

# Research on Consumers' Delayed Purchase

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**Abstract**—Delayed purchase refers to consumers who have desire to purchase a product and ability to purchase it, but they tend to delay the purchase when making consumption decisions. Delaying purchases gives consumers more time to make decisions, but it doesn't necessarily lead to better results than instant decisions. For enterprises, the delayed purchase behavior of consumers will obviously pose a great threat to the improvement of their spot sales. Based on existing relevant research, this paper firstly reviews the definition and impact of delayed purchase, then summarizes the influencing factors and formation mechanism of consumers' delayed purchase behavior, finally, integrates related research on delayed purchase. The purpose of this paper is to provide theoretical support for enterprises to understand consumers' delayed purchase behavior and to formulate marketing strategies.

**Keywords**—Consumption decision; Delayed purchase; Delayed purchase reversal; Enterprise marketing

## I. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, with the rapid development of ever-changing technology and society, people often encounter various difficulties when making decisions, few people choose to insist on making a decision, most people tend to delay decisions to overcome difficulties. The traditional view of decision theory focuses on how people tend to choose one of several options, namely decision-making, while ignore the special but common phenomenon of delayed decision-making. Delay purchase decisions are often reflected on the present and future consumers weigh the costs and benefits. On the one hand, delayed purchases give consumers more time and energy to search for information to make better decisions; on the other hand, delayed purchases also means less opportunities and more costs, even miss the best decision timing. This suggests that delaying purchase decisions can lead to delays in consumer demand and may result in poor consumer decision-making.

Delayed purchases, as a common phenomenon, are widespread in consumer purchasing decisions and have attracted the interest of marketing scholars who have initiated a series of related research. However, these studies are each focused and relatively dispersed, and lack of systematic theoretical integration. This paper provides a theoretical basis for the company to deeply understand the delayed purchase phenomenon of consumers and to develop targeted marketing strategies by combing and summarizing the relevant literatures.

## II. THE CONCEPT OF DELAYED PURCHASE

### Definition of delayed purchase

Delayed selection refers to people making choices when they should, including deferring choices (selecting delay options) or refusing to select an option in the options [1]. In the context of consumer purchase, people's delayed selection often manifests itself as delayed purchases by consumers. In real life, consumers can not only consider how to make purchase decisions in many commodities, but also decide whether to buy.

Delayed purchase refers to products that consumers have a clear intention to purchase, when they have the ability to pay, they prefer to buy later [2]. Delayed purchase is a common attitude when consumers buy goods. For the sake of maximizing profit or decision-making optimization, consumers often want to consider all possible choices before making a purchase decision. However, due to cognitive limitations and increased search costs, consumers are often unable to make a complete estimate of all commodities, they will feel the conflict, weigh the difficulties, and delay the purchase.

### Impact of delayed purchase

#### A. Impact on consumers

Studies have shown that delayed selection can reduce consumer's negative emotions. Simonson (1992) argues that when the outcome of the final decision is expected to be poor, decision makers often delay the choice to reduce the level of regret that is subsequently experienced; however, if consumers find the choice to give up will produce better results, they will feel more regret and remorse [3]. People always compare existing factual results that have been generated with possible idealized results. When the actual results are worse, the stronger the contrast with the better results of other options, the easier it is to imagine that if have choose the other options, might have produced a better results. This comparison process will make consumers feel more regrettable [4].

Research in the field of decision making shows that people's previous decisions will have an impact on their subsequent decision-making behavior. The study of no-action regret shows that if consumers regret during the last purchase opportunity, this kind of inaction regret will have different effects on them: one is to encourage consumers to improve their future purchase intentions, and the non-action regrets make them summarize the past experience, and think that not buying at the beginning is the wrong choice. If encounter similar purchase opportunities, they must take the

purchase behavior decisively; the other is to encourage them to self-regulate regret, perform psychological repair work, suppress or relieve regret [5]. If an individual is concerned about a previously more favorable opportunity, it will associate the current opportunity with a negative psychological state, and most of them tend to give up the current opportunity because of the tendency to avoid negative emotions. In addition, in order to reduce the sense of disharmony, consumers will try to underestimate the value of abandoned purchase opportunities, and no action is the best choice.

### *B. Impact on the company*

Delayed purchases by consumers have had a negative impact on some companies and retailers. For companies that primarily increase sales through promotions, delayed purchases have weakened the company's promotional effectiveness. In addition, delayed purchases also affect some special retailers. For example, consumers with delayed purchase preferences tend to have stronger price cuts for perishables, which will increase the risk of profitability of perishable retailers. But for these companies, it also means development opportunities. Greenleaf and Lehmann (1995) argue that consumers postpone purchases for some reason, and when these reasons are resolved, people will not delay purchases [6].

## III. FACTORS AFFECTING DELAYED PURCHASE

There are many factors that cause consumers not to take purchase action. Through comprehensive investigation and analysis of relevant research results, this paper divides the factors affecting consumers' delayed purchase into macro factors and micro factors:

Macro factors include market factors (expectations, risks, uncertainties, etc.), product factors (categories of products, price changes, renewal, etc.), cultural factors (thrift habits, etc.)

