Cognitive Consistency in Purchase Behaviour:

Theoretical & Empirical Analyses

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Abstract

The fundamental thrust of consistency theories is to enforce equilibrium among one's cognitions. Man seeks haemostatic states among his cognitive elements or avoids conflicting stimuli. He loves the familiar; the unfamiliar is always discomforting and disturbing though common knowledge tells us that actual behaviour turns what seems novel at the pre-decision stage into familiar following series of learning and experience. The Heider's balance theory, Osgood's congruity model and Festinger's cognitive dissonance theory are the three popular schools of thought that   provide the foundational theories of cognitive consistency This paper critically analyzed and synthesized the major theoretical and empirical body of knowledge of these schools with a view to proffering a tripartite approach (involving the consumers, the organizations and the governments) to solving inconsistency among cognitive elements (e.g.; values, beliefs, knowledge and attitudes). These schools were specifically looked into and assessed in terms of their individual real world application and/or empirical fertility. Each represents an improvement upon the other with Festinger's theory providing the most elaborate perspective of emphasizing on psychological tension and means of achieving consistency within and between the cognitive system and ultimately overt and covert behaviours.

Keywords: Cognitive consistency, Purchase behaviour, Cognitive dissonance, Balance theory, Congruity theory, Psychological of tension

1. Introduction

Research interest in social psychology shows an integral relationship between the three existential stances (knowing, feeling and acting), which interrelate to form a richer and more flexible construct (McGuire, 1969). Sheth (1974) notes that the interaction between affect (individual liking or disliking a stimulus), beliefs (cognitive structure reflected by the information about the stimulus), and behavioural intention (the tendency to respond, either favourably or unfavourably, towards the stimulus). Man loves what is familiar and the unfamiliar is always discomforting and disturbing though common knowledge tells us that what is unfamiliar turns familiar sooner or later (Venkatesan, 1973). It is often argued that man resists totally novel concepts that challenge established behaviour pattern (Awa, 2003; Heiskanen and Repo, 2007) though successful radical concepts allow developers to enjoy less competition and potentially transform the entire value networks to the developers' advantage (Christensen, 1997; Tushman and Anderson, 1986). The consistency theorists emphasize that affect (liking or disliking) is a hypothesized function of beliefs related to the perceived instrumentality of object or concept in attaining or frustrating a set of relevant valued states, weighted by the relative importance of those valued states (Osgood, Suci and Tannenbaum, 1957; Rosenberg, 1960; Day, 1973). Then, the theory of propositional control of Dulaney (1966) considers behavioural intention to be a function of two factors. First, attitude towards a specific act defined in terms of beliefs about the consequences of performing that act, weighted by the evaluation of those beliefs; and second, social and personal normative beliefs, weighted by motivation to comply.

The phenomenon therefore is that man holds information or knowledge, which reflects his beliefs or evaluations about stimuli. Such knowledge, opinions and beliefs about stimuli constitute his cognition. Day (1973) observes that consistency theorists share the basic assumption that individual strives to achieve consistency within and between his cognition. Thus, man seeks to maintain cognitive consistency irrespective of the circumstances. Further, these theorists assume that inconsistency among cognitions creates psychological tension or discomfort

(motivational state), which is disturbing in much the same way as any other drive state, such as thirst, and thus forces drive reduction action(s). Graham (2007) shuns situations where two or more elements of cognition are in disagreement. The resulting tension of such disagreement is the motivational force leading to efforts to modify or change the cognitive system. The magnitude of the psychological tension, according to Day (1973), could be considerable or appreciable in nature. The appreciable tension, which is most applicable to businesses, is the consequence of everyday problems, such as when a favourite brand is out-of-stock or the actual performance of a new choice behaviour falls short of the expected performance.

