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solomon consumer behavior buying having and being

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Solomon Consumer Behavior: Buying, Having, and Being

When marketers talk about consumer behavior, the conversation often centers on the act of purchase—what drives a customer to click “Add to Cart” or to walk into a store. Yet, the life of a product extends far beyond that single moment. In the late 1990s, marketing scholar **Russell Solomon** proposed a nuanced framework that expands the traditional view of consumption into three distinct but interconnected stages: *Buying, Having, and Being*. This model invites us to examine not only the mechanics of the transaction but also the ongoing relationship between consumers and the products they acquire, and ultimately how those products shape identity and experience.

In this article, we’ll unpack Solomon’s theory, explore its practical implications for brands, and illustrate how the buying–having–being continuum can be leveraged to create more resonant, long term customer relationships.

1. The Genesis of Solomon’s Three Stage Model

Russell Solomon, a professor at the University of South Florida, has long focused on how consumers interpret and use products. In his 2004 book, *Consumer Behavior: Buying, Having, and Being*, Solomon challenged the prevailing emphasis on the purchase decision alone. He argued that the consumer experience continues to evolve after the purchase, and that each stage—buying, having, and being—has its own psychological drivers and marketing opportunities.

Solomon’s framework aligns with broader theories of consumption that differentiate between:

- Utilitarian motives – the practical, functional reasons for buying.
- Hedonic motives – the pleasure and enjoyment derived from consumption.
- Symbolic motives – the identity and status signals conveyed by owning or using a product.

By mapping these motives onto the three stages, Solomon provides a roadmap for brands to engage consumers throughout the entire lifecycle of a product.

2. Buying: The Transactional Stage

2.1 What Drives the Purchase?

The buying stage is where the consumer makes a conscious decision to acquire a product. It is influenced by:

1. Perceived value – the balance of cost versus benefit.
2. Need recognition – the identification of a problem or desire.
3. Information search – gathering data from advertisements, reviews, and word of mouth.
4. Evaluation of alternatives – comparing brands, features, and price points.
5. Purchase decision – selecting the product that best satisfies the consumer’s criteria.

In the digital age, the buying stage also incorporates online touchpoints such as e commerce platforms, social media ads, and influencer endorsements. Marketers must therefore optimize the entire funnel—from awareness to checkout—to secure the purchase.

2.2 Marketing Tactics for the Buying Stage

- Targeted advertising – using data analytics to reach consumers at the right moment.
- Product positioning – highlighting unique selling propositions (USPs) that align with consumer needs.
- Pricing strategies – employing psychological pricing, discounts, or bundling to create perceived value.
- Trust signals – showcasing certifications, guarantees, and customer reviews.
- Seamless checkout – minimizing friction with one‑click purchases, guest checkout, and multiple payment options.

3. Having: The Ownership Stage

3.1 From Product to Possession

Once the purchase is complete, the consumer enters the *having* stage. Here, the focus shifts from the act of buying to the experience of owning and using the product. Key aspects include:

- Post‑purchase satisfaction – how well the product meets expectations.
- Usage experience – the ease, enjoyment, and frequency of use.
- Maintenance and support – availability of customer service and product updates.
- Social sharing – how consumers talk about or display their product to others.

During this phase, consumers may also engage in *post‑purchase behavior* such as writing reviews, participating in brand communities, or seeking additional accessories. These actions can reinforce brand loyalty or, if negative, lead to churn.

3.2 Marketing Tactics for the Having Stage

- Onboarding content – tutorials, FAQs, and user guides that help consumers get the most out of their purchase.
- Customer support – responsive help desks, chatbots, and self‑service options.
- Loyalty programs – rewards for repeat purchases or referrals.
- Community building – forums, social media groups, and events that foster peer support.
- Product updates – firmware upgrades, new features, and seasonal refreshes that extend product life.

4. Being: The Identity Stage

4.1 How Products Shape Identity

The *being* stage represents the most profound level of engagement: the way a product becomes part of the consumer's self‑concept and social identity. Solomon identifies three sub‑dimensions that illustrate how consumption can express who we are:

1. Personal identity – the product reflects individual traits, values, and aspirations.
2. Social identity – the product signals group membership or status within a community.
3. Collective identity – the product aligns with broader cultural or societal narratives.

