

Preface

I started my teaching career in India when the middle class and the consumption-dominant lifestyle was still nascent. One of the earliest case studies discussed in a class on consumer behavior was that of the gas-powered cooking stove that was ill-suited to the round-bottom cooking utensils owned by most traditional households. The question was whether consumers should change their behaviors or manufacturers modify the design of the stove? Similar problems characterize affluent markets as well.

Such issues have been the topic of classroom discussions over the many decades of my academic career. Standard texts on consumer behavior and marketing communications, courses that I teach regularly, attempt to incorporate some of these issues, but primarily from the perspective of the marketer using new technologies to influence and change consumer behavior. I found there is a gap in our understanding of how consumers are acquiring and utilizing these technologies.

At the same time, choice is an explicit condition of the marketplace and choice of technologies has come to dominate consumer behaviors. It is quickly apparent that there is very little discussion of the choice context and how the choice of household technologies has evolved over time or shaped by macro forces such as regulations. As affluent markets become saturated and marketers start to look at emerging markets internationally, the global differences in the choice contexts make the critical gaps in our understanding of technology choices and consumer behaviors even more salient.

This book is a response to these gaps. The focus of the book is to elaborate on how technologies have entered the domestic space, how they have evolved, and what factors influence consumer relationships with them. While there are innumerable technologies that affect our daily lives, I have deliberately focused on four consumer activities—shopping, entertainment, communication and payment—and associated technologies. These activities account for a large share of consumer resources—time and money—and have been greatly affected by recent innovations in various information-based technologies. Cooking and cleaning—activities that consume a large portion of time as well—have been deliberately excluded even though technologies have affected them as well. My observations and available

research suggest that these two activities are often not performed at home, outsourced (e.g. cleaning services) or performed with a very limited set of technologies (e.g. vacuum cleaners or washing machines).

This book starts with a historical and macro perspective (Chaps. 1 and 2) on household technologies so that we get an appreciation of how the technologies and their places within the household have changed. Wherever possible, international comparisons are made to highlight the similarities and differences in the experience of consumers over time and space. Chapter 3 provides a framework to understand the individual-level consumer characteristics that influence their behaviors. Specifically, the emphasis is on utilization of technology since acquisition and evaluation processes are more brand and price specific.

For each of the selected consumer activities (Chaps. 4–7), the evolution of the choice context and technologies is described. Today's consumer, for instance, has choices regarding at-home as well as out-of-home shopping but also among a large number of formats within at-home shopping. These choices have evolved over time and different technologies are required to benefit from the increased choices. Similar evolutions have occurred in the choices regarding entertainment, communication, and payment activities. The final chapter (Chap. 8) focuses on the macro-level transformations in consumer and marketer behaviors and raises issues affected by the pervasive use of technology, highlighting both the positive and negative effects.

The book draws upon our existing understanding of consumer behavior and extends that specifically to household technologies. I have attempted to integrate diverse points of view from varied disciplines but always with a focus on increasing our understanding of consumer relationships to technology. Data, collected by a range of government and private sources, have been used to describe the historical changes. While we get richness in details, the rapid changes in technologies mean that the data provide a snapshot of behaviors only for specific points in time. Hopefully, this will increase our appreciation of the dynamic nature of the choice context and encourage the reader to consider not only how we consumers behave in the present and now, but more critically evaluate how the future would look like.



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