The specific modes of resolving inconsistencies are of obvious concern to the relevant manufacturers and trade dealers. For instance, psychological tension aroused by shortfall in product performance may attract public or private actions and perhaps the ideals of attribution theory, to restore consistency. The public actions relate to seeking redress in the law court, forming consumer movements, complaining to the offending organization for compensation or for more dissonance-reducing instructions or complaining to Public Complaints Commission or any other bodies in charge of handling consumer dissatisfaction(s). Private actions, on the other hand, involve boycotting the offending product and its maker, warning friends and other relations to beware and engaging in repression. Jones *et al* (1972) report that attribution theory explains how people assign the causality to events in terms of their own behaviour (especially success) or the behaviour of others (e.g.; dissonant issues). For instance, a student who failed examination may resolve that in terms of her/his perceived teacher's hatred.

McGuire (1966) discusses six ways by which inconsistency can be created in a man. First, inconsistency results from an individual's simultaneous occupation of two or more conflicting social roles. Informed decisions complement one's social roles because the time for the search and comparison efforts increasingly compete and conflict with job demands, leisure time and time for attending to other issues, thereby enforcing decisions that create inconsistencies. Linder (1970) predicts that the process of allocating decreasing personal time lead to increasing tension in a society. Second, environmental change may encumber an individual with issues that no longer accord with the reality of life. This is evidenced in the case of computer and typewriter, diskette and flash drive, etc. Third, an individual may be constrained to behave in ways inconsistent with his original attitudes, perhaps as result of the death of a dear one, loss of job, or some other pressing events. Fourth, an individual may be persuaded to change his belief structure via new information, interpersonal interactions or firsthand experience, only to find that, that may be inconsistent with other elements of the cognition (Day, 1973). Fifth, individuals seek inconsistency, either because of a desire for novelty or to mask more deep-seated conflicts that can rarely be resolved through action. Finally, there are human logical shortcomings that perhaps produce logical fallacies, though inconsistency theory is usually based on psycho-logic rather than formal logic.

The theorists of cognitive-consistency often record three most significant schools of thought- the Heider's balance theory (1946 and 1958), Osgood and Tanennenbaum's congruity theory (1955), and Festinger's cognitive dissonance theory (1957). The fundamental thrust of these theories is to enforce mechanisms to reduce disequilibrium among one's cognitions. While the balance theorists seek to cause balance relations among cognitions that perhaps were imbalanced (Hummon and Doreian, 2003; Khanafiah and Situngkir, 2004); congruity theorists strive to turn incongruity among attitudes to consistency (Han and James, 2007); and dissonance theorists are preoccupied with reducing dissonant cognitions (Dickinson and Oxoby, 2007). Although some modifications have taken place on the formulations of the postulates of these schools, Deustch (1968) notes that they tend to draw their philosophical and theoretical bases from the field theory framework of Lewin. This paper attempts to synthesize the submissions of these three major schools and the improvements thereon with a view to drawing antecedent conditions and modes of inconsistency reduction in consumption related behaviour.

2. Balance Theory

The balance theory is a populous school of thought of cognitive consistency. Pioneered by Heider's versions and dominated the 1960s (Greenwald *et al*, 2002), its philosophy lies on people's naïve theory of action. It is the conceptual framework that describes how man perceives others around him or interprets, explains, and predicts other people's behaviour (Khanafiah and Situngkir, 2004). Heider (1946) and (1958) is preoccupied with structural property of cognitive elements, involving a perceiver or a focal person, P, who perhaps simultaneously exhibits negative or positive cognitive relations towards an object, an individual, or an issue, O, and some other person/object/individual, X. The basic thrust of this POX model is that individuals subconsciously alter cognitive elements in such a manner to re-orientate balance, consistency or harmony (Schiffman and Kanuk, 1987; Day, 1973). P has cognition about O and X, and he is interested in O's cognition about X, (Venkatesan, 1973), representing a triangular relationship. Sentiment relation between P and X is determined by the attitude of P and X towards O (Khanafiah and Situngkir, 2004). *(Figure 1 is referred here).*

