In this regard, to assess a discipline's accrued knowledge, in-depth reviews of research published in peer-reviewed journals are the most relevant and useful resources (Üsdiken & Pasadeos, 1995; Williams & Plouffe, 2007). The importance of consumer behavior in the different disciplines of business literature also suggests the need for an up-to-date look at the literature in this field. Beyond helping consumer behavior scholars and practitioners develop a better understanding of the direction in which the field is progressing and identify the gaps, such studies will provide a guideline for them in positioning their future research and marketing efforts.

In this regard, a technique such as content analysis, which can be used to analyze message content and handling, is ideal for conducting such literature review studies. As an observational research method, content analysis systematically evaluates the symbolic content of all forms of recorded communications (Sattari, 2012). It can be considered as an empirical starting point generating new research evidence about the nature and effect of specific communications (Kolbe & Burnett, 1991; Vallet-Bellmunt, Martínez-Fernández, & Capó-Vicedo, 2011). Content analysis not only helps identify central issues to the field but can also help to reveal areas where more work needs to be undertaken, particularly if these are considered to be important and defining issues in the discipline (Cokley, Caldwell, Miller, & Muhammad, 2001). Such integrative review of consumer behavior research as a diverse discipline with an overwhelming scope in peer-reviewed journals is necessary if the field is to progress in a systematic fashion. Moreover, although content analysis of journals can be time-consuming and data-intensive, such studies provide direction into future areas of needed inquiry in the field by offering insight about the topical, methodological, and theoretical trends into research communities (Williams & Plouffe, 2007).

According to Buboltz, Miller, and Williams (1999), an examination of articles published in a journal reveals the trends and issues that impact the discipline. A content analysis of journal articles within a specific discipline allows for an examination of the kinds of topics that are deemed important to the particular field the journal represents (Cokley et al., 2001). In consumer studies, marketing research, and other business disciplines, literature investigations can also provide insights into the specific journals' contributions to the field as well as the specific published works (Sattari, 2012). This, in turn, can be used to describe a discipline's intellectual history (Pasadeos et al., 1998). A comprehensive content analysis of peer-reviewed journal publications in a field encourages the scholars to assess the entire "forest" of knowledge by taking a step back from their individual "trees" (Williams & Plouffe, 2007).

Such studies have been conducted within a variety of disciplines based on publications in the most respected journals. Two examples are the Pasadeos et al. (1998) and West (2007) studies reporting on the impact of advertising on researchers during different periods of time. Buboltz et al. (1999) and Cokley et al. (2001) have contributed similar studies in psychology. Others have targeted the consumer behavior field such as the studies done by Kassarian (1977) and Helgeson, Kluge, Mager, and Taylor (1984), but there is no current review of the field. Therefore, given the importance of consumer behavior research, a comprehensive literature study of more recent contributions to this area of research is warranted.

In this regard, this article serves to assess the structure and evolution of consumer behavior research content in business disciplines. The purpose of this literature review is to systematically review consumer behavior research over a 12-year period in five major journals in the field. Such an examination of diverse research in this discipline allows for identification of shifts and changes in a longitudinal manner. This article presents the results of a comprehensive content analysis covering 12 years of research in the domain of consumer behavior. Our review, which evaluated more than 1,000 articles published across five key journals, provides a descriptive snapshot of the status of consumer behavior research including the most dominant topics based on Helgeson et al.'s (1984) framework and methodological and analytical approaches, in addition to citation statistics of the reviewed consumer behavior articles.

Method

To examine the content of consumer behavior literature, trace its evolution, and identify the main streams of research over time, a content analysis was first performed on the articles focusing on consumer behavior. Helgeson et al. (1984) classified 32 years of consumer behavior literature from selected journals and proceedings. As there did not seem to be a comprehensive review and classification of consumer behavior topics in the literature, they tried to rectify the situation by examining the evolution of consumer behavior literature as a topic between 1950 and 1981. No similar research has been carried out since 1981, so this study replicates Helgeson et al.'s work based on the framework proposed by Berthon, Pitt, Ewing, and Carr (2002) by extending its context to the period 1998-2009.

The purpose of this article is, therefore, to cover 12 years (1998-2009) of literature to investigate consumer behavior growth as a research topic in the literature. Like Helgeson et al. (1984), our objective is not to evaluate the results of the research but to categorize and evaluate trends as found in the following publications: (a) *Journal of Consumer Research (JCR)*, (b) *Journal of Marketing (JM)*, (c) *Journal of Marketing Research (JMR)*, (d) *Journal of Advertising (JA)*, and (e) *Journal of Advertising Research (JAR)*.

