

# **The I.T.E.R. Marketing Model: A Proposal for a New Approach to Consumer Behaviour**

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## **Abstract**

This work is based on the assumptions already reported in literature concerning, on one side, rational drives and emotional drives that influence consumers' choices, and, on the other side, it considers the product/service dichotomy up to Grönross's research (2011) and the *Service-Dominant Logic* perspective.

The aim of the I.T.E.R. model (from Latin *iter – itineris*, meaning path, journey, access) is to describe the elements that the consumer considers and examines during the act of buying and which guide his behaviour: intangibility/tangibility and emotionality/rationality.

I.T.E.R. analyses together the aspects linked with the emotive and experiential drives (experience, impulse) that encourage the rational aspects to take action, defining the key buying factors which can be compared and assessed from the quantitative point of view (price, size, performance), to the physicality or not of what is being considered, (on one side the purchase of capital goods or a house, on the other a financial investment or an accountant's opinion or a consultation).

## **Keywords**

consumer behaviour; emotionality/rationality; tangibility/intangibility; purchase decision evaluation

## 1. Premise – work purpose

Although it is still in an embryonal state, the I.T.E.R. model is put forward as an instrument for analysing consumers' behaviour, with the aim of integrating the analysis of the rational and emotional aspects characterising consumer processes and completing them with the level of tangibility of the associated product or service.

This approach intends to categorise goods and services and, by defining metrics, position them within a matrix (I.T.E.R.), where each quadrant describes and incorporates a combination of the elements placed on the IR, IE, TR, TE axes to enable the weight that tangibility/intangibility and rationality/emotionality assume in the buying process.

## 2. Review of recent literature

### 2.1. Rationality / Emotionality

Scholars (inter alia Jensen and Klastrup, 2008; Puggioni et al., 1998; Arndt, 1986; Dalli et al., 2003; Webster, 1972; Anderson, 1998) who have considered the effects that the rational and emotional components have on the choice of a product or of an industrial supplier agree that the focus is directed towards rationality and add that the functional and rational performances are perceived by the industrial operators as being more important than the emotional ones. In particular, the attributes to which greater attention is given are: "Quality, reliability, performance, after-sales service, operating and maintenance service, price, reputation" and only finally "the relationship with the supplier"<sup>1</sup>.

In literature it emerges that in the buying behaviour of industrial companies there are some "general objectives which in the context of an individual company have a certain degree of priority" (Fiocca et al., 2009:42) over others. In this sense, the technical and functional aspects, in other words those that guarantee the effectiveness and efficiency of the industrial activities take priority over the relational ones, (Bendixen et al., 2004; Jensen and Klastrup, 2008; Kuhn et al., 2008; Leek and Christodoulides, 2012) which mainly concern the relationship with the supplier. On this matter, Fiocca, Snehota and Tunisini (2009:42-43) classify these general objectives in:

- "continuity/availability of the supply";
- "quality – understood as a quality fitting the customer's requirements and not in absolute terms";
- "cost minimization";
- "improvement of efficiency";
- "exploitation of the supplier's potentiality".

It is evident that in literature the buying choices of this type of consumer are governed by rationality to achieve their own objectives of efficiency, cost effectiveness and profitability; it should also be mentioned that some scholars are focusing on relational type components. Rationality is qualified as one of the "key" variables in the buying process, both for the end consumer and for the industrial company.

Towards the end of the 1950s<sup>2</sup>, products were acknowledged to have an emotional type component (Levy and Sidney, 1959) as well and this gave rise to the study of this aspect

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<sup>1</sup> See the model introduced by Bendixen et al. (2004), p. 376.

<sup>2</sup> On the basis of the reports made by Dalli and Romani (2003), after the end of an empiristic phase (1930s – 1940s), from the 1950s onwards, with the phase of motivational research, a more in-depth study of consumers' behaviour was undertaken. These phases were, in fact, followed by the formative phase (1960s), the phase of the great models (1960s – 1970s), the information processing phase (1970s), the renewal phase (1980s) up to the more current approaches to the discipline. For further details, reference should be made to Dalli and Romani (2003).

which then developed in the 1970s and 1980s. Amongst the authors who have dealt with this topic, Buck (1976) defines emotion as a sort of filter that enables a response to be made to stimuli, events and situations before the brain has processed more complex and rational information. The same opinion is shared by Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) who recognise that the behaviour of consumers and of people in general is a complex process consisting of different aspects and the search for information which not only involves the rational sphere, but also that linked to the senses (sight, sound, smell, touch, taste) that enable individuals to deal with an emotive consumer experience.