To illustrate the relations of P-O-X triad, let us consider two brothers, James and John, their attitudinal relations to star lager beer, and James' attitude towards John or vice versa. Initially, James had negative cognition about star beer, but John, a renowned professional brewer recommends it for its excellent mixture of ingredients and/or perhaps for stomach sake. This recommendation from proven source is capable of causing James to change his negative attitudes towards Star lager beer. The reverse would be the case if John had recommended otherwise, perhaps projecting Gulder lager as the best when James had negative predisposition towards Gulder. Thus, P likes or dislikes objects, X or O; O likes or dislikes X, etc. The structural balance theory as shown in the POX model rates sentiment relations among people to result from social and/or interpersonal networks (Kadushin, 2004) and shows how change in the dyadic sign changes the balance state of the whole graph (network of men). (*Table 1 referred here*)

The psychological state is plausibly one of three- balance, imbalance and non-balance (Newcomb, 1968) though the last two are treated as same in this paper. It is balance when the set of cognitive elements is accepted as it is. Relations in the P-O-X triad are considered balance when all the three sentiment (Khanafiah and Situngkir, 2004), or multiplication signs (Heider, 1946) relations are positive or the algebraic product of the three signs is positive (+P +O +X) (Day, 1973), when two negatives and one positive exist (-P -O +X) (Khanafiah and Situngkir, 2004), or when actual performance equals or exceeds ideal expectation. A graph or network of men within a large group of men is balanced only when the group can be divided into two subgroups, wherein individuals in the same subgroup are all positive and between individuals in different subgroups are negative (Khanafiah and Situngkir, 2004). Abelson and Rosenberg (1960) opine that balance outcome is enthroned when the tendencies toward hedonic gain and consistency operate in same direction.

When indifference between acceptance and modification of the cognitive elements possibly exists non-balance state is said to be enthrone. Last, it is imbalance when modification is feasible or when the resulting algebraic product of the relationship among the triad is negative. Table 1 shows that imbalance state in the POX triad exists when all sentiment relations are negative (-P-O-X) or when two positive and one negative signs (+P+O-X) exist. The balance theorists assert that balance states are most preferable to imbalance states, and imbalance relations instigate action(s) to modify the cognitive set to install balance though the modes of doing that were out-rightly ignored by the early theorists. Thus, balance states are assumed stable and to resist change whereas, imbalance states change so as to enthrone balance. However, the early postulates have been accused of being seemingly parochial in identifying and dealing with states of balance and imbalance relations. The starting point of many newer and perhaps refined theories, rest upon four snags of the early theorists (Kiesler, Collins and Miller, 1969).

First, the theory lacks route guides on the modes of obtaining balance states. Hummon and Doreian (2003) develop an agent-based model that assists to install balance state in the triads based on some certain partitions; and Wang and Thorngate (2003) view how a network is divided into two sub-groups by randomly balancing the triads. Second, it lacks provision for degree of balance or imbalance, or intensity of the relations desired by a person. Third, the theory rarely copes with complex situations involving multiple relations within a triad, or the inclusion of other persons or objects may pose a problem. Last, liking or disliking relation is assumed ambiguous, vague and lacks specifics. Zajonc (1960) observes that no matter how much John likes James; it may be difficult to influence John to liking Star lager beer, though according to the balance theory, James should influence John perhaps with his experience(s). Against Heider's postulates, Jacoby (1970) reports from his survey that negatively valence sources stating dislike for novel consumer item(s) will generate increase in preference rates, and perhaps intent to buy.

Cartwright and Harry (1956) sought to refine, formalize, extent or complement Heider's concept of cognitive balance by covering more than triadic relationships though Zajonc (1968) attacks them for having a mathematical treatment that did not conform to empiricism. Abelson and Rosenbergs' (1958) cognitive balancing model and Abelson and Rosenberg (1960) represent an extensive modification of Heider's theory with much greater complementary extension. These experts postulate a single affective relationship between psychological objects, which may be favourable, unfavourable or null. They devised a number of alternative ways to restore balance. The probability of using a particular method is inversely proportional to the amount of psychological effort required by the method. Day (1973) reviews their works and opines that the least effortful method is operationally defined as requiring the fewest sign changes before balance is restored. So, the recognition of Heider's balance theory of the need to turn to person(s)   one accustomed to trust is acceptable to the extent that such person(s) assists to resolve cognitive imbalances with a minimal effort.

