Customer behavior in the culture of fear and short attention

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The research which was carried out on a sample of N = 344 respondents of different age and gender, using the X PANAS questionnaire to measure the basic and specific emotional states, calls attention to emphasized emotions of boredom and fear. Are there significant differences in the intensity of emotions of fear and boredom, depending on the age and gender of respondents? What is the causal link between the identified state and the optimum level of stimulation (ONS)? How does it reflect the creation of customer behavior trends? The research findings provide answers to these questions.

Key words: Emotions, fear, boredom, customer behavior, optimum level of stimulation, locus of control, cultural pattern.

INTRODUCTION

"Behavior is a difficult issue", says Skinner (1969), "not because it is inaccessible, but because it is extremely complex". Many areas of human life are overpowered with prejudice and burdened with inadequate attitude towards the problem and its manifestations. Human sensibility (emotionality) and feelings (emotions) are certainly one of the areas of large inconsistency between their importance in human life and current theoretical approaches to their explanation. Emotions neither arise in a vacuum, nor occur by themselves; instead, they are inseparable from the human that feels them, just as inseparable the human is from the life situations in which he experiences the given feeling. "Therefore, the broadest framework of our approach is the one by which the relations between life situations and the world on one hand, the living being or person on the other, and the emotions as a reaction between the living being and the world, on the third is defined. We feel that the emotion is always a reaction of the living being to a certain development" (Milivojevic, 1999). Therefore, the understanding of emotional states of (potential) customers is a significant and increasingly important field of maneuver for marketing activities. To understand and to "play the emotional harp" of customers, is a means to achieve the desired market success. "Emotions provide the insight ... how we understand the world, what our values are, what is important to us ..., all this is revealed in our emotional behavior" (Grelan, 2007).

When we are able to interpret our feelings and their manifestations, we gain great advantage both in life and in the market. Specific behavioral preferences of our customers are explained and predicted by the emotional self-expression of fear and boredom. What products will be in focus of attention of customers with strongly emphasized feeling of fear and what of customers with a strong feeling of boredom? What are the implications of these emotions to the creation of a product and service portfolio? These are questions that should be answered in this paper.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Emphasized emotions of boredom, modality of anxiety
and fear - neurosis, concern and intimidation all speak in favor of the thesis that "boredom is the 'privilege' of modern man" (Svensen, 2004), where "fear colonize our living world" (Svensen, 2008). "The vast majority states that they are happy," writes Lipovečka, "and yet grumpiness and stress, depression and anxiety, form large river that increases troublesome" (Lipovetsky, 2008). Back in the 1834, the German physiologist E. H. Weber (1949) found that the "differential threshold" or "just noticeable difference" between two stimuli "is not an absolute dimension, but rather a relative one in regard to the intensity of stimuli" (Weber's law). The research of Leuba (1955) and Hebb (1955), on the connection between the optimum stimulation level (OSL) and the individual need for stimulation was introduced into psychology, through the research of Dember and Earl (1957), Berlyne (1960), Raju (1980), McAlister (1982) and Pesssemier (1982), Pesssemier and Handelsman (1984), Joachimsthaler and Lastovicka (1984), Hoyer and Ridgway (1984), Steenkamp, (1992) Jan-Benedict and Baugartner (1992), and the recent research of Burgess and Harris (1998), Helm (2009) and Sharm et al (2010), that introduced the survey of customer behavior in order to create a more solid connection between the scientific disciplines of psychology and marketing. Therefore, it is not surprising that a growing importance is attributed to the optimum stimulation level model (OSL) as to the "process that forms the basis of everything that describes the customer's sensitivity towards a purchase offer".

The optimum stimulation level is like a 'mirror' in which customers' (dis)satisfaction, boredom, need for increased stimulation can be easily recognized as well as the need for decreasing the level of stimulation... Researchers of customer's behavior are preoccupied with the need to understand the way the differences in the necessary stimulations are associated with customer's behavior. What are the conclusions? High ONS is directly correlated with willingness to take risks, readiness to test new products, inventiveness, and a need for higher awareness... When the customer's ONS is higher than the current level of stimulation, it is expected that customers will be bored and search for enhanced stimulation. When the customer's ONS is lower than the actual situation, he will certainly be peaceful, relaxed, disburdened... With low-ONS, lower risk is perceived as a higher level of risk; when the ONS is high, a higher risk is perceived as a lower level of risk. It can be concluded that the individual with a strong sense of fear will perceive the lower risk as being high, and vice versa, which explains the coupling of fear and ONS. Namely, fearful people will show lower ONS, while the people who feel bored will show high ONS. The relations between the locus of control (LC) and the ONS are discussed in the research.