For example, a luxury watch may symbolize personal achievement, while a sustainable sneaker line may signal environmental consciousness and align with a community of eco‑activists.

4.2 Marketing Tactics for the Being Stage

- Storytelling – narratives that connect product features to personal values.
- Co‑creation – involving consumers in design, customization, or brand initiatives.
- Influencer partnerships – aligning with personalities who embody the desired identity.
- Experiential marketing – immersive events that let consumers live the brand experience.
- Social proof – showcasing how others use the product to reinforce identity signals.

5. Integrating the Three Stages into a Unified Marketing Strategy

While each stage has unique drivers, they are interconnected. A failure at one stage can ripple across the continuum. Below is a practical framework for aligning marketing activities across buying, having, and being.

5.1 The Customer Journey Map

1. Awareness & Consideration (Buying) – content marketing, paid ads, and influencer teasers.
2. Conversion & Purchase (Buying) – streamlined checkout, limited time offers.
3. Onboarding & Support (Having) – welcome emails, tutorials, and responsive support.
4. Engagement & Community (Having) – loyalty programs, user generated content.
5. Advocacy & Identity (Being) – storytelling, brand ambassadors, and cultural alignment.

5.2 Data Driven Personalization

By collecting data across all touchpoints—web analytics, purchase history, social listening, and post purchase surveys—brands can tailor experiences that resonate at each stage. For instance:

- Buying – personalized product recommendations based on browsing patterns.
- Having – proactive service reminders or upgrade offers aligned with usage data.
- Being – content that reflects the consumer's evolving interests and identity markers.

5.3 Measuring Success Across Stages

Traditional metrics like conversion rate capture only the buying stage. To evaluate the full continuum, consider the following KPIs:

- Net Promoter Score (NPS) – reflects overall satisfaction and advocacy.
- Customer Lifetime Value (CLV) – indicates the long term profitability of a consumer.
- Usage Frequency – measures how often a product is used.
- Social Media Engagement – tracks shares, mentions, and sentiment.
- Brand Sentiment Index – gauges how positively consumers associate the brand with identity.

6. Real World Examples of the Buying Having Being Model

6.1 Apple: From Purchase to Identity

Apple's marketing is a masterclass in the buying having being continuum. The initial purchase is driven by sleek design, ecosystem integration, and status. Post purchase, the iPhone's seamless user experience and frequent updates ensure ongoing satisfaction. Finally, owning an Apple device becomes a cultural statement—"I'm a tech savvy, design conscious individual." The brand's focus on privacy and sustainability further reinforces collective identity among eco conscious consumers.

6.2 Patagonia: Sustainable Adventure

Patagonia's customers buy for performance and durability. Having the gear involves active use on outdoor adventures, with the brand providing repair services and a "Worn Wear" program that extends product life. The identity stage is rooted in environmental stewardship—Patagonia's activism and transparency resonate with consumers who view themselves as protectors of the planet.

6.3 Tesla: Electric Innovation

Tesla's buying stage capitalizes on cutting edge technology and luxury. The owning experience is defined by high performance, over the air software updates, and a growing Supercharger network. The identity stage positions Tesla owners as forward thinking, eco friendly innovators who are part of a movement toward sustainable mobility.

7. Challenges and Pitfalls

7.1 Over Emphasis on Buying

Many brands focus solely on the purchase funnel, neglecting post purchase engagement. This can lead to missed opportunities for upselling, loyalty, and advocacy.

7.2 Identity Misalignment

If a product's brand narrative does not align with a consumer's self concept, the identity stage can fail, resulting in dissonance and churn.

7.3 Data Privacy Concerns

Collecting data across stages must be balanced with transparency and compliance with privacy regulations (GDPR, CCPA, etc.).

8. Future Trends in the Buying Having Being Landscape

- AI Driven Personalization – real time tailoring of content and offers.
- Virtual and Augmented Reality – immersive buying experiences and product demonstrations.
- Circular Economy Models – subscription, leasing, or resale platforms that extend the having stage.
- Purpose Driven Branding – deeper integration of social impact into identity narratives.
- Blockchain for Transparency – verifiable claims about sourcing, sustainability, and authenticity.

9. Actionable Takeaways for Marketers

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