Individuals prefer solutions that maximize hedonic gain, which operates independent of striving for consistency. They try to maximize potential gain and minimize potential loss (Abelson and Rosenberg, 1960) or perceived

risks. Although this model is somewhat classic and represents an improvement upon the basic model, Day (1973) accuses it of having an unimpressive empirical support and problem of how hedonic gain and hedonic loss could be measured. On this basis, he strongly advises that the conceptual frameworks of the general balance theory could be beefed up by incorporating some of the strengths of the well-developed concepts of perceived risk by Bauer (1960) and Cox (1967). By this theory, what determines the shape of P's cognitive elements towards X and O is the extent of P's involvement in the decision(s). Involvement theorists posit that individual's decisions and/or action is affected, among others, by the amount of capital outlay, information search efforts and risk level, frequency of behaviour and expressiveness of the decisions' outcomes. If the perceived risk is high (that is, high involvement behaviour), P relies perhaps not only on O_1 to ensure balanced cognition but also on O_2, O_3 ----- O_n to improve or change his cognition in order to enhance satisfaction from X_1 or even change to X_2, X_3 ----- X_n.

This is same as complex behaviour, where a decision-maker seeks balance relations by being conscious and aggressive in information search leading to satisfactory evaluation and informed decision. When compared with low involved consumers, high involved consumers use more criteria for choice making (Mitchell, 1989); search for more information (Beatty and Smith, 1987); know are about alternatives (Petty and Cacioppo, 1983); process relevant information in details (Chaiken, 1980); and form attitudes that are more resistant to change (Petty, Cacioppo, and Schumann, 1983).   Conversely, if the perceived risk is low (that is, low involvement behaviour), P relies less on O_1, O_2, O_3….O_n to ensure balanced cognition. He shuns repeat behaviour towards X_1 if actual satisfaction is less than expectations and perhaps favours X_2, X_3, X_4…..X_n The explanation to this is that X_1, X_2, X_3 ----- X_n are less risky and take low capital outlay, less expressive, frequently done, and convenient decisions. The hierarchy of effects for the low-and-high involvement behaviours is shown below in figure 2. (*Figure 2 referred*).

Sheth (1969) observes that friends and relatives might willingly dispose unsolicited advice on low-risk decisions than on high-risk ones, because any adverse consequences may not likely stain the established rapport.

3. Congruity Theory

Osgood's congruity model (Osgood, Suci and Tannenbaum, 1957; Osgood, 1960; Tannenbaum, 1967) represents a second major consistency formulation. Though at variance with the balance theory as Day (1973) notes congruity theory handles the problem of communication effects. The theory consists of a person (P) receiving favourable assertions from an identifiable source (S) about an object, event or other person (O), which informs his (P's) attitude formation or change. The congruity principle has the kudos of attempting to specify precisely the direction of change; either to O or to S. S makes some assertions about O and the pressure is to change only the existing attitudes for or against S or O. The extent of influence of S on P's attitude depends, to a very great extent, upon how much P likes or dislikes S and O, the product category (whether convenience, shopping, or specialty) and the enormity of the message.

The model often measures attitudes with reasonable precisions via the use of Semantic Differential Scale. First, if P likes S and O prior to the information from S, and the assertion is favourable, then there will be congruity. Second, when incongruity prevails (i.e.; P likes both S and O, whereupon S relays negative information about O to P), P's attitudes toward both S and O changes and ultimately forcing P to the direction of wanting to re-introduce congruity. Incongruous states generate a pressure for change in attitudes toward S and/or O (Venktesan, 1973) and the amount of attitude change required of P to deal with the situation is inversely proportional to the initial intensity of the attitude (Day, 1973). Osgood (1960) opines that extreme attitudes ignite the least amount of change.