The emotional component offers a guide and support for consumers' inclinations and behaviour (Cohen and Areni, 1991; Bagozzi et al., 1999) which, in this way, can connect on a "visceral" level with products, services and brands (Lau-Gesk and Meyers-Levy, 2009).

This thesis is also supported by recent studies which, by means of the use of scientific and medical-neurological approaches show the existence and importance of the emotional sphere in consumers' buying and consumption process. Chaudhuri (2006) maintains that consumers – on the basis of personal characteristics (personality, perceptions, inclinations, needs, motivations), context (culture, subculture, family, friends, institutions) and genetic inheritance – react according to a dual prospective, one being rational the other emotional. In his writings, he refers in particular to the effects of advertising and qualifies the emotional motivation as "primary" in the choice of products and services. On the basis of these considerations, scholars have focused on the characteristics of the emotions, classifying them and adopting models to explain how they are used by individuals. Amongst the first works, that of Schneider and Shrifin (1977) identifies emotive processes of the *controlled* type that present themselves to the individual in a conscious and attentive way and the *automatic* type, which, in other words, are not associated with conscious awareness. This conceptualisation is also supported by LeDoux (1996) who presents a *low road* method, a fast but undifferentiated process which involves the emotions in a mechanical way, and a *high road*, in other words a slower and differentiated process directed towards achieving an objective. The first works mainly by stimulating individuals to reactive actions on the basis of what they have already tried and experimented in the past; the second is a more complex system that triggers the individual's emotions to accomplish strategies satisfying a certain need, whether it be emotional, relational, experiential or symbolic.

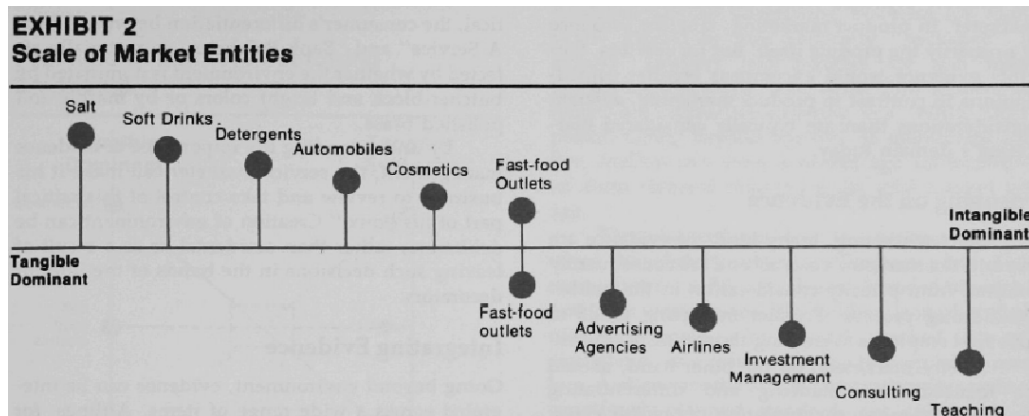
## 2.2. Tangibility/Intangibility

The particular emphasis given by marketing to the technical, organoleptic and performance characteristics and commodity groups of the products, even through communication, is due to a historical period which sees the so-called tangible goods as the protagonists.

It is evident that over the last few decades, the economy has changed in an epoch-making way, moving from the side of industry to that of services; as a consequence, studies have also focused on the *intangibles*. Due to the new context, the same authors underline the changes which, in the economic and entrepreneurial scenario, have marked a turning point in the panorama of marketing, focusing their attention on a new perspective: *service marketing*. Theodor Levitt, one of the first writers to give an opinion on the subject, writes, "all products, whether they are services or goods, possess a certain quantity of intangibility" (1981:94), which occurs regardless of where they are produced. His writings follow on from those of 1977 by Lynn Shostack, who analyses the varying degree of tangibility/intangibility characterising some products and services (Figure 1), demonstrating the real difference between products and services and how the latter very often depend on tangible products for their realization. Following in the tracks of these authors' works, other scholars have continued along the lines of inserting the intangible component, with an eye to management

and marketing. Rushton and Carson (1985) describe the process of integration of the intangible components of the services with the tangible ones of the products and the consequent creation of a “hybrid” which is described as a more complete value offer.

Figure 1. Scale of Market Entities



Source: L. Shostack (1977:73)

In 1990, the author, referring to the service sector, stated that “The sectors of the economy boil down to just one: the service sector that regulates all the production activities within the system itself [...]. According to this point of view, the services are the center of the realization of everything that is produced and served in the economic sector” (Cavallone, 1990:19).