The choice of these five journals is straightforward as they have held positions as the top consumer behavior journals and business journals for decades. Evidence of this comes from many sources, such as the ABS' (Chartered Association of Business Schools) Academic Journal Quality Guide Studies evaluating these journals at the top level of business journals.

Evidence is also available from the Web of Science Internet library source and Thomson Reuters journal citation reports, both measuring the influence of publications based on impact factors (defined as the frequency with which articles from a journal have been cited). The last journal citation report from Web of Science (2014) shows that *JCR* (5-year impact factor of 5), *JM* (5-year impact factor of 7.42), *JMR* (5-year impact factor of 3.77), *JA* (5-year impact factor of 1.73), and *JAR* (5-year impact factor of 2.54) have consistently been positioned as top influential business journals (Journal Citation Reports, 2014). Moreover, the idea behind choosing these journals was to cover various disciplines among business studies such as marketing, advertising, and consumer research. Choosing these five journals also helped to evaluate articles published by different publishers, namely, the American Marketing Association (AMA), Oxford University Press, Taylor & Francis, and World Advertising Research Center.

Moreover, as claimed by Furrer, Thomas, and Goussevskaya (2008), established influential journals, such as the ones chosen in this study, set the bar for studies within their frame of reference by forming the theoretical and empirical work in

their discipline.

However, it must be said that notable contributions to consumer behavior research have come from other sources, particularly books and monographs, which we did not examine. In total, 2,915 articles published in the five journals during the period under study were included in our review.

Table 1. Number of Total and Consumer Behavior Articles.

Year	Description	Journal of Advertising	Journal Advertising Research	of Journal Consumer Research	of Journal Marketing	Journal Marketing Research	of All five journals
1998	Total	32	46	34	27	63	202
	Consumer behavior articles	11	13	20	6	16	66
1999	Total	24	49	33	48	58	212
	Consumer behavior articles	13	22	21	10	8	74
2000	Total	27	50	44	48	58	227
	Consumer behavior articles	12	26	33	6	14	91
2001	Total	29	52	59	42	61	243
	Consumer behavior articles	11	30	42	9	15	107
2002	Total	33	56	49	46	58	242
	Consumer behavior articles	11	9	34	11	17	82
2003	Total	30	41	47	35	47	200
	Consumer behavior articles	13	18	31	6	15	83
2004	Total	28	40	78	44	47	237
	Consumer behavior articles	14	12	52	15	14	107
2005	Total	37	41	60	52	47	237
	Consumer behavior articles	12	12	44	20	12	100
2006	Total	44	39	61	46	68	258
	Consumer behavior articles	17	20	46	18	17	118
2007	Total	46	50	52	55	63	266
	Consumer behavior articles	20	23	41	18	25	127
2008	Total	40	59	86	54	55	294
	Consumer behavior articles	19	27	71	18	17	152
2009	Total	34	56	82	61	64	297
	Consumer behavior articles	17	28	67	21	23	156
	Total	404	579	685	558	689	2,915
	Consumer behavior articles	170	240	502	158	193	1,263
	%	42.1	41.5	73.3	28.3	2843.3	

The first decision made by each reviewer was whether the article dealt with consumer behavior. Hence, in the initial phase of this research, the authors manually reviewed every issue of the five examined journals to identify articles for inclusion in the analysis. First each article's title, abstract, and keywords were evaluated, and if they included consumer behavior (or behaviour), then the article would be on the list for further analysis. In many cases, this criterion was not met so the full article was inspected and skimmed through to determine whether the article was related to consumer behavior. A very small number of publication entries, such as editorials, points of view, abstracts, and book reviews, were excluded from the analysis. In total, this identification phase yielded a sample of 1,263 consumer behavior articles (Table 1).

The second phase of the study involved systematically categorizing the major aspects of each chosen article. Both deductive and inductive procedures were conducted to determine the categories used in the content analysis of the articles. The initial inclusion of content topics relied on deductive procedures, meaning that the reviewed consumer behavior articles were classified into 37 topics, which were divided into four major areas, *Internal*, *Purchase Process*, *External*, and *Miscellaneous* (Table 1), as previously determined by Helgeson et al. (1984). This categorization can be explained through Wright's (2006) perspective in that the variety of human internal factors, external environment, and problem-solving processes should be identified when trying to understand consumer behavior. Accordingly, the Internal category covers topics associated with consumers' individual and psychological factors, whereas the topics categorized under External involve situational and social factors.

