

# **The Delineation Theory As A Proposal For Maximizing Consumer Satisfaction**

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## **Abstract:**

*Consumer satisfaction remains a chest full of gold at the end of the rainbow, and models, as abstractions of reality, are used to shorten this journey, represented by the purchase decision process. This article proposes to contribute in this sense. Its author maintains that the individual can maximize his satisfaction in his purchase process. For this, he presented the Delineation as a theory that involves the perceptive process of the individual, allowing him to reach higher levels of satisfaction in his purchase process. The argument states that Delineation is a moderating construct between the consumption recognition and the consumer's purchasing action. Using a sample of 260 respondents and multivariate statistical techniques, the results of the empirical study pointed to Delineation as a moderating construct and procedure that maximizes individual satisfaction. The article discussed impacts, limitations, and proposals for new works.*

**Key Word:** *Delineation; Consumer Behavior; Consumer Process Making; Consumer Problem Solving; Marketing.*

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## **I. Introduction**

During the chaos in which the world's population is living, such as economic and environmental instabilities and the "icing on the cake," the Covid-19 pandemic, talking about consumer satisfaction may seem peripheral. However, it depends on how it approaches the subject.

Satisfaction in the purchase process can be more than meeting desires, as it also involves needs and problems (Serralvo and Loureiro, 2020), but this should not mean acts that meet the social demands mentioned above; on the contrary, the specifics of the product desired by the consumer will make a difference in the productive, environmental, economic and, consequently, social chain.

Researchers have relevantly addressed the topic of consumer satisfaction, and although it is a multifaceted construct in the field of consumer behavior, it has proven to be a prolific subject (Oliver, 2015; Suchánek & Králová, 2019; Ahrholdt, Gudergan Sadik, 2020).

However, in this article, the author addressed the issue of satisfaction by introducing a new topic called delineation. It is the proposal of a theory that involves the perceptive process of the individual as a consumer.

Thus, the objective of this article was to introduce the topic of delineation, proposing it as a moderating construct between consumption recognition and the consumer's purchase action (steps that are part of the decision model commonly used in the literature of this field of knowledge), which, when correctly performed, maximizes the individual's satisfaction in their purchase decision process.

The delineation topic has a high degree of originality, which makes the availability of literature in this regard scarce. The author justifies their expectation in developing this content by offering the academy material that enables a re-examination of how individuals behave in their pursuit of satisfaction in their role as consumers. The focal point is their perceptual process, encompassing the codification, storage, and retrieval of memories contributing to their product acquisition.

## **II. Delineation: the proposal of a new theory**

Bruner and Pomazal (1988, p.56) state, "A consumer problem cannot be adequately addressed until it is properly delineated." The proposed statement's context is the first stage of the consumer's decision-making process, problem recognition.

Based on this statement, the author of this article proposed to deepen and expand the maxim that it brings through the starting question thus written: if the consumer is unable to express what he understands as a problem, need or desire and point out its specificities, will he not be able to obtain satisfaction in his choices and purchase decisions?

This starting question involves the idea of "delineation", conceptualized by Loureiro (2020) as "...the cognitive action of concisely and directly describing the characteristics (specificities) of the good or service intended by the individual."

The individual's buying process involves the discomfort or imbalance between their current state and the desired state (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2019), and satisfying the need, desire, or problem perceived by the individual can resolve the situation (Serralvo & Loureiro, 2020).

Satisfaction is a broad and multifaceted term and has been a critical component in the study of human behavior by various disciplines, including economics when considering marginal utility theory (Sloman, Garratt, & Guest, 2018), sociology when the subject is the consumer society (Warde, 2017) and psychology, for example, in studies of job satisfaction (King, 2017).

Concerning studies of consumer behavior, the products that satisfy the individual have the specificities that he seeks to the point of being sufficient for them; that is, there was a positive evaluation or feeling of happiness with their decision (Oliver, 2015; Hoyer, MacInnis & Pieters, 2018).

In his choice and decision-making process, the consumer will seek the sufficiency of his satisfaction. According to Tse and Wilton (1988); Blackwell, Miniard, and Engel (2005), this moment is the individual's response concerning his evaluation of the perceived discrepancy between his expectations before the acquisition of the product and after its acquisition. This way of analyzing the consumer's purchase decision-making process remains current for works in this field of knowledge (Mothersbaugh, Hawkins & Kleiser (2020).