However, the theory has gathered empirical supports from social psychology and consumer behaviour scientists. Day notes that the theory has done well in its limited domain (1973). Very limited empirical works can be found to test the theory's general implications and none for novelty seeking (Venkatesan, 1973). Generalization beyond the restricted types of communications situation is rather thorny (Tannenbaum, 1968). Robertson's (1970) has shown that congruity principle has done reasonably well in acceptance of new products. For instance, a disliked celebrity used to endorse a product may contaminate it (the product). Consider a situation where a consumer has a balance cognition towards food products, favourable attitude towards General Foods Company and its coffee brand (+) and an unfavourable attitude towards new coffee products, which he perceives inferior alternatives (-). General Foods then introduces Maxim Freeze-dried coffee, stressing its superiority (+). Under these conditions, attitudinal imbalance is obvious and change is most likely to occur. The possible outcomes of these may be as follow. P has favourable attitude towards O (brand) perhaps because S (the manufacturer) conveyed positive assertion about O (brand). P has already a set of predispositions towards O (product class) and S (manufacturer).

If P has a positive cognition towards O (the new coffee), congruous state is aroused, whereas if he has negative cognition towards the product category, positive assertion by S (manufacturer) may cause him to seek the new coffee version. But if P has negative cognition towards S, even if his attitude towards the product category is positive, novelty will rarely be aroused. This theory has found strong application in technology cluster and semi-skimmed innovations, whereupon firms use existing brand image to launch extension brands perhaps on accounts of   costly nature of full-fat innovations and stimulus generalization.

4. Cognitive-Dissonance Theory

The theory of cognitive dissonance posits a human phenomenon used by psychologists to express psychological discomforts (Altschul and Sinclair, 1981) or a state of disequilibrium amongst one's cognition (values, beliefs, attitudes and knowledge) resulting from the inflow of conflicting messages, objects, events or experiences. Stone and Cooper (2000) propose that dissonance begins when people exhibit behaviour and then access such behaviour against some meaningful criterion of judgment or when an action   measured against relevant criterion poses a threaten to oneself. Since over 40 years Leon Festinger published the original theory of cognitive dissonance, scholars have continually debated to refine, complement and/or extend its arousal and reduction in at least three perspectives.   First, cognitions represent standards or expectancies that facilitate dissonance arousal (Duval and Wicklund, 1972); second, cognitions function as resources for dissonance reduction (Aronson, Cohen, and Nail, 1999), which may be irrational and sometimes maladaptive behaviour; and third, cognitions are irrelevant to the process of dissonance arousal and reduction (Cooper and Fazio, 1984). At least empirical supports for the predictions of the role played by cognition in dissonance process in each perspective exist (Steele, Spencer, and Lynch, 1993) though no consensus exists among scholars as to how   self relevant thoughts mediate the arousal and reduction of dissonance (Stone and Cooper, 2000).

Whereas the balance theory is concerned with interpersonal perception; the congruity theory deals with attitude change resulting from the conveyance of information from a source about an object, event or person; the theory of cognitive dissonance seems to have wider applications and empirical fertility than the other two and enjoys practical fascination to both the social psychologists and consumer behaviour scientists. The social psychologists have been motivated by controversies to enrich theory, while the consumer behaviour scientists have been attracted by the theory's flexibility and unique insights into post-purchase behaviour.

Festinger (1957) and his followers note that relations exist between relevant cognitions of man. Any two or more cognitive elements (e.g.; values, attitudes, beliefs, or knowledge) may be at consonant, dissonant or irrelevant to one another. Assuming we de-emphasize the issue of relevance and score all beliefs or attributes as relevant, then a satisfactory relationship between cognitive elements is characterized by *fitting or consonant relations.* Psychological tension resulting from *non-fitting of* or contradiction amongst cognitive elements connotes dissonance relations. Cooper and Fazio (1984) observe that a person's attitude-discrepant behaviour must produce negative consequences and individual's task consists of freedom of choice and belief that the potential negative consequences of the actions were foreseeable. The magnitude of dissonance experienced and the probability of action depends on the situation. Self-affirmation theorists maintain that dissonance arousal is a function of threats to globally positive integrity or cohesiveness of the self (Stone and Cooper, 2000). Though self-integrity is often defined vaguely, Aronson, Cohen and Nail (1999) express it in terms of anything that threatens one's positive image, including negative evaluations from others that motivate need for affirmation. The classic dissonance paradigm of Spencer, Joseph and Steele (1999) suggests that if attention is drawn to threats inherent in a given behaviour, everybody tries to affirm by deflecting or diminishing the threat and if people do not focus on their self-resources following dissonance, they tend to rationalize or dismiss the dissonance relations.