In 2004, Vargo and Lusch (2004b:324) defined the previous studies as just “a process of initial legitimization of the dominion of service marketing” and they present a new perspective defined as *Service-Dominant Logic*, in contrast with the *Goods-Dominant logic*<sup>3</sup>. In line with the writer’s perspective, the goods of the S-D logic are no longer at the centre of the production process but are placed in the background compared with the service component.

Quoting the words of Vargo and Lusch, “in a service-centred perspective, the tangible goods are used as accessories to provide a service, instead of being an end in themselves” (2004a:13). The peculiarity of their theory lies in the distinction between the concepts of *services* and *service*:

- the term *services* identifies the intangible *output units* that the companies add to their products or use to supplement them;
- the term *service* refers to a dynamic process which, by exploiting intangible resources (skills, know-how, expertise), activates all the production and value creation processes (Lusch et al., 2007).

The first definition is the corner-stone of a G-D logic concept, in which the services are considered inferior or accessories to the tangible goods made and where the same assets create and transfer value, while the services are only for the purpose of completing the offer.

<sup>3</sup> Vargo and Lusch (2008) also state some definitions which have been given to the Goods-Dominant logic in the course of time: “Others have referred to it as the “neoclassical economics research tradition” (e.g. Hunt, 2000), “manufacturing logic” (e.g. Normann, 2001), “old enterprise logic” (Zuboff and Maxmin, 2002) or, more specific to marketing, “product orientation” (Keith, 1960), “marketing myopia” (Levitt, 1960), “product marketing” (Shostack, 1977), and more recently, “marketing management” (Webster, 1992)”. This underlines how for a long time tangibility has been the centre of attention of marketing companies, but even now, although tangibility remains an important part of a company’s value offer, the conceptualisation of the value must be made on the basis of the service component.

In the second economic system, the perspective changes, basing itself on the idea that “service is exchanged for service” (Vargo and Lusch, 2008:256). In this sense, the intangible component takes on a primary role in contrast with the theories proposed by Lynn Shostak and Levitt which, although focusing on the service, did so according, once again, to a product-centered perspective.

This does not mean that the tangible products lose their importance entirely, but in this new logic it is the service which is *superordinate* (Vargo and Lusch, 2008). Also the services, understood as “services”, do not cease to exist (Grönross, 2011), but are integrated in the service activity that the firm offers in order to create value for and with its customers.

From the emerging results, we can conclude that the firms, from a service-centred point of view, have as their *core business* the supply of a “service”, which can be described as an intangible process of value co-creation between the company and the customer; within this process, according to the perspective presented by Shostack, Levitt, Rushton and Carson, a product/service, tangible/intangible dichotomy is found which, with the passing of time, is gradually becoming integrated to offer a service that transfers a higher value to its customers.

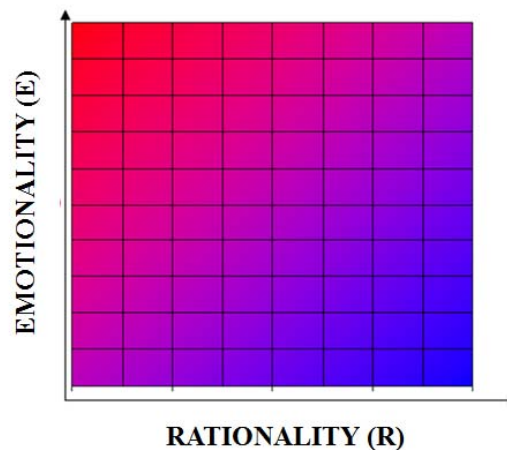
From the analysis made above, it emerges that the two intangible and tangible variables have represented and continue to represent two supporting “arms” both for the analysis and for the realisation of company outputs.

### 3. Research Hypothesis and Evidence raised

#### 3.1. The R/E model

The R/E (Rational/Emotional) model enables the rational and emotional<sup>4</sup> components guiding the consumer in his buying pattern to be shown graphically.

Figure 2. The R/E model



The axes are graduated from zero to one hundred and are used to position the hypothesized cases of purchase.

The rational situations are positioned on the x-coordinate axis on a mounting scale, whereas the emotional situations are shown on the y-coordinate axis, again on a mounting scale. By intersecting the values of these axes, it is possible to obtain points on the graph indicating the combination of components (whether more rational or more emotional) that influence the consumer process for the various categories of commodities.

<sup>4</sup> Chaudhuri has also expressed an opinion on this matter and has put forward a similar model.