The individual will try to materialize his satisfaction by obtaining the product that has the capacity, that is, the specificities that are sufficient for him (Oliver, 2015), and in this context, a proposed response to this search is the appropriate delineation, which has its bases in the sensitive and perceptive process (Baddeley, Eysenck & Anderson, 2020).

People exposed to an environment are stimulated by objects and events, detected through sensation and perception. The first involves the detection of elementary properties of the stimuli, such as, for example, a glare that dazzles the individual's sight. The second involves higher functions of the brain, such as the interpretation of events and objects, for example, identifying that the brightness refers to the headlight of a vehicle (Goldstein & Brockmole, 2017).

Thus, perception concerns organizing and interpreting sensory information to make sense (King, 2017), which in the case of consumers involves their exposure and attention to marketing stimuli (Mothersbaugh et al., 2020), starting their purchase decision process.

For the delineation to occur, the individual will make use of his/her sensory systems diffused in his/her body composed of exteroceptors, which detect the world directly from the outside; interoceptors, which detect information from internal organs and processes and proprioception, those that detect a sense of position and load (Marzvanyan & Alhawaj, 2020).

The primary sensory receptors are vision, hearing, balance, taste, smell, and skin (or touch). They are specialized neurons that respond to specific types of stimuli (Spielman, Jenkins & Lovett, 2020), all participants in the individual's buying process.

In the case of delineation, the consumer's "problem" may not just represent some difficulty or emergency to be resolved. The individual may be dealing with a need or a desire which, as suggested by Serralvo and Loureiro (2020), modifies how the perceptive process will operate since the quality of construction and retrieval of memories are subject to the conditions or mental state of the individual (Tulving, 1983; Rocklage & Fazio, 2020).

It is worth noting that the delineation process can be learned (cognitive process) and incorporated into the individual's behavior through good associations and good memory retrievals (Kalat, 2017). It is about improving the internal search, but its bases are focused on perceptive processes and based on fields of knowledge such as psychology, neuroscience, and neuromarketing.

For the present article, the focus was to verify if there is evidence that the delineation moderates the consumption recognition (CR) and the purchase action (PA), consequently maximizing the individual's satisfaction in their purchase process.

### **Hypotheses development**

Armstrong, Adam, Denize, Volkov, and Kotler (2018) consider that the amount and time of information search are related to the individual's involvement with the product. Appropriate delineation can shorten this perception of time, that is, it can reduce the relationship between consumption recognition and purchase action when guided by good encodings and good memory retrievals (Tulving, 1983; Izquierdo, 2018); the reduction of time can increase the satisfaction of the individual in his purchase process, is the proposal. Then:

H<sub>1A</sub>: The delineation positively increases the effect of the relationship between Consumption Recognition (CR) and Purchase Action (PA); consequently, it increases the individual's satisfaction level in his purchase process.

As already mentioned in this article, delineation can be learned and incorporated into the individual's behavior, depending on their cognitive capacity, as age sometimes becomes an impediment to the proper implementation of delineation, these occurrences are treated as exceptions, as they involve the natural decline of the human being or some process of deterioration due to illness or accident (Barber, Opitz, Marting, Sakaki & Mather, 2016).

Except for the conditions mentioned above, the function of the delineation is to moderate the consumption recognition and the purchase action, allowing the individual to gather the necessary specificities so that he can materialize the desired product in a way that the result is sufficient for him, that is, to maximize the level of his satisfaction in the purchase process.

The individual's search for balance resulting from the discrepancy experienced due to his consumption recognition will demand that he search for information, internal or external, that contributes to his purchase (Lamb, Hair & McDaniel (2018).

Studies developed by Sparrow, Liu, and Wegner (2011) suggested that when faced with difficult questions, individuals are ready to resort to computers, where information is archived, but have low rates of recall of information obtained externally.

As for the search for internal information, what differs from the delineation is the fact that in the first one, the individual will retrieve the information and, based on it, will make his decisions (Kotler & Armstrong., 2018), while in the second he will strive for successful coding so that an equally successful recovery is possible (Craik & Lockhart, 1972; Kalat, 2017), intending to increase his degree of satisfaction and assertiveness in his purchase decision. Like this:

H<sub>1B</sub> The delineation positively affects the relationship between the Consumption Recognition (CR) and Purchase Action (PA) variables, confirming its role as a moderating construct, allowing for greater individual satisfaction in the purchase process.

The author of this article understands that the delineation is an improvement of the internal search for information.