Festinger's version notes that dissonance is likely to be high when either of the following happens.

- There is a mistake in high involvement decision(s); decisions that are expressive, infrequent, involve high capital outlay and requires aggressive search effort to reduce perceived risk. Such decisions are rarely revocable once taken or revocable at a very huge loss to the decision-maker.

- The alternatives are quantitatively dissimilar (Nnedu, 1996) or there is little cognitive overlap or sharing of features (Day, 1973). For instance, a choice between a car and an aero plane creates a more dissonance relation than a choice between a Mercedes Benz and KIA.

- The desirable alternatives are perhaps enormous and the choice results from freewill effort or outside pressure. If pressure is applied, the decision-maker complies without letting his cognition challenged (Festinger and Carlsmith, 1959).

5. The Tripartite Approach to Resolving Cognitive Inconsistency

The concept of cognitive consistency is built around the theory of hedonism. The theory posits man to be a calculative and pleasure seeking animal that chooses alternative courses of action that are capable of giving him the maximum pay-off. It also follows Thorndike's law of effects, which emphasizes that behaviour that yields positive outcomes will be reinforced or repeated. Festinger (1964) reports that inconsistency arousal and effort to reduce/eliminate it and ultimately return to *fit* or *consonance* takes place only after a decision; thus, consequences flow from the decision. Inconsistency creates psychological tension and anxiety, and therefore the organism is aroused to finding ways to reduce or remove it. When tuned to consumption related decisions, Ukoh (1993) reports that handling inconsistent relations involves a tripartite activity, involving the consumers, the organizations and the governments, though studies show that consumer interest is the weakest in public policy perhaps because they are not well organized. Perhaps, the organization of Nigerian consumers is almost not more than a mob, which is at variance with Ralph Nader's philosophy about consumer movement.

5.1 The Individuals/Consumers

For individuals/consumers, Atlschul and Sinclair (1981) break the modes of resolution into problem-focused and emotion-focused, though they note that the latter is predominantly used. The former operates when the individual thinks he can change the inconsistent relations in his favour. The modes of doing this, among others, include exercising carefulness and impartiality in gathering and evaluating information (Venketesan, 1973) leading to decision; revoking the inconsistent behaviour (e.g.; selling out the product in question, dashing it out, throwing it away or returning it to the seller, especially when the seller stimulates repeat behaviour via liberal return policy); and changing cognition to increase cognitive overlap or to psychologically decrease the attractiveness of the rejected alternative(s) and increase the attractiveness of the chosen. Stone and Cooper (2000) write on self-affirmation paradigm; they opine that affirmation/consonance occurs when focus on discrepancy between actual behaviour and stipulated standards is swept aside by the accessibility of positive self-attributes that were irrelevant to the behavioural discrepancy in question. Instead of reducing dissonance by changing cognitions relevant to discrepant action, Stone *et al* (1997) posit that affirmation/consonance occurs when new cognition about oneself distracts people from thinking about the dissonant act. The assumption is that for affirmation to operate, the affirming self-attributes must be irrelevant or unrelated to the behavioural discrepancy that caused the discomfort in the first place (Stone and Cooper, 2000).

The latter exists when anything is rarely done to the inconsistent relations and as such, the individual resorts to strategies that permit him to cope or live with the ugly situation. Among others, the modes include seeking out advertisement(s) or information that supports the choice while avoiding inconsistent-creating stimuli, down-rating the relevance attached to the discrepant areas or re-evaluating the conflicting beliefs to create *fit* or *consonant*; or by engaging in repression, defense mechanisms and rationalization.