At the extreme points outside the axes are the limit situations characterised by purchases influenced almost entirely by one of the two components. Thus, the highly rational buying processes (rationality levels close to 100%) are represented on the extreme right of the x-coordinate axis and associated with the colour blue. On the contrary, the purchases characterised by a highly emotional component are represented at the very top of the y-coordinate axis and associated with the colour red. For example, a purchase in the industrial goods sector is taken as a model of maximum rationality, as it is generally characterized by *drivers* of a technical – functional nature. On the contrary, the luxury goods sector is found on the opposite extremity as it corresponds with purchases that are extremely emotional.

The area inside the graph represents intermediate situations characterised by the co-presence of both the rational and the emotional dimension. In most cases, the purchase does, in fact, represent both components. When the first prevails, the client is driven by rational *drivers* and favours choices based on the functional characteristics of the product, on the price and on the terms of payment. However, when the emotional dimension has a greater influence on the decision-making process of the purchase, the impact that sensory stimuli have on the buyer's perceptions comes into play (music, smell, shape and colours, flavours, tactile characteristics...) and the influence of the emotions on the behaviour of the consumer.

The R/E model aims precisely to demonstrate that the composite nature of the decision-making processes during purchases derives from the combined influence of the rational dimension and the emotional one on the consumer's choices. Although present in varying percentages, the two spheres coexist and must be taken into proper consideration in order to formulate effective marketing strategies.

### 3.2. *The step forward: the I.T.E.R. model*

To reach the holistic definition of the buying alternatives, the I.T.E.R. model (from latin *iter – itineris*, meaning path, journey, route, passage, access) combines two new variables with the R/E model: I and T, which represent the intangibility and tangibility of products and services.

The aim of this addition is to try and describe the elements that the consumer considers and examines during the act of buying and which guide his behaviour.

The addition of the two new variables aims to provide the model with the connotation of a “dashboard”, a sort of check list of the possible alternatives that complete the tangible or intangible nature of the goods being taken into consideration. From a practical point of view, I.T.E.R. analyses together the aspects linked with the emotive and experiential drives (experience, impulse) that lead the rational aspects to action, defining the key buying factors which can be compared and assessed from the quantitative point of view (price, size, performance), to the physicality or not of what is being considered, (on one side the purchase of capital goods or a house, on the other a financial investment or an accountant's opinion or a consultation).

In literature, before the advent of the era of services, the product/service, tangible/intangible dichotomy is approached keeping the focus on tangible and physical goods, because marketing starts by considering the outputs of the manufacturing sector as the “core”.

What emerges is that the primary/constitutive function of marketing is to sell and distribute *tangible products* which are described as palpable and material (Shostack, 1977), and as Levitt states, “are directly testable because they can be seen, touched, smelt, tasted and in the same way tested” (1981:96).

Having made the considerations above, we proceed to present the I.T.E.R. model.

With the insertion in the model of two further variables, the aim is to achieve a complete representation of the evaluation alternatives in buying decisions: rational, emotional, tangible and intangible.

The combination leads to the pinpointing of four possible alternatives: IR (intangible, rational), IE (intangible, emotional), TR (tangible, rational), TE (tangible, emotional), which represent the possibilities of contamination amongst the four variables and enable the types of products and services analysed below to be positioned in the matrix (Figure 4).

**IR Intangible Rational:** the goods/services requiring a decisional, evaluative and comparative approach, typical of shopping activities, belong to this category, in which the offers are compared before the purchase and, at the same time, refer to intangible goods. For example, insurance products belong to this category such as life insurance, for which alternative offers are evaluated according to the name of the company, the cost, duration, reimbursement, maximum sum insurable or, in the case of a financial investment, the choice is made based on the risk perceived and/or declared, the return, capital injection and the interest returned.

The same can be said of the opening of a bank account, which can be chosen by comparing the charges for holding the account, on the basis of whether the credit-debit cards and the cash machine cards are free of charge or not, on-line access, the operating charges, the credit ceiling or overdraft allowed. When choosing an anti-virus software for a PC, on the other hand, the brand name, the price, the duration, the type of protection afforded and the ease of installation are considered. As can be seen, the elements involved are intangible, but they are the object of a comparison and rational evaluation.

One decision-making tool assisting this type of choice is the competitive matrix which enables the offers of several competitors to be compared on the basis of a panel of key purchasing factors, pinpointed upstream from the “shopper” and evaluated individually allocating points and/or weights to the various alternatives (Figure 3).

**Figure 3. Competitive matrix**

