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Website- www.aarf.asia, **Email :** editor@aarf.asia , editoraarf@gmail.com

MARKETING MANAGEMENT IN THE ERA OF TRANSFORMATION: PRIORITISING CONSUMERS' NEEDS

Mahima Rana, Assistant Professor

Department of Commerce, DAV PG College, Karnal-132001, Haryana

Abstract:

Marketing today is not an easy task, with growing sources of information in the hands of the buyers and numerous competitive alternatives entering the market each day. Customers today are highly conscious about their purchasing decisions and utilize each resource optimally before coming to the most economical decision, however small an expense it might be. No longer can a producer ask the buyer to settle for the nearest alternative or deny the availability of the perfect product or service. Buyers come to the market armed with the particular description of their needs, with nothing about quality, quantity, price, and any attribute left to ambiguity. Manufacturers have to be highly sensitive to the needs of the buyers as consumers today will not be satisfied with anything else but the perfect match to their individual desires. Marketers thus have to deeply understand these desires and from where these desires arise. These desires are the demands created out of the human needs. Psychologists have been studying these human needs for years. The most popular theory, Maslow's Need Hierarchy Theory, simplifies the reasons for these needs and the demands that arise from such needs. The present study is an attempt to use this theory as a means to understand the needs of the buyers' market effectively. The paper stresses on the importance of treating consumer the king in every manner and making the whole objective of marketing the satisfaction of buyer desires. Sustainability of business in the present market is entirely based upon how one's buyers perceive the marketing objective of the business activities one undertakes. If these acts are not focused on the satisfaction of buyers' needs, the business will not survive even if it plans to cater to the mass market. Buyers want satiation of needs with the optimum bundle of utilities the marketer offers.

1. Introduction

"The key is, no matter what story you tell, make your buyer the hero."

-Chris Brogan

The ultimate aim of marketing is the successful delivery of a bundle of utility to the ultimate consumer, economically satisfying his/her needs. In this process, the most important task of a marketer is the understanding of consumer needs. Without this, the marketer will remain clueless about what to produce, why to produce, how to deliver the product and how to follow up. Marketing activities require psychology to understand the reasons behind the consumer's demand, which provide the producer the features to be incorporated in their offerings. The present study employs Maslow's need hierarchy theory to help marketers understand the buyer needs and match those to their offerings in the present scenario.

Even though the human mind cannot be defined in any particular terms, still it is imperative to understand the customer's needs in logical terms. For this understanding, application of theories becomes important from which a marketer can understand why a consumer wants what he/she wants. Fluidity of scenario calls for flexibility in structure as the present buyer market is dynamic.

2. Research Objective

The objective of this paper is to understand the needs of buyer market in the present market conditions with the application of Maslow's need hierarchy theory. It aims at helping marketers understand why this understanding is important for their survival and how businesses have successfully been applying this strategy since long.

3. Research Methodology

The study employs literature based research applying findings from various researches, journal articles, magazines, newspapers. Marketing strategies of various successful advertisement campaigns of popular products and services have been studied to provide relevant and real life examples of how marketers can productively use the understanding of human needs to sustain profitably in the market.

4. Maslow's Need hierarchy Theory

Abraham Maslow developed this psychological theory in 1943 in his paper "A Theory of Human Motivation" in Psychological Review. The theory depicts human motivations for particular actions. His theory is popularly used to date in researches in the fields of sociology, management training, psychology etc.

Maslow described human needs as the motivation behind human actions, choices and behaviours. Humans spend their lives satisfying these needs in a particular order of hierarchy from the bottom up. According to Maslow, humans must satisfy one set of needs before moving on to the next set

The needs are typically represented as a pyramid showing the hierarchy.