According to Rotter (Rotter, 1966), Locus of Control is a "generalized expectation from which the possible outcome of any individual situation may be concluded, what would be expected to happen"... The Roter's concept of locus of control (Rotter, 1966), distinguishes between internal and external locus of control, whereby the locus of control is viewed as individual attitude regarding the place of responsibility for his own life, for what happens to him, for what he does and feels. For the person with ILC (Internal Locus of Control) – the internal locus of control "real life is a choice not fate"; he believes that the life's events are (more) reflections of his activities not circumstances. In contrary, people with ELC (External Locus of Control) are prone to approach life as a 'fate', believing that events are primarily determined by situational factors. Studies showed that people with internal locus of control are willing to take higher responsibility, both for their own behavior and the behavior in the environment where the "individual" acts; they are characterized by action and future-orientation, high level of flexibility and adaptability. It could be concluded that people with internal locus of control are dealing with lower fear, having higher ONS, they will take higher risks, be willing to face new experiences, etc. People with external LC are characterized by lower ONS, higher fear and lower willingness to accept new things, uncertainty, etc.

The complexity of culture as phenomenon is undeniable due to the fact that culture is "alive and dynamic" category. One of many indicators of this complexity is the reflection "that all people are the same as all other people, that some people are the same as some other people, and that no man is like the other man" (Kluckhohn, 1939). Culturalists such as Benedict (1935), Linton (1945) and others, explain the national character through the relationship of culture and personality. While seeking to understand the cultural (psychological) matrix which is, according to Muchielli (Muchielli, 1986), the "core of group identification" through which the existential mode of the entire national collective is expressed as well as its (national) idiosyncrasy", thus, it is explained that this particular matrix "influences the behavior, thinking and feeling of all or most members of the national collective", where the cultural pattern (Benedict, 1934, 1946), is "the way people adopt certain, culturally specific behavior, belief and attitudes towards themselves and the others during the process of development".

Since the culture "forms an integral part of the structure of society as well as personality", it should be investigated from both angles. "Culture can be thought of as a 'building' which has been built for centuries by our ancestors," wrote Golubovic (1998), "which we found at birth; and without it, we would not be able to live our human lives, but while living, we also feel the need to form and upgrade it ...". All these speak in favor of the thesis on interdependence between culture, human being and his (customer) behavior. Customer preferences in
Serbia, as well as in any other part of the world, can be explained, among other things, by the characteristics of the prevailing cultural pattern. What material builds the cultural pillar of customer's behavior in Serbia? The answer to this question can be found in indications about the prevailing cultural matrix (cultural pattern) in Serbia, according to the research carried out by G. Hofstede (2010) where culture is defined as a multidimensional concept. Based on the research from 1970’s, and reiterated studies, Hofstede and his associates concluded that the same problems are addressed differently in different countries, identifying four basic dimensions for distinguishing national cultures: Power Distance (PDI), Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI), Individualism/Collectivism (IDV), Masculinity/Femininity (MAS) and the fifth dimension of Long-Term/Short-Term Orientation, which were defined in 1987.

The author was primarily interested in how opinions, attitudes, values, beliefs and perceptions of people with various national/cultural backgrounds are varying. Based on the responses and their analysis, the specified dimensions were constructed. Using the findings of Hofstede and associates, Figure 1 shows the position of Serbia regarding the dimensions of power distance and uncertainty avoidance; Figure 2 shows the dimensions of the “male” vs. “female” values and the dimensions of individualism vs. collectivism. When relating the optimum level of stimulation (OSL), the internal (ILC) and external (ELC) locus of control, risk (R) and cultural pattern, with the expressed fear and boredom (short attention), the scheme of their interrelationship is structured (Figure 3).

The aim of this research is to confirm this kind of dependence.