To ensure consistent classification of multitopic articles, in cases where an article could be classified under more than one topic, the authors discussed the article and obtained a consensus about the closest topic, which the article covered. Then, each article was classified based on its research typology as being either qualitative, quantitative, or both. In the next step, by using Google Scholar, the number of citations for each selected article was gathered.

Articles were further categorized according to research methodology. Helgeson et al. (1984) used a group of four methods: Survey, Experiment, Discussion, and Other. Inductive procedures were used to develop additional categories for the articles' methodologies and analysis techniques. This was done by each author independently reviewing the contents of articles they were assigned and then meeting and discussing their overall impressions of the types of articles published in the journal. The inductive procedures resulted in adding a new separate category to the research methods (case study) and one to the analysis techniques (structural equation modeling [SEM]).

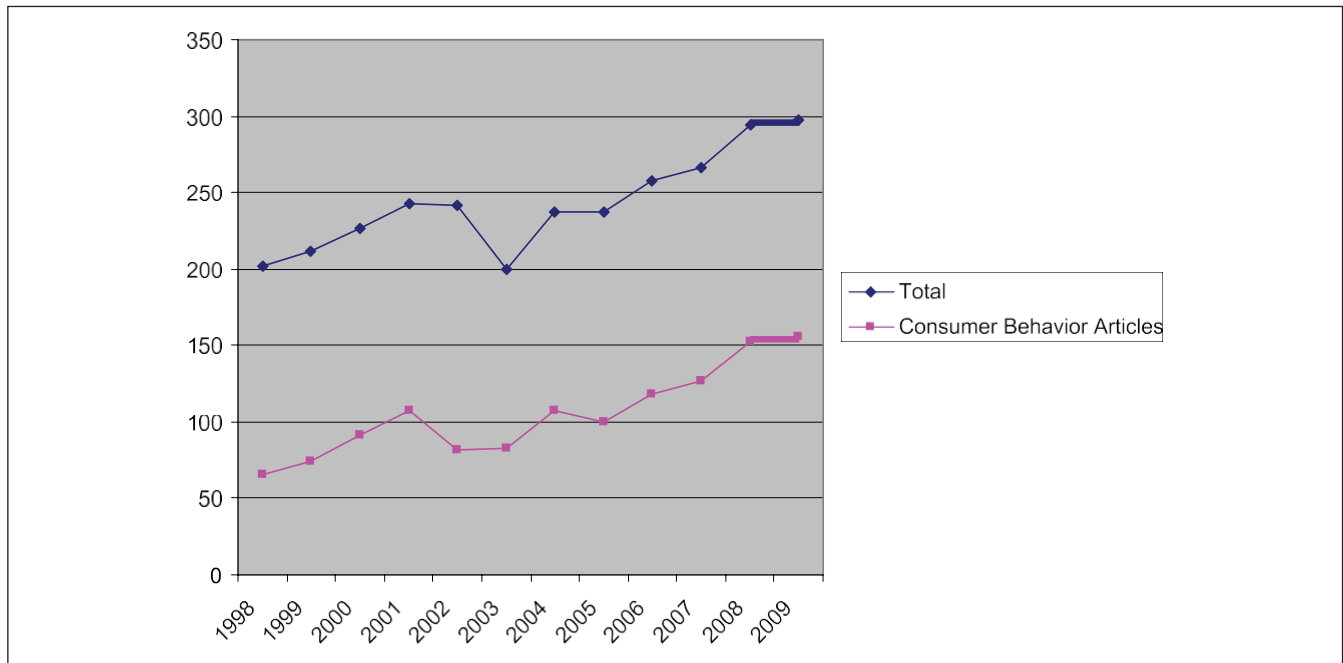


Figure 1. Trend of total and consumer behavior articles.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The number of consumer behavior articles during the studied time period ranged from 66 per year in 1998 to 156 per year in 2009 (Table 1). These numbers as a percentage of total articles appearing in the literature in the five selected journals are illustrated in Figure 1.

At least three characteristic life-cycle patterns seemed to emerge, when plotting the percentage of consumer behavior articles devoted to each of four major areas over time (Figure 2). The first pattern is exemplified by *External* area, which, despite its consistent appearance in the literature, showed a decline in the number of articles compared with the other three areas. This pattern for *External* topics is negatively skewed with periodic peaks through time. A second pattern is exhibited by *Internal* topics, which are still in a growth stage showing a gradually increasing interest in the literature. The skewness for pattern is positive without any significant periodic peaks through time. The *Purchase Process* area revealed a third pattern, which is also positively skewed but with some periodic and major peaks through time. Despite a decline in the height of these peaks over time, the *Purchase Process* topics remain an important part of the literature, and this trend is growing.