5.2 The Organizations

In liaison with the organizations, the influx of predatory and cut-throat competition in almost all the industries, which Hoskin, Macve and Stone (1997) note followed the rapid pace of technological innovation and increasing customer sophistication, encourages players to formulate policies that enforce a consonant-creating environment. The policies that reflect on that, among others, include the following.

- Quality improvement on attributes and features such as functionality, versatility, durability, serviceability, dexterity and others. Firms formulate policies that encourage superior quality standards relative to competitors and customer expectations. Favourable experiences improve routinized behaviour, repeat behaviour and viral marketing.

- Advertising messages should underscore the unique selling points. Nnedu (1996) posits the message should be structured in factual, logical and careful manners that will enhance consistency among the consumer's cognitive elements.

- Messages should be clear, definite, persuasive and truthful before, during and after behaviour to ensure informed decisions and dissonance-free exchanges. Where necessary, performance should be under-stated in advertising messages to encourage satisfaction or over-satisfaction and of course congruous relations. Further, promotion should emphasize existing and satisfied users to reassure and congratulate them for making wise decision.

- Provision of after-sale service (such as free transportation and installation, instruction booklets, etc.) and developing effective mechanism for handling customer complaints to ensure effective but consonant performance that promises the flow of product support and viral.

5.3 The Governments

Finally, governments in the course of governance owe it a duty to regulate business operations and to protect the general public's interests, since everybody is a consumer. Often governments do this through direct participation and/or creation of regulatory institutions and agencies. Recently, the government of China demonstrated this duty by banning the importation of meats from seven American states for containing hazardous residues. In Nigeria, several agencies and institutions have been created to avert the exploitative tendencies of organizations, or inconsistent relations arousal on citizenry, though the effectiveness of most of them is still in doubt owing to bureaucratic red-tapism, policy inconsistency, power change, poor funding, insincerity, lack of transparency in governance, and a host of other factors. Some of these agencies and institutions are National Agency for Food and Drug Administration Control (NAFDAC), Standard Organization of Nigeria (SON), Public Complaints Commission (PCC), National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), Federal and State Environmental Protection Agencies and Nigeria Enterprise Promotion (NEP).

Most of these, if not all, have performed below expectations and therefore creating room for pertinent questions to be analyzed by Nigerian government, business scholars and business practitioners. How many dissatisfied consumers have been compensated through the efforts of Public Complaints Commission? Why is it that many medicated soaps made in Nigeria still contain excess mercury? Why are product claims exaggerated even with the existence of SON, NAFDAC and perhaps APCON? Why do we continue to experience drug trafficking and consumption of inimical goods as well as the sale of non-treated bottle and sachet water when NAFDAC and NDLEA are in existence? Granted that NAFDAC fared better than before with its former boss, Professor   (Mrs.) Dorah Akunyili but much is still needed to reposition it via giving people and organizations re-orientations geared at internalization of, and exhibition of behaviour that reflects on, socially and economically acceptable norms. This will reflect positively on cognitive consistency of Nigerian consumers. However, when most agencies and institutions are almost inefficient as they are in Nigeria, dissatisfied consumers will be left with private actions (e.g.; boycotting the products and warning others to beware) rather than public actions (e.g.; confrontation, seeking redress in court, complaining to PCC, etc.), which is the case in advanced economies.

6. Conclusions

The quest for models that provide better description and understanding of multi-faceted attribute structures has been proceeding along two tracks. One track has its roots to consistency theory and requires highly structured judgments about specific attributes. The other, though incorporates preference judgments into a perceptual space, is based on multi-dimensional scaling techniques, which make fewer demands of respondents. The two extremes are converging as hybrid methods that extract the strengths of each (Johnson, 1971) to form a richer construct. The reviews of literature on cognitive consistency theory takes a provocative stride and advocated its relationships with Thorndike's law of effects and the theories of hedonism, conceptual conflicts, economic man, novelty seeking and rationality though Berlyne (1963) views total consistency unpleasant when he notes that man seeks inconsistency and consistency to an optimal level. The provocative stride is explained on the grounds that attitude change results directly from one's experience and/or from the immediate problems of another, referred to as the communicator of word-of-mouth. Bauer (1964) observes overlap when audience exerts considerable initiative in interpreting and using the incoming persuasive messages for her own purpose. Thus, perceptual conflicts are motivating to attract consistent relations.