Research hypotheses

The purpose of this research is to identify the respondents' (consumers') emotional condition and create a possible picture of consumer's trends based on the identified basic and specific emotional conditions. Starting from the premise that “Emotions provide insight... How we understand the world, what our values are, what is important to us..., all this is revealed by our emotional behavior.” (Grelan, 2007) the following hypotheses are defined:

H1: There is no significant difference between older (45 years and over) and younger (under 30) respondents regarding the variable of “fear” as measured by Panas X test:

H2: There is no significant difference between male and female respondents regarding the variable of “fear” as measured by Panas X test:

H3: There is no significant difference between older (45 years and over) and younger (under 30) respondents regarding the variable of “boredom” as measured by Panas X test:

H4: There is no significant difference between male and female respondents regarding the variable of “boredom” as measured by Panas X test:
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Sample

The research was carried out on the sample of $N = 344$ respondents of different age and gender, by using the PANAS X questionnaire (Watson and Clark, 1988). This questionnaire measures the respondents' basic and specific emotional conditions.

Research instrument

PANAS X

(Positive and Negative Affect Schedule Expanded Form) is a questionnaire conceived by Watson and his associates (Clark and Tellengen, 1988; 2000). The questionnaire is based on the research findings that consider more primal human states called ‘moods’ by Watson. According to Watson human is a reactive system consisting of behavior, affects, cognition and biological dimension. Each of these dimensions, both individually and as a system (a human), operates on the principle of activation and inhibition. According to Watson, there are two primary conditions coexisting in man: a) primary positive affect, and b) primary negative affect. These are two basic scales in the questionnaire providing the first level of basic human emotional conditions. According to Watson, the basic positive and the basic negative states are primarily humans’ adaptive functions and they are permanent and stable responses of man as a system to various stimuli coming primarily from the external environment.

At another level, according to Watson, there are positive and negative emotions and other affective states. The initial version of

Figure 2. Dimension of National culture—Masculinity vs. Individualism (According to G. Hofstede and G.J. Hofstede (2010), Cultures and organizations, McGraw-Hill).

Figure 3. Patterns of behavior.
the questionnaire consisted of 117 terms describing our emotional conditions, but the method of factorial analysis led to its final version consisting of 60 terms. The questionnaire consists of 60 words describing our emotional conditions, and the task of the respondents is to rate their emotional condition on the scale from 1 to 5 (where 1 implies the absence and 5 the presence of the stated emotion) as follows:

Now, today, last days, the whole week, last couple of weeks, last month, last year and generally.

Depending on the nature of research, respondents are given directions as to the time period they need to assess their emotional condition. In this research, the determinant “generally” has been used.

RESULTS

The survey using the Panas X (According to Watson, these two basic moods always coexist in man and they are of different intensity and form the basis of variable emotional states of man) questionnaire was carried out on the sample of 344 respondents. Independent variables of our study are the respondents “gender and age”. Due to the fact that gender is a variable that can be expressed on a nominal scale of measurement, our sample consisted of 173 male and 171 female respondents. The independent variable “age”, which could be expressed on an interval scale, is also presented at a nominal level by surveying a random sample of students (204 students) from the Faculty of Technical Sciences in Novi Sad, and a random sample of employed residents of Novi Sad over 45 years (140 individuals).

Dependent variables of our research are the Panas X questionnaire scales measuring “fear and attentiveness”. These variables are expressed in interval scale, so we present their arithmetic mean and standard deviations, using the one-way analysis of variance (One Way ANOVA) to investigate the effects of independent variables (gender and age) on the dependent variables of our study (fear and attentiveness).

Effects of the independent variable “gender” on the dependent variables

From Table 1 we can see that the “fear” is more prominent among male respondents (As = 14.34), while its variability is more common for female respondents (Sd = 4.39). Attentiveness is more common among female respondents (As = 13.49), while its variability is more common for male respondents (Sd = 14.34). In order to see whether these differences regarding gender are statistically significant, a One Way ANOVA was applied on the obtained data. There is statistically significant impact of the variable “gender” towards the intensity of the variables “fear” (F = 14.82 p = 0.00) and Attentiveness (F = 36.71 p = 0.00) which is presented in Table 2.