Table 2 exemplifies the frequency and percentage of articles that each of the main area of topics covered compared with the reviewed articles in consumer behavior fields in the reviewed journals. As mentioned above, 37 major topics in consumer behavior were selected in categorizing articles, which were then grouped into four major areas. Using these categories, Table 3 shows the percentage of occurrence of each topic within the reviewed consumer behavior articles.

According to the findings, the most studied topic within consumer behavior articles in the five journals was Perception, which was covered in 12% of the articles. Only slightly less common, Attitudes came next (11.5%), while the third topic, at almost half the size of the preceding two, with 6.2%, was Brand awareness/loyalty. In Table 3, bold fonts highlight the most studied topic in each major area. As discussed earlier, the present study classified articles based on their research typology, methodology, and the data analysis techniques used. Findings revealed that a large number of the reviewed consumer behavior articles were classified as quantitative studies (76%), as shown in Table 4. To dig deeper into this matter, we also evaluated the relationship between the types of studies (qualitative and quantitative) with respect to the four topic categories as shown in Table 5.

Moreover, according to the research methodology, experiments and surveys were the most common instruments for conducting consumer behavior research. This can be described as the nature of consumer behavior as related to studying and observing consumers. The articles were also classified by using one of the previously mentioned 10 analytical techniques. Table 6 presents the frequency and percentage of each research methodology and the analysis techniques used in the reviewed articles. Moreover, Table 7 shows the trends regarding analytical techniques used during the 12 years studied as the percentage of all consumer behavior articles in each year.

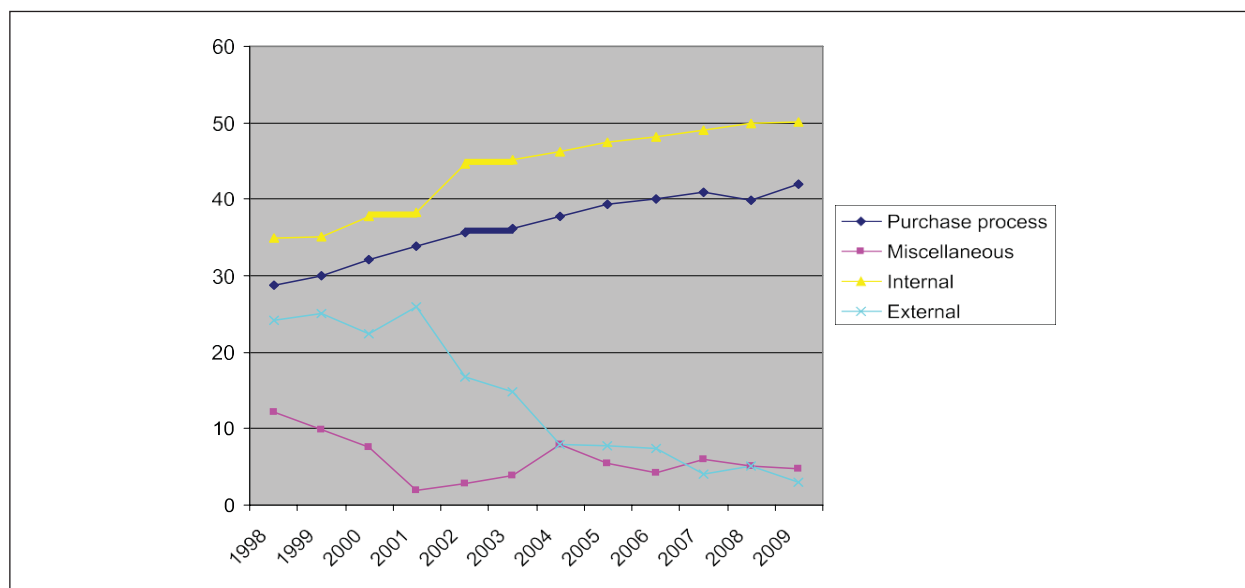


Figure 2. Occurrence of four major areas of topics in consumer behavior over time (%). Table 2. Frequency and

Percentage of Articles in Each Major Area.