So, once again, resuming the role of learning, Solomon (2018, p. 130) states that "Learning is a relatively permanent behavior change, caused by experience". The individual does not need to experience directly to learn (Kalat, 2017), he can acquire knowledge through observation, and the individual, the better his encodings and memory retrievals (Tulving, 1983; Bear, Connors & Paradiso, 2017), the greater his level of satisfaction with the result of his purchase. Like this:

H<sub>1C</sub> Since the delineation improves the internal search for information, its result will never be a null or negative value.

### **Empirical Study**

The present article has its main bases in the studies of the following authors: i) Bruner and Pomazal (1988) who approach delineation as a process that, if not properly conducted, prevents the individual from solving his problem, for example, buying; ii) Loureiro (2020), who in his doctoral thesis deepened the topic of delineation; iii) Serralvo and Loureiro (2020) who presented an empirical study whose results pointed to the fact that the consumption recognition (first stage of the purchase decision process) has as dimensions the problem, the need and the desire and for each case the process has different specificities, consequently, results with different levels of satisfaction, and iv) the bases related to the perceptual process were supported by works in areas bordering the field of study of consumer behavior, among which: psychology with Marzvan Yan & Alhawaj (2020); Goldstein and Brockmole (2017); King (2017) and neuroscience with Bear, Connors and Paradiso, 2017 and Gazzaniga, Heatherton and Halpern (2018).

### **III. Methodology**

The authors of this article developed an empirical study whose purpose was to verify the influence of the delineation construct in maximizing the individual's satisfaction as a consumer by acting as a moderator between the consumption recognition and the purchase action.

The scales developed for each variable involved were: consumption recognition (RC), Delineation (DL), and purchase action (PA). The statistical procedures used to develop and refine the scales were by Costa (2011), DeVellis (2016), and Hair, Black, Babin, and Anderson (2019).

The sample was convenience, totaling 260 respondents. Were discarded 50 respondents in the phase of development and validation of the scales, proceeding with the analysis with 210 respondents.

The statistical techniques used were: Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) using SPSS software (Field, 2018) and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) using SmartPLS software (Hair, Hult, Ringle, Sarstedt, 2017).

Considering that in science, measuring a latent variable cannot be done directly, using factor analysis (in the case of this article, exploratory) is a relevant resource. According to Field (2018, p. 991), the three main uses of this technique are: "(1) understand the structure of a set of variables; (2) construct a questionnaire to measure

an underlying variable such as [e.g., pain]; and (3) reduce a data set to a more manageable size, keeping as much of the original information as possible".

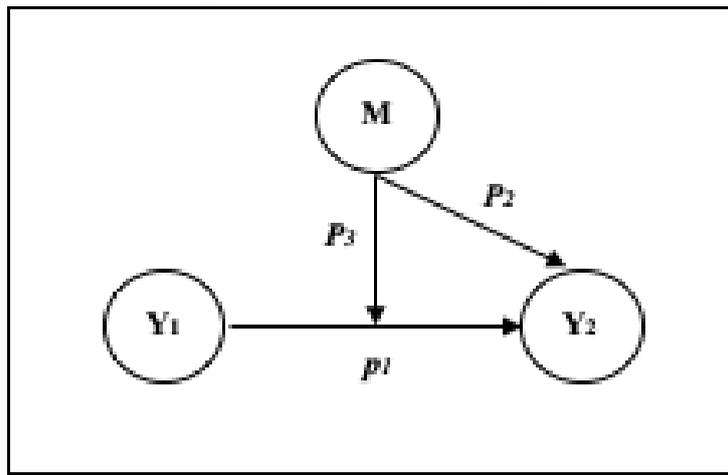
The results of the procedures with the EFA were robust and provided items used in the MEE, allowing us to verify whether, or not, there was support for both the starting question and the hypotheses. For this reason, were presented only SmartPls outputs.

#### IV. Presentation and Discussion of Results

As a statistical method, the SEM examines the relationships between numerous variables simultaneously. It is a family of related techniques, understood as a combination of the regression technique and factor analysis (Hair et al., 2019).

When the researcher deals with a model without a moderating variable with only an arrow connecting, for example, the variables Y1 with Y2, the p1 effect is considered a direct effect or main effect, as it represents the strength between them. This situation would remain if the moderator construct were equal to zero, otherwise (Figure 1), p1 is now considered a simple effect. Thus, if the moderator construct increases by one standard deviation unit (or decreases), the simple effect p1 is expected to be modified as a function of the size p3 (Hair et al., 2017).

Figure 1: Moderator effect example



Source: Hair et al. (2017, p.249).