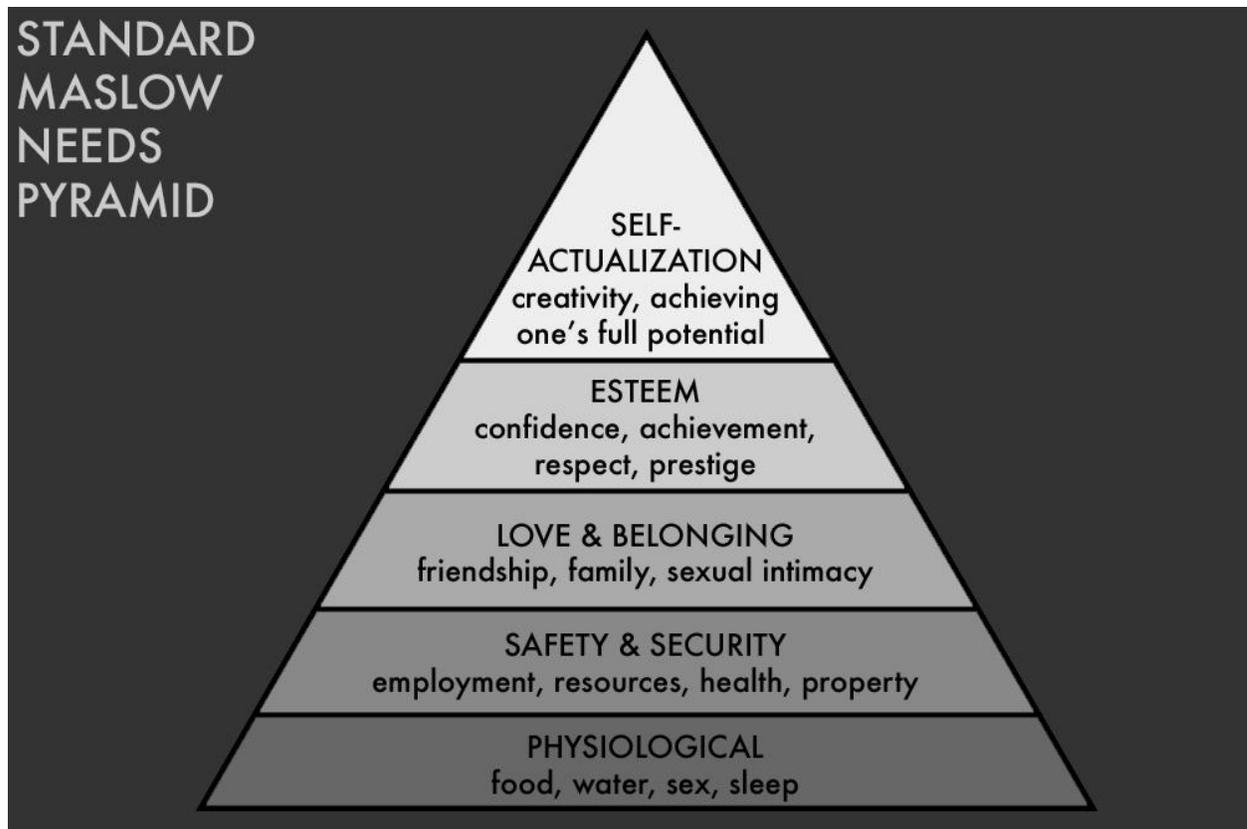


Figure 1: Pyramid depicting Maslow's Need Hierarchy Theory

Source: <http://www.ultrasomething.com/2012/11/the-inverted-maslow/>

The needs are as follows:

4.1 Psychological Needs: These are basic needs of every human. These include the basic amenities like air, water, food, shelter and clothing. These are the basics

without which humans will not survive. Thus, means for survival are termed as basic psychological needs.

4.2 Safety Needs: These are the human needs which bring a sense of security from uncertainties of the future. These include security of self and family, property, job security, financial security, health security etc.

4.3 Social Needs: These are the needs which create feelings of relations and a sense of belonging in the society. Humans are social animals and being accepted as a productive and appreciated part of the society is important to the human mind. Feelings of love, friendship, care, affection etc. bring a feeling of social belonging.