Major topic category	Number of articles	%
Internal	534	43
Purchase Process	328	26
External	313	23
Miscellaneous	88	8

In comparison with the study done by Helgeson et al. in 1984, there has been tremendous growth in the use of complex statistical techniques such as SEM. This may be due to the fact that these techniques involve advanced computer software and packages that did not exist in 1984. It may also be the result of an increase in the number of consumer behavior articles that conducted scientific hypothesis testing generated from a theory base. The complexity of the articles written has also witnessed an increase due to growing emphasis on theoretical foundations and multivariate statistics, linked to advances in computer manipulation of data. Thus, to comprehend the more recent consumer behavior articles, readers are required to have a greater knowledge of the theoretical roots of articles and more statistical sophistication than had been necessary for earlier articles. Another consequence of the data analysis concerns articles that have been cited the most often in consumer behavior literature. Table 8 shows the 15 most cited articles in all journals, whereas Table 9 illustrates

the three most influential articles from each journal.

CONCLUSION

The results presented in this article suggest many implications for the consumer behavior research community, researchers, journal editors, and reviewers, as well as for the practitioners. In this regard, this article not only serves to evaluate the structure and evolution of the literature in consumer behavior field but also presents some assumptions about further developments in this literature.

By helping consumer behavior scholars to better understand the direction in which the field is going, the article is intended to provide a guideline for scholars in positioning their future research efforts. The results of this article provide consumer behavior researchers with a concrete perspective on what has been published on the subject area by indicating hot topics, research methods, and analysis techniques. The findings of this study highlight the most important consumer behavior topics and the most influential articles in the field based on citation frequency. The number of topics studied in consumer behavior showed a dramatic growth and revealed some general patterns during the 12 years studied in this article.

Table 3. Major Topics of Consumer Behavior and Their Percentage of Occurrence.

Topic Category	Number of Articles	%
Internal		
Attitudes	145	11.5
Attribution	36	2.9
Belief-expectancy models	11	0.9
Cognitive dissonance	16	1.3
Information processing	29	2.3
Involvement	12	1.0
Learning	10	0.8
Life style	17	1.4
Motivation	16	1.3
Perception	151	12.0
Personality	12	1.0
Physiological	42	3.3
Values/beliefs	31	2.5
Purchase Process		
Brand awareness/loyalty	78	6.2
Choice	74	5.9
Evaluation	46	3.7
Postpurchase	41	3.3
Purchase decision process	60	4.8
Search for information	36	2.9
External		
Communications	57	4.5
Consumer socialization	18	1.5
Culture	32	2.6
Demographics	32	2.6
Family decision process	7	0.6
Group influences	24	2.0
Innovators/innovations	13	1.1
Opinion leaders	16	0.3
Persuasion	49	3.9
Segmentation	22	1.8
Situation	7	0.6
Social stratification	10	0.8
Miscellaneous		
Consumerism	17	1.4
General	6	0.5
Models	41	3.4
Preference	22	1.8
Public policy	11	0.9
Store patronage	16	0.3

Table 4. Frequency and Percentage of Research Typology.

Research typology	Number of articles	%
Qualitative	960	76
Quantitative	139	11
Both	164	13

Table 5. Frequency and Percentage of Research Typology With Regard to Topic Category.

Topic category	Research typology		
	Qualitative	Quantitative	Both
	Number of articles		
External	47	207	33
Internal	58	399	71
Miscellaneous	18	87	8
Purchasing Process	26	259	50

Table 6. Frequency and Percentage of Research Methodology and Data Analysis Techniques.

Research methodology	Number of articles	%
Experiment	530	42
Survey	530	42
Discussion	101	8
Case study	89	7
Other	13	1
Data analysis techniques	Number of articles	%
ANOVA	278	22
Descriptive	164	13
Multivariate analysis	164	13
Bivariate and multiple regression	139	11
Other	126	10
SEM (PLS, LISREL)	88	7
Correlation	76	6
t test or chi-square	76	6
Content analysis	31	3
Nonparametric	39	3
Discourse analysis	22	2
Grounded theory	22	2
Narrative analysis	19	1.5
Framework approach	11	1
Ethnography	8	0.6

Note. SEM = structural equation modeling; PLS = partial least squares; LISREL = linear structural relations.

According to the results, authors aiming to have an article published in a journal will have a better understanding of the different trends consumer behavior research has had during the studied period. Moreover, potential authors, researchers, and interested readers may use the information presented as a means to assess the field.

The findings of this research also provide journal editors and reviewers with a wider (global, in a sense) perspective

regarding the publication trends and themes on consumer behavior research topics, methods, and statistical analysis.

Note. SEM = structural equation modeling; PLS = partial least squares; LISREL = linear structural relations.

Practitioners can use this study to indicate which journals to consult as sources of information on specific topics. The analysis of the topic areas among the reviewed articles provides evidence that certain topic areas (Purchase Process and Internal) enjoyed consistent popularity among the chosen journals' editors and reviewers during the studied years,

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