The micro factors are summarized as cognitive factors, emotional factors and consumer personal traits:

### *Cognitive factors*

(1) Decision time: In some cases, time pressure can make consumer to avoid options. Perceived time pressure affects the information processing methods and strategic choices of consumers when they shop, which in turn affects decision-making behavior [7]. Excessive time pressure makes consumers feel that they don't have enough time to make judgments. In particular, when the entire decision has not been structured and the overall decision involves several steps and procedures, they may withdraw from the entire decision-making process. In order to avoid risks, it may delay decision-making or directly abandon decision-making.

(2) Decision strategy: Under the pressure of time, consumers may change their decision-making strategies, specifically, they will change from compensatory decision rules to non-compensatory decision rules. Compensatory decision rules refer to the decision-makers' analysis of the

attributes of alternatives, positive evaluation of dominant attributes, negative evaluation of inferior attributes, and then mutual compensation between positive and negative evaluations. The degree of intervention is relatively high. The non-compensatory rule means that the decision maker sets a threshold for the inferior attribute when considering the alternative. As long as the intent attribute of an option does not meet the standard, the option is directly eliminated and the decision maker's involvement is relatively low.

(3) Attraction between options: White and Hoffrage (2009) believe that there are two situations that can lead to delayed purchases: First, there is no option to reach people's utility threshold, the second is that each option is attractive enough, but people are not sure which option is the best and will delay purchases [8]. When the level of attractiveness of the optional product is comparable, consumers will feel more conflicts and thus it is easier to delay purchases.

### *Emotional factors*

(1) Anticipated emotions: This is a kind of emotional reaction that are expected by decision makers to occur in the future with certain decision-making outcomes, such as regrets, disappointments, and so on. The expected utility model believes that people predict the emotional outcomes associated with the selection action and then choose the option of maximizing positive emotions and minimizing negative emotions. Sevdalis, Harvey and Yip M (2006) [9] further divides expected regret into anticipation as regret and expected inaction as regret. And it was found when price differences are large, people experience too much regret for losing their previous opportunities. When people expect to be regrets, they choose inaction to avoid future regrets. The regret will be minimized through its own choice, so delayed purchase may be the last result.

(1) Anticipatory emotions: This is a kind of immediate emotional reaction, such as anxiety, fear, etc., which has a direct or indirect influence on decision making. The preemptive emotion influence the decision-makers' prediction of the results, the selection and processing of information, and the depth of processing, which in turn affects their decision-making strategies. Scholars' research on anticipatory emotions is more about the negative emotions that are stimulated in people's decision-making process.

According to consumer psychology theory, negative emotions generated by consumers when shopping will negatively affect their current willingness to purchase, whether it is due to the internal factors of their own characteristics or the external factors of the shopping situation. Anderson (2003) found that negative emotions caused by decision-making situations will improve the avoidance behavior of decision makers, and they hope to get rid of this negative emotion by avoiding choices. Some studies have shown that when people have to make trade-offs between important features, they generate disgust, and then this aversion often leads consumers to reluctant to make choices or maintain their current state.

#### Consumer personal trait factors:

(1) Consumer age: The study found that older people were more likely to delay their choices than young people. Older people are more cautious, in order to avoid risks, older people are more likely to delay their choices and think deeply about making decisions. Moreover, research shows that emotional problems in older people seem to be more prominent than younger people.

(2) Consumption characteristics: In general, consumers will have their own unique characteristics when purchasing products or services, such as high-quality awareness, high-value awareness, etc [10]. Some researchers stress that consumers who value product quality will shop more carefully and systematically, thus delaying purchases. High-value consumers may also delay buying a product or service because they will spend extra time exploring other products or seeking information (such as price, recommendation).

(3) Individual consumer differences: Higgins (1997) holds that people have two regulation systems, which are defined as promotive orientation for growth goals and preventive orientation for safety goals [11]. Based on the different target state types, different types of individuals will stimulate the corresponding self-regulation system. In particular, promoting orientation focuses on positive outcomes and benefits of motivational behavior, while prevention focuses on negative information and possible loss of behavioral consequences, and tends to maintain the current state. Wang Huaiyong and Liu Yongfang (2013) found that individuals who promote orientation prefer preference decision-making, while individuals who prevent orientation prefer decision-making [12].

#### IV. FORMATION MECHANISM OF DELAYED PURCHASE

Delayed purchase is a common no-action behavior. This paper uses the rational-emotional model of Anderson (2003) to explain the reason why consumers do not act. According to the model, the cost of action and conversion, expected regret or responsibility, and decision-making difficulties can lead to consumer inaction.