Hair et al. (2017) emphasizes the need to include the simple effect of the moderator construct p2 in the endogenous latent variable, as the omission of this procedure may inflate the effect of the moderator construct (M) in the relationship between Y1 and Y2, that is, P3.

The authors of this article measured the effect between the CR and PC variables to verify the robustness of the individual's satisfaction as a consumer in his purchasing process before the moderating construct, which is the DL. Table 1 presents the result.

Table 1: Path Coefficient (Γ)

Causal Relations	Path Coefficient (Γ)
Consumption Recognition – CR → Purchase Action - PA	0,714

Source: the authors with software SmartPLS (2021).

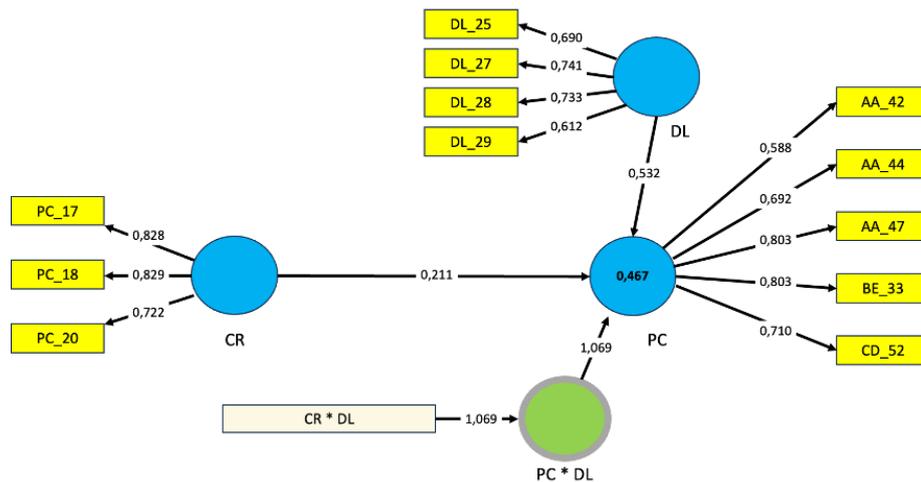
Hair et al. (2019) state that path coefficient values greater than 0.20 are considered significant.

Regarding the main effect between CR and PA, considering the value of 0.714, there is a strong relationship between them, suggesting that the individual's satisfaction as a consumer involved in his purchase action is significantly related to his consumption recognition. The hypotheses did not predict this relationship.

The next step of this study was to verify if the delineation maximizes the individual's level of satisfaction in his purchase process by including him in the study.

Figure 2 shows the model resulting from entering the items and performing the calculations in the SmartPls software.

Figure 2: Model of Software SmartPLS



The analyzes in Figure 2 were performed based on the interpretation of the interaction term, with the average level of the delineation being the reference point. The analysis has three steps:

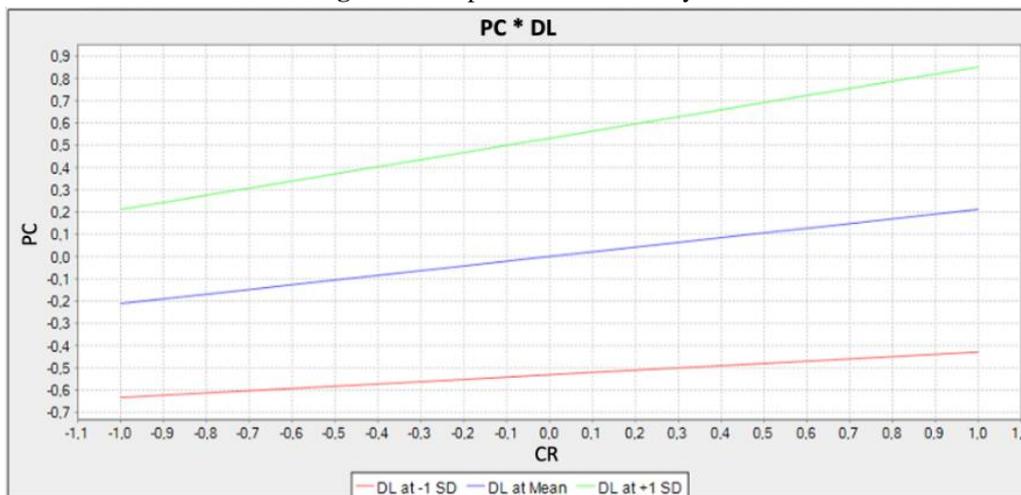
1st) At a medium level of delineation, the relationship between CR and PC (p1, which is now a simple effect) has a value of 0.211;

2nd); In the case of the delineation occurs, that is, the increase of one standard deviation, as a function of the interaction term, would imply an increase in the ratio between CR and PC by  $0.211 + 0.109 = 0.320$ ;

3rd); If there is no delineation, there would be a one standard deviation decrease, implying that the relationship between CR and PC would decrease:  $0.211 - 0.109 = 0.102$ .