According to the obtained results, we can say that the intensity of Fear in our sample is statistically much higher for males, while the intensity of Attentiveness is statistically much higher for females. The dimension of the F-ratio suggests that the influence of gender is considerably higher on “attentiveness”, regardless to the fact that its influence on the intensity of both emotions is at the level of statistical significance.

The influence of independent variable “age” on the dependent variables

From Table 3 it is obvious that the intensity of “fear” is more explicit among respondents who are students (As = 13.92) than among those who are older than 45 (12.85). The intensity of these emotions varies among students (As = 4.03). The intensity of Attentiveness is slightly more explicit among respondents older than 45 (mean = 12.67) than among the students (12.41). The variation of intensity of this emotion is almost equal in both groups. The One Way ANOVA results clearly indicate in Table 4 shows that the intensity of “fear” among the respondents (F = 5.39 p = 0.021) is significantly influenced by age, while the intensity of “attentiveness” is not influenced. Thus, the intensity of “fear” was significantly higher among students, as compared to respondents older than 45.

DISCUSSION

The obtained results suggest that the intensity of “fear and attentiveness” in our culture is much more moderated by “gender”. It is interesting that in the population of our respondents, “fear” is more intense among males and Attentiveness among females (Figure 4). When considering the nature of our culture which is defined as a feminine in the context of Hofstede’s cultural matrix, these results are not surprising. Naturally, in addition to Hofstede’s determination, we must take into account the difficult socioeconomic situation of our society. It is interesting to note that according to our results, women are more bored than men (lower intensity of attentiveness), which shows a far-reaching impact on the behavior and decision making in many situations, and thereby also in the process of purchase.

When extending this consideration by the reflection that the product is often more important than its function (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982), it should not be surprising that the final decision of customers does not depend (solely) on careful information processing, but also on the feelings and emotions, and affective factors.
Table 1. Fear and attentiveness by gender.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Fear</th>
<th>Attentiveness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>14.3410</td>
<td>11.5607</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N 173</td>
<td>N 173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Std. deviation 3.89012</td>
<td>Std. deviation 3.14256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>12.6199</td>
<td>13.4971</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N 171</td>
<td>N 171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Std. deviation 4.39002</td>
<td>Std. deviation 2.77038</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Mean 13.4855</td>
<td>Mean 12.5233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N 344</td>
<td>N 344</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Std. deviation 4.22885</td>
<td>Std. deviation 3.11388</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. ANOVA fear and attentiveness by gender.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sum of squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fear * Gender</td>
<td>254.756</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>254.756</td>
<td>14.820</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5879.171</td>
<td>342</td>
<td>17.191</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6133.927</td>
<td>343</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attentiveness * Gender</td>
<td>322.453</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>322.453</td>
<td>36.718</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3003.361</td>
<td>342</td>
<td>8.782</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3325.814</td>
<td>343</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Fear and attentiveness by age.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Fear</th>
<th>Attentiveness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>students</td>
<td>Mean 13.9216</td>
<td>12.4167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N 204</td>
<td>N 204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Std. Deviation 4.31445</td>
<td>Std. Deviation 3.16039</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>over 45</td>
<td>Mean 12.8500</td>
<td>12.6786</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N 140</td>
<td>N 140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Std. Deviation 4.03211</td>
<td>Std. Deviation 3.04940</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Mean 13.4855</td>
<td>Mean 12.5233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N 344</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Std. Deviation 4.22885</td>
<td>Std. Deviation 3.11388</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Likewise, there is another interesting finding that “fear” is more intense among students than among respondents older than 45. The opposite should be expected but due to the highly difficult socio-economic situation in our society and the fact that all our respondents older than 45 are employees, this is not a huge surprise. Namely, the student population is faced with a high level of uncertainty and unemployment generated by the economic order; all these result in anxiety-induced psychological confusion and awakens a sense of life failure. At first glance one might think that older respondents are big losers of transition, but when scratched deeper, the
Table 4. ANOVA fear and attentiveness by age.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sum of squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fear * Age</td>
<td>95.332</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>95.332</td>
<td>5.399</td>
<td>.021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6038.595</td>
<td>342</td>
<td>17.657</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6133.927</td>
<td>343</td>
<td>17.657</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attentiveness * Age</td>
<td>5.695</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5.695</td>
<td>.587</td>
<td>.444</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3320.119</td>
<td>342</td>
<td>9.708</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3325.814</td>
<td>343</td>
<td>9.708</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4. Fear and attentiveness by gender and age.