Man presumably and impartially collects and evaluates information about available alternatives in order to make informed or inconsistent-free decisions. This precondition exercise is an integral part of the cognitive process, and thus, once decision is made, the psychological situation changes decisively, either negatively or positively. Venkatesan (1973) concludes less objectivity, partiality and bias now characterize the process. Actual behaviour turns what seemed novel at the pre-decision stage into a familiar case as its pros and cons have been evaluated, and the individual is now disposed to express the extent of consistency or inconsistency existing among the elements of his cognition. Of the three schools of thought (balance, congruity and dissonance) discussed in the paper, the postulates of the last have wider practical fascination and empirical fertility than the other two perhaps because the direction of and the modes of resolving inconsistent relations are embedded in the theory. The balance theory simply deals with interpersonal perception (P-O-X) triad; the congruity theory relates to how attitude change results from source's message about an object, event or person; and the cognitive dissonance theory, in addition to handling the direction of the inconsistent relations like Osgood's (1960) congruity model, treats the strategies for returning the psychological tension to consistent relations. Thus, each latter postulate represents an improvement upon the immediate former. Inconsistency is a cognitive but post-behaviour phenomenon aroused when there is an inflow of stimuli that conflicts with one's cognition about an object, oneself, one's action and/or environment.

Operationally, individuals experience inconsistency when they hurriedly make a novel decision without the usual search efforts; when there is a negative relationship between actual and expected behaviours, etc. Often consumers cognitively form performance expectation about a choice through mass media and word-of-mouth (Bass, 1969). The quest to reduce the concomitant psychological tension and anxiety often reflects on the level of risk involved in the decision; for high risk decisions, the quest is aggressive, perhaps because they are infrequent, expressive and command high capital outlay. However, inconsistency comes from myriad of sources and as such dealing with it will involve the tripartite of consumers, organizations and governments.

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Table 1. The Combination of Sentiment relations in POX model and their resulting relation's features

(P-O)	(P-X)	(O-X)	Relation Feature
+	+	+	Balance State
-	-	+	Balance State
-	+	-	Balance State
+	-	-	Balance State
-	-	-	Imbalance Balance
+	+	-	Imbalance Balance
+	-	+	Imbalance Balance
-	+	+	Imbalance Balance
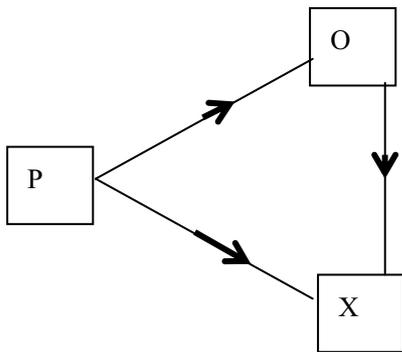
Figure 1. Relations of P –O –X triad

High Involvement   **Low Involvement**
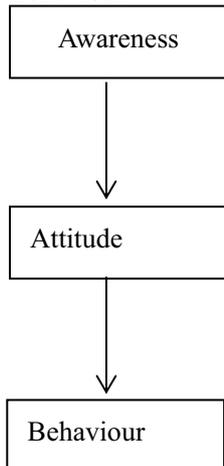
**Behaviour**   **Behaviour**
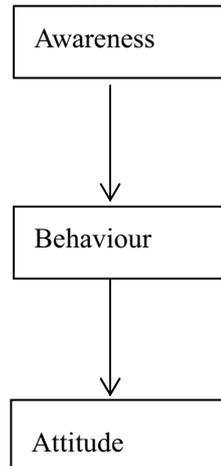
Figure 2. Hierarchy of effects of low- and high- involvement behaviours