4.4 Esteem Needs: Humans desire to be valued and respected by others. The needs of self-esteem and self respect are important for humans to feel appreciated in the world. Recognition of value of self, confidence, achievement, freedom, power, status, attention etc. are what define these needs.

4.5 Self-actualisation Needs: "*What a man can be, he must be.*" These needs arise when an individual fully understands his/her full potential and realization of achieving the highest achievement possible. At this level, humans desire to accomplish everything that one can, to become the most that one can be.

5. Buyers' Needs and Maslow's Need Hierarchy Theory

Marketers have to understand their target market's needs in scientific terms. In today's competitive world, no business can survive with the goals of mass production. Masses today are no longer groups of people with the same requirements. Even if people demand the same goods, their desires differ regarding the various product characteristics, their needs differ given the different lifestyles and the human desire of uniqueness. There is nothing called the mass market anymore. The mass is a mass of niches and each sect has independent needs for satisfaction and aspirations of recognition. The buyers are conscious about what they buy as their demands are no longer just for need satisfaction but for gaining a status in the society, for fitting into niches, for feeling a sense of achievement and for being desired. Keeping these human aspects of the buyer market in mind, marketers have to appreciate the individuality of demands of the consumers and the imperative need of studying the buyers' needs in specific terms.

Maslow's Need Hierarchy Theory provides the much needed framework to categorise the buyers' needs, understand how to satisfy these needs, plan out the offering and strategise how to cater to these needs.