Conclusion is that the actual losers are young people, namely, the students. According to our survey, the intensity of Attentiveness among our respondents is not directly affected by age. Due to the fact that research includes both male and female subjects, it would be advisable to observe the division of roles in the potential purchase of a family in the context of results that are related to the emotions of fear and boredom and their behavioral implications. Numerous studies indicate a change of family 'togetherness' that used to mean "do things together," but today the more prominent means "to be in the same family" and work in their own way (Haran, 1995). Most studies concerning the relation between husband and wife and their influence on consumer decision-making, determine the family consumer decisions into the categories of husband domination, wife domination, joint or autonomous decisions (Corfman, 1991; Mowen, 1990). Due to the dominant cultural model in Serbia, it would be interesting to determine whether the 'domination of women' was the dominant category of consumer decision regarding the whole family.
Conclusions

The research results clearly show a dominant cultural pattern in Serbia, which clearly indicates that “gender” significantly moderates the intensity of emotions, “fear and attentiveness”. In the population of our respondents “fear” proved to be more intensive for men and “attentiveness” for women. These results go in step with the cultural matrix of Serbia defined as feminine. Marketing implications of these results are highly obvious. The feeling of boredom can be linked to the “hunger for experience. Experience is the only thing that is interesting.” A significant number of people think we are rather focused on “whether it is interesting” instead of “whether it has any value.” Back in 1878, Karl Philipp Moritz, a representative of German romanticism, wrote that “life must be interesting in order to avoid the unbearable boredom.” Therefore, it is not surprising that the best-selling items are, for example, “interesting information,” highly extreme, catastrophic news...

The fact that boredom is closely associated with meaning, that is with the sense of the lack of meaning, should not be overlooked. Therefore, more and more customers are looking for ‘shock and danger’, for extremes, for new and more powerful experiences, for new and rare sensations, spectacles that can alleviate boredom. One source of great boredom is “that we want something big where we should be happy with something small”, and the everyday life of our customers is increasingly directed towards this kind of replacement between goals and desires. "If boredom grows, it means that there is a serious error in a society or culture as a sense-making institution ..." (Svensen, 2004). The expression of feelings of boredom clearly refers to the society, state institutions and the like, had to deal with creating a climate that will increase the sense of living in which marketing cannot avoid responsibility for creating the offer, which will enable the transition from the zone of boredom into the zone of more clear meaning of consumer corpus. Do the society and the market have adequate answers to this state of affairs?

Fear reveals the fact that something is conceived as dangerous, but also that "I" is understood as vulnerable to damage or destruction. The cult of brands could be explained by the emergence of "hyper-modern uncertainty." When the fear is growing, for example of food products, the advantage is gained by the "products with the label bio"... The growing uncertainty goes hand in hand with the rise of the rule of brands. The increased feelings of fear are compensated by the increase of use of drugs, medical encyclopedia, Web sites 'offering a solution' for all the problems, articles of advisory content, cosmetic products... The sphere of existence "receives health coloration, customer goods are increasingly adopting the dimension of health: food, tourism, housing, cosmetics, health topics... The time of life medicalization and consumption is at work (Lipovetsky, 2008).

Due to the fact that women are often the deciding factor in the purchasing process, (especially in cultures that are marked as feminine), it is logical to link strands of boredom as an accessible women's 'feature' and on that basis to create a supply where the target group are women, regardless on whether they will be the only customers and consumers of certain products. The dominant cultural pattern will be reflected in the properties of the family shopping, and it would be interesting, at some future studies, to illuminate specific family purchases in the context of the Serbian cultural form, and to provide answers to the influence of fear and boredom of behavior in the process of purchasing and consumption. The customer realm is increasingly built on the foundations of uncertainty, mistrust, everyday concerns, lack of content, the more prominent human fear and boredom. Research results are speaking in favor of such course of things—they are justifying it and/or causing it. One thing is certain- the market is comfortably settled in bed, which spreads out in fear and boredom.

REFERENCES