Another way to view these results is by using the Simple Slope Analysis chart, as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Simple Inclination Analysis



Using the colors of the curves: i) the purple color curve represents the average level of the delineation; ii) the green color curve represents the delineation plus one standard deviation (0.320); and iii) the red color curve represents the delineation minus one standard deviation (0.102).

The analyzes carried out so far have shown that the size of the effect of the delineation as a moderating construct was significant, but for such conclusions to be valid, it is necessary to verify whether the interaction term was significant and, for that, used Bootstrapping. This resource available in SmartPLS presents the t and p statistics values, shown in Table 2.

**Table 2:** Statistics t and p

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics ((O/STDEV))	P Values
PC*DL -> PC	0,109	0,109	0,045	2,418	0,016
DL -> PC	0,532	0,542	0,100	5,342	0,000
CR -> PC	0,211	0,208	0,104	2,031	0,042

The parameters used were a significance level of 5% ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ), commonly used in the marketing area (Field, 2018); this means that 95% of the values of any normally distributed random variable are in the range between -1.96 and +1.96. To reject the null hypotheses within these parameters, it is necessary to obtain  $t > \pm 1.96$  and a p-value  $\leq 0.05$ .

According to Table 2, the t-statistic value was 2.418, therefore, higher than the reference value of 1.96 and the p-value of 0.016 (in gray) for the path between the interaction term and the PC construct, that is, lower than  $\alpha = 0.05$  defined in this research. Such results point to the effect of the interaction term as significant.

Finally, Table 3 presents the hypotheses whose purpose was to verify the significance of the DL construct as a moderator between the CR and PC variables and whether it increases the individual's level of satisfaction as a consumer in their purchase process.

**Table 3:** Hypotheses Regarding Delineation as a Moderating and Maximizing Construct of Satisfaction of the Individual as a Consumer in their Purchase Process

Hypothesis	Hypothesis Description	path coefficient	Conclusion
Scientific	The delineation positively increases the effect of the relationship between CR and PC; consequently, it increases the individual's satisfaction level in his purchase process.	0,016	H <sub>1A</sub> supported
Nullity	H <sub>0</sub> : DL = 0		
Alternative	H <sub>a</sub> : DL > 0		
Scientific	The delineation positively affects the relationship between the CR and PC variables, confirming its role as a moderating construct, allowing for greater individual satisfaction in the purchase process.	0,016	H <sub>1B</sub> supported
Nullity	H <sub>0</sub> : DL = 0		
Alternative	H <sub>a</sub> : DL > 0		
Scientific	Since the delineation improves the internal search for information, its result will never be a null or negative value.	0,016	H <sub>1C</sub> supported
Nullity	H <sub>0</sub> : DL ≤ 0		
Alternative	H <sub>a</sub> : DL > 0		

## V. Conclusion

Despite current issues such as excessive consumption of goods and services, which harm natural resources, economic and social instabilities on most continents, and, above all, the Covid-19 pandemic that is plaguing the world, cooling down one of the pillars of human existence, which is the socialization of individuals, there is still room for the pursuit of satisfaction through shopping.

This article proposed to contribute to the academy by presenting a new way of analyzing the model of the consumer's decision-making process in terms of understanding the route taken by him, from his perceptive process (which anticipates consumption recognition) to the acquisition of the intended product (the fruit of his purchase action).

The results of the empirical study indicated that it is possible to learn the delineation process as a social contribution, allowing the individual to increase their level of satisfaction in their purchase process.

For market professionals involved in analyzing individual behavior as a consumer, for developers and providers of goods and services, this is an opportunity to understand how the delineation process works and teach their target audiences. This role can also be played by academics and those interested in the subject.

The theme proposed here has a relevant degree of originality, which allows for two aspects: one that can be understood as a limitation of this article since it makes it difficult to describe the proposal in greater depth, and the other aspect is an invitation to researchers and those interested in the subject to deepen the subject, proposing corrections or contributions in what was exposed here or to elaborate other works based on the delineation theme.

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