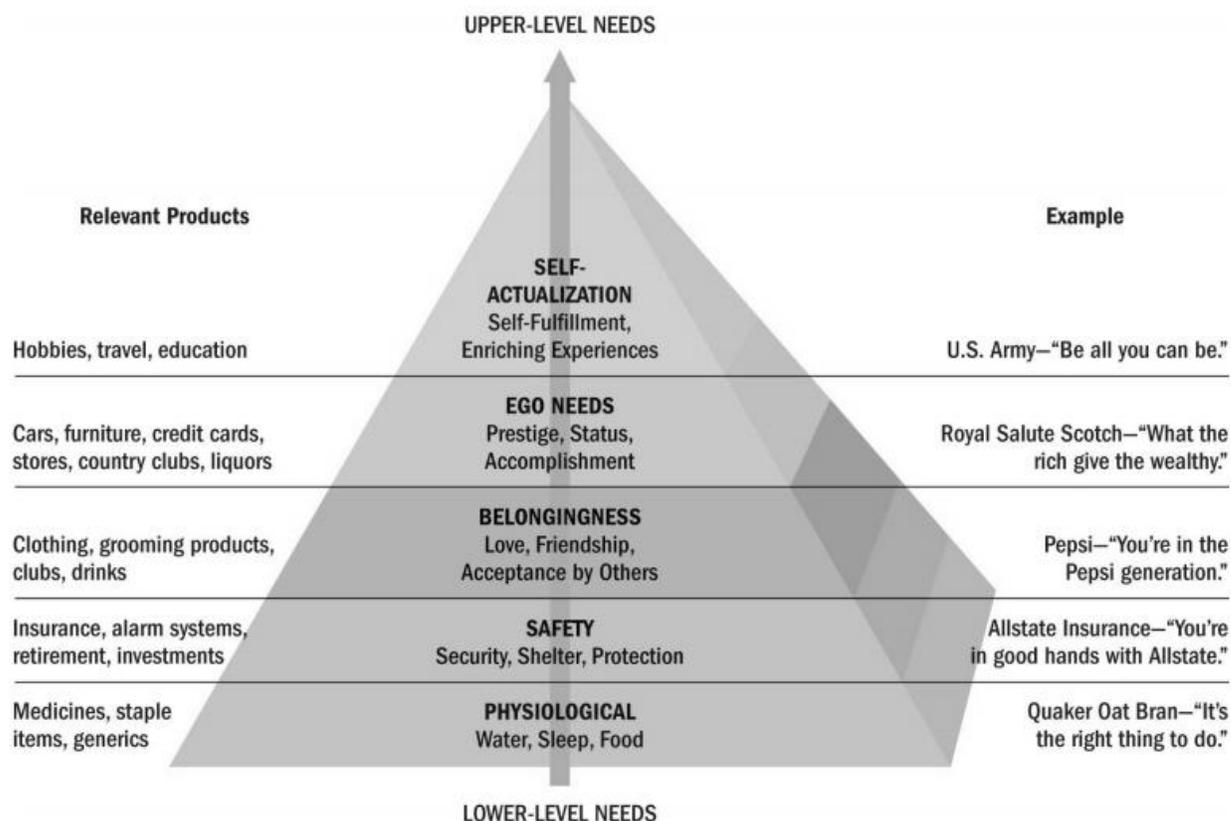


Figure 2: Examples of Customer requirements as per needs recognized by Maslow's Need Hierarchy Theory

Source: <https://sites.google.com/site/cnsmrbhvr/consumer-needs/maslow-s-hierarchy-of-needs>

5.1 Psychological Needs:

Maslow categorized needs of basic amenities as the primary needs of human beings. With these needs come the demands of every day products like staple items, medicines, generics, breakfast cereal, bread, butter, sugar, flour etc. as figure 2 shows. Therefore, manufacturers producing these items have to understand that buyers require these products every day as these requirements arise for the survival of individual. By appealing to these basic needs, marketers can understand what should be the selling point of their product and how to communicate the attributes of their products.

Various successful brands market their products as the necessary means for these basic needs. For example, Cadbury Bournvita biscuits are advertised as ‘Subah Ka Biscuit’ (Biscuit for the morning) highlighting the importance of starting the day with healthy food, basic requirement of a busy day being a good breakfast. Revital started its campaign as the much needed daily health supplement to keep going through the hectic day in today’s world. Endorsed by Salman Khan, it advertises ‘*Bhaag daud bhari zindagi, leking thakna mana hai. Isiliye main keta hu Reviral. Jiyo Jee bhar ke*’. Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s initiative *Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana* uses the tag line ‘Housing for all’. Similarly, advertisements for home loans always show happy families in pleasing homes which they can call their own thus satisfying the shelter need and recognizing it as the basic right and need of every human. In the modern age, mobile phones, laptops, tablets etc. too have become basic needs without which humans find it difficult to survive the day. Google is another such invention which has become increasingly popular with people across all ages and cultures.

Marketers have to develop and market their products as per the basic needs of consumers in order to appease these desires and formulate the image of their offering as the ultimate means to satisfy these primary level needs.

5.2 Safety:

These needs include needs for safety, shelter, protection. As per figure 2, consumer demands that stem out of these needs are insurance, alarms systems for homes and offices, pension fund requirements for retirement, investments to meet future contingencies.

Understanding of the survival instinct of humans give marketers an inner perspective of the fragility of the human mind which needs constant assurance of protection from the unknown. Marketers can use their understanding of these needs to create products which provide satisfactory protection of self and belonging, and effectively communicating these features targeting the safety needs of buyers.

Insurance providers are heavily relying on these human needs and creating humorous and engaging ad campaigns, specifically attracting market through messages designed to cater to the fear of human minds regarding the temporary nature of life. For example, LIC of India uses the tagline ‘*Zindagi ke Sath bhi, zindagi ke baad bhi*’ as a reminder of its objective to fulfill the customers’ need to feel

protected. Birla Sun Life Insurance's extremely moving campaign '*Khud Ko Kar Buland Itna*' stirs a sense of independence and highlights the need to face life head on without fear of the ambiguous future. HDFC Life came out with #MyMomentOfPride campaign, calling out to the human desire to step up and enjoy freedom with the message '*Apno ko apne dum par jeena sikhao*'.

