



3 Forces That Motivate Your Customers' Decisions



Do you know what motivates your customers to buy from you?

Do you know why they choose one brand over another?

Do you know what drives one customer to become loyal while many others do not?

These are important questions, the answers to which will inform virtually everything your organization does.

But truthfully, they are tricky questions to answer effectively. Don't let any marketing consultant tell you otherwise.

You can't even go ask your customers directly what motivates them. Despite what they might tell you, they really don't know either.

The truth is that we make the vast majority of our decisions (as much as 95%) without consciously knowing why.

That is, our decisions and what motivates our behavior takes place below the surface of our conscious awareness.

To understand what this means, we need to first take a quick look inside your customer's brain.

A Very Brief Tour of Your Customer's Brain

We can separate the human brain into three parts: the basal ganglia, the limbic system, and the neocortex.

The neocortex controls language, thought, and reasoning. Information in the neocortex is mostly *conscious*. We can draw on this information at will.

The limbic system is the home of emotions, among other things. Information from the limbic system is largely *subconscious*. For the most part, our emotions are just below the surface; we are only vaguely aware of how we feel in a given moment.

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As a quick shorthand, here's a reference table:

Brain Region	Function	Process
Neocortex	Thoughts	Mostly Conscious
Limbic System	Emotions	Mostly Subconscious
Basal Ganglia	Instincts	Mostly Unconscious

The Key to Customer Motivation Lies Below the Surface

Now, what do these brain regions have to do with understanding your customers' decisions?

When you ask your customers why they make a particular decision, they access their neocortex (conscious mind) to answer. We are rarely short of *conscious reasons* why we do what we do.

But study after study of human behavior shows that the majority of our decisions are made *below the surface*. Decisions are made from our emotions and instincts—the *subconscious and unconscious parts of our brain*.

If you ask someone why they bought an iPhone, they may list features like ease of use, beautiful design, good battery life, or access to cool apps.

These are the logical, conscious reasons arising from the customer's neocortex.

But what really motivated this customer's decision was a *feeling*. Perhaps it was a sense of wonder, a desire for self-expression, or wanting to belong to a group.

The customer's limbic system triggers a *subconscious feeling* first. Then his neocortex rationalizes why he's making the decision with *conscious thought*, not realizing that the decision was already made.

Although this insight may appear to complicate the matter, here's the good news: below the surface, human beings are more alike than we are different.

From here, if we want to probe deeper into the drivers behind customer decisions, we need to turn to the field of psychology.

Maslow and Human Needs

The insights of [Abraham Maslow](#) shed light on human motivation. In *Motivation and Personality* (1954), Maslow set forth the categories of motivations we know as the [hierarchy of needs](#).

Human needs like physiological, safety, belonging, and esteem needs are biological and instinctual (unconscious). We are all motivated by these needs. And most of the time, we are not aware that these needs are driving our behavior.

Do you know which needs your customers are trying to fulfill when they interact with your business?

Jung and Archetypes

Psychiatrist Carl Jung illuminated how symbols, [archetypes](#), and [images](#) influence human behavior.

Our brains are hard-wired with a database of these archetypal images. The source of these images is largely unconscious.

Archetypal images trigger emotions. We are generally unaware of the power and influence these images have on our behavior and the decisions we make. Nor are we fully conscious of the emotions they evoke in us.



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Campbell and Cultural Stories

Finally, the famed mythologist Joseph Campbell deconstructed the [hero's journey](#) for us.

Cultural stories are like collective dreams that a large group of people share. They represent the common underlying themes and tensions of the people. These stories help us process life's inherent tensions and struggles, of which we are often not fully conscious.

Do you know the cultural narrative your customers unconsciously hold in relation to your offering? Do you know the tensions these stories carry and the role you can play in resolving these tensions?

Psychology and the Future of Your Business

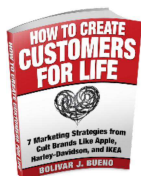
There are many other titans of psychology worthy of our attention, but we've found that these three help unearth many of the hidden drivers behind customer preferences, motivations, and behavior.

None of the above questions can be answered in an absolute fashion and yet they can form the basis for a structured process and a new way of looking at your business and your customers.

In this psychologically-driven model, you can uncover penetrating insights into your customer's motivations, understand why they make decisions, and even predict future behavior.

If used with integrity and business acumen, it can also lead to deeper customer bonds, increased market share, and higher profitability.

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