The purchase behavior is accompanied by the action cost. For example, when purchasing a new computer, the consumer first needs to spend some time to know the price, quality, etc., and then need to pay for the computer. Taking a purchase also requires people to pay for the conversion costs. Consumers need to pay time and energy to familiarize with the functions after buying the computer. These costs can be avoided if no purchases are taken. Of course, taking action will also generate revenue. The transaction utility theory holds that consumers will evaluate the "loss" and "return" of a transaction through perceived value in the process of consumption decision-making, and then decide whether to adopt a purchase decision [13]. The purchase behavior can only occur when the purchase can obtain the transaction utility, and the consumer feels satisfied and believes that the decision is "economical". On the other hand, if the actual payment price of the commodity is greater than their inner reference price, the psychological gap caused by this price will make the purchase

behavior a loss, and the purchase at this time will lead to a psychological state of "loss". The sense of loss will negatively affect the consumer's current willingness to purchase, and consumers will delay the purchase.

The high level of expected regret associated with selection will enable decision makers to avoid this expectation of regret and responsibility by delaying selection. When consumers are concerned about the negative consequences of current purchase decisions, they may be expected to regret this purchase in the future. In order to avoid such expected regrets, they usually delay purchases and solicit opinions from others or continue to search for related information. The more likely a consumer is to produce an expected regret, the more likely they are not to take a purchase. At the same time, expectations of liability will also lead to delayed purchases by consumers.

Luce (1998) suggests that the more difficult it is, the more negative feelings people tend to avoid making decisions [14]. Decision-making difficulties lead to avoidance of decisions. When there is no absolute difference in attractiveness between options, or when there are not many attractive options, but none of them is significantly better than others, consumers will feel difficult and conflicting. Tversky and Shafir (1992) [15] believes that conflict not only affects the mental state of decision makers, but also affects actual choice behavior. Decision conflicts make choice painful and most likely cause consumers to postpone selection and look for other information or possible options.

#### V. RESEARCH ON DELAYED PURCHASE

Through literature review, it is found that scholars' researches on changing consumers' delayed purchase are mainly divided into two types: one is how to reverse consumers' delayed purchase preference; the other is that consumers face a similar purchase opportunity next time after delayed purchase, Will they continue not to buy, or choose to buy?

Many studies in psychology and behavioral economics have shown that there is often a dynamic inconsistency of time between consumer decisions and actions [16], which is the inconsistency between decisions and actions due to changes in consumer preferences. The phenomenon is called Preference Reversal (PR) [17]. Since then, many scholars have demonstrated the prevalence of preference reversal from different angles. Preference reversal indicates that consumers do not have stable and consistent value preferences, and their choices generally go through a process of continuous construction, which is not static. This also indicates that consumers may delay the purchase preference reversal after generating delayed purchase preferences. Scholars have conducted some research on how to reverse consumers' delayed purchase preferences. Li Xiaohu and Tu Caixie (2011) believe that in consumers who have delayed purchase preferences, their delay intentions will change with attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioral changes, and thus preference reversal [18]. Li Xiao, Huang Lei and Zhang Xiaohan. (2013) found through experiments that psychological simulation and information processing patterns interact to influence people's reversal behavior intentions [19].



Most scholars believe that consumers will continue not to buy when they miss the purchase, this tendency known as "inaction inertia." Cognitive dissonance theory believes that after consumers miss the purchase, in order to maintain internal coordination, avoid or reduce the regret caused by missing the purchase, it will tend to cognitively devalue the current similar purchase opportunities and continue to postpone the purchase. In fact, it does not occur as an inertia only when the difference between the two purchase opportunities is large. When the current two purchase opportunities are the same, the regret caused by the loss of the previous opportunity will prompt people to use the current opportunity, not to give up buying. Patrick, Lancellotti and Hagtvædt (2009) believe that if consumers regret for the last purchase, then this inaction regret will increase their future purchase intentions [20]. Although it has previously lost a more attractive opportunity, there are multiple options available to reduce the consumer's tendency to stay in the past. At this point, consumers will make better use of current opportunities, regardless of whether the opportunities are large or small.

## VI. SUMMARY

In real life, even if consumer is interested and capable of purchasing a product, but they ultimately choose to delay the purchase, consumers' delayed purchase behavior become more and more common, posing a threat to improve the immediate sales of enterprises, retailers and so on. How to make the consumer with delayed preferences take the purchase behavior has important marketing value in the future, Companies must fully understand the consumer's delayed purchase behavior and apply appropriate marketing strategies to minimize sales losses. However, so far, consumers' delayed purchases are still a relatively new field. Many of the research done by scholars in this field are not deep enough. This paper suggests that future scholars can strengthen research from the following aspects:

First of all, consumer delay purchase is a complex purchase behavior, with many influencing factors, new concepts and the influencing factors continue to emerge. How to integrate these new elements into the research will be the focus of scholars' continuous attention. Secondly, so far, mostly foreign scholars study delay the purchase made in the field of environment and background are mostly for foreign consumers, Due to cultural differences and geographical differences, the delayed purchase behavior of domestic and foreign consumers also has certain the difference, therefore, the delayed purchase of consumers in the context of eastern culture is also worthy of further discussion by scholars. Finally, only a few scholars have begun to explore how to reverse the delayed purchase of consumers. In the future, scholars need to explore more variables and methods to promote consumers' delayed purchase reversal in combination with actual situations.

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