PNB MetLife's magician campaign is another such example. The quirky video shows that how a magician turns a man into a pigeon and fails to bring him back. The video then concludes with a message, "Anything can happen in life. Get Insured."

5.3 Belongingness:

Belongingness needs arise for the fact that human beings are social beings and require a sense of being accepted as a part of the society. Figure 2 describes these feelings as love, friendship, acceptance by others. Consumers make certain demands in order to be accepted by the society they feel attached to. Buyers make decisions in order to conform to certain social rules.

These needs have become more important in the present day with most of the buyer choices arising out of their needs to conform to societal norms. Marketers have to appreciate these desires and produce products and services which suffice the belongingness needs. Manufacturers can create customer loyalty if their product themselves becomes a symbol of a group or an identifier of a society. Producers can create segments in the market based on these needs by imaging their offerings as the need satisfying bundle of utility identifying a particular segment as one.

Youth, as shown by Figure 2, has been targeted by Pepsi, identifying its product as the must have by the younger generation. Pepsi has been using this tactic since it entered the market with the radio jingle during the 1930s to 1950s "Pepsi-Cola Hits The Spot... Pepsi-Cola is the drink for you". Table 1 shows the taglines Pepsi has used hitting on the belongingness needs of youth.

YEAR	TAGLINE
1959-60	"The Sociables Prefer Pepsi"
1961-64	"Now It's Pepsi for Those Who Think Young"
1964-67	"Come Alive, You're in the Pepsi Generation"
1973-77	"Join the Pepsi People (Feeling Free)"
1984-88	"Pepsi. The Choice of a New Generation" featuring Michael Jackson
1989	"Pepsi. A Generation Ahead"
1990-91	<i>"Yehi hai right choice Baby, Aha"</i>
1992-93	"Be Young, Have Fun, Drink Pepsi"
1997-98	"Generation Next" with the Spice Girls and with Ricky Martin, during 1998 FIFA World Cup in 1998
1999-2000	"For Those Who Think Young" commercial with Brittany Spears
2009	<i>"Yeh hai youngistaan meri jaan"</i> and "My Pepsi My Way"
2011-13	<i>"Dunya Hai Dil Walon Ki"</i> featuring AliZafar in Pakistan

Table 1: Pepsi Taglines targeting the Youth

Source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pepsi>

Fastrack too targets the young generation by featuring its products as the cult items to feel cool and young with advertisements featuring young people or celebrities which the youth can easily identify with. Beauty products usually use these emotions to launch campaigns which create a sense of belonging if you use the particular item. Maybelline uses the tagline "Maybe she's born with it. Maybe it's Maybelline" to bring out the feeling of belonging to a group if you use Maybelline products. Recently, it changed the iconic tagline to a more feminist message of "Some of the lucky ones were born with it. The rest of us... Make It Happen" inspiring women to feel empowered and belong to the modern, free and independent female section of the society. The name Jockey immediately rings in the tag

“Jockey or nothing” again making it a symbol of conformity. Brand consciousness regarding choices of clothes, footwear, handbags culminate from the same need of belongingness.

5.4 Ego Needs:

Ego needs are more complex than the previous hierarchy of needs marketers have to decipher. These are those needs which come from the human desires to feel appreciated, valued, accepted, respected for being a productive part of the society. Figure 2 lists these feelings- prestige, status, accomplishment. The human mind desires recognition of his/her existence and applauds for actions it undertakes during the lifetime, be it in the family, or at the workplace or society.

Marketers need to design products and services to fulfill these desires. Ego satisfaction of the buyer market will lead to creation of niche markets with high customer loyalty.

Status symbols like cars, furniture, credit cards, high end mobile phones, television, club memberships etc. are demanded to satisfy these needs.

For example, Onida came up with the tag line 'neighbour's envy, owner's pride' to bring ego satisfaction to those who buy Onida TVs by feeling a sense of pride in owning these TVs which are better than any TV one's neighbor might own. The symbol of Mercedes, rings of Audi, the leaping Jaguar, the impressive name of Royal Enfield are all status symbols satisfying the buyer's craving to feel productive. Driving down the road with any of these symbols on the hood make head turns, and attention is the ego need consumers seek to satisfy when they spend huge bucks on these modes of travelling. Trademark labels of Gucci, Prada, Ralph Lauren, Loius Vitton have become symbols of the society one aspires to belong to in the future or has to conform to in the present. The apple behind the iPhone has become another means to satiate the need to feel appreciated (or envied) after spending money.

5.5 Self Actualisation Needs:

These are the enriching experiences humans desire to feel and experience to fulfill their ultimate need to realize one's full potential and realization of the true self.

Marketers have to be very sensitive when they target these needs as these symbolize the most complex and natural needs of humans which are also the most difficult to understand and fulfill effectively. Manufacturers don't only have to manufacture products, but unique experiences which satisfy the inner self of the consumer by

understanding in detail what the buyer is actually looking for when he/she makes a demand. Marketers have to study the buyers' interests, hobbies, level of education to create the perfect experience satisfying these highest level needs.

For example, the Indian Army's motto "Service before self", Madras Regiment's "*Swadharme nidhanam shreyaha*" (It is a glory to die doing one's duty), Gorkha Rifles' "*Kayar hunu bhandu marnu ramro*" (Better to die than live like a coward), Maratha Light Infantry's "Duty, honour, courage", Border Security Force's "Duty unto death" stir these feelings in the people to attract them to join the forces. Indian Navy invites young citizens by advertising in its recruitment advertisement "Live life with honour and dignity", "Let nothing stop you from realizing your dreams". Indian Air Force advertise for recruitment with the motivating line "We don't aim for the sky. We actually test its limits. Give a flying start to your career, join IAF". Products calling out to national or cultural sentiments often use these feeling as the basis of their marketing strategy.

6. Findings

Marketers have to understand that these needs do not create different demands for different items. These needs create demands for the same items but at different times and for different needs. Consumers demanding cars might be at the first level looking for something to satisfy the basic need to reach work on time, or drop off children to school, at the second level fulfilling his/her need for safety and security during travel, at the third level of belongingness trying to fit into the society, at the fourth level of ego needs acquiring a status symbol to feel superior or at the final level of self actualization, trying to find a car which has been the lifelong dream of a buyer and the drive is an experience in itself. What the marketer has to decipher is how to cater to these different but inter mingling needs with the same product. Differentiating product as per the hierarchy can be one such solution. Create product ranges like budget and luxury as adopted by all airline services by providing economy class, first class and business class is another such strategy. Not all buyers in the market are at the same level of hierarchy of needs. Thus, marketers have to find answers to the following questions in order to match their offerings to the needs of the buyer market:

- What does the buyer desire?
- Why does he/she desire so?
- What product would satisfy these desires?
- What should be the features of the products to satisfy the different levels of hierarchy for different buyers in the market?

It is also important to keep in mind that the human mind can never be understood in exact terms, thus these categories of needs are the ultimate guide to success and should not be blindly followed in the present dynamic and competitive market. The over lapping of needs have to be considered. Also, not all people follow the hierarchy in strict terms. Human desire knows no boundary and the masses will not accept if the offering is anything less than unique. Therefore, Maslow's Theory has certain limitations lacking realistic nature but never-the-less is provides the broad framework necessary to match products/services to the needs of the buyer markets.

7. Conclusion

Businesses have to understand that buyers are ultimately humans with fragile emotions and aspirations, desires and wants which give shape to their demands. Thus, it is necessary to understand these factors which create the final demand because it is these factors which provide the guidelines to marketers for a sustainable competitive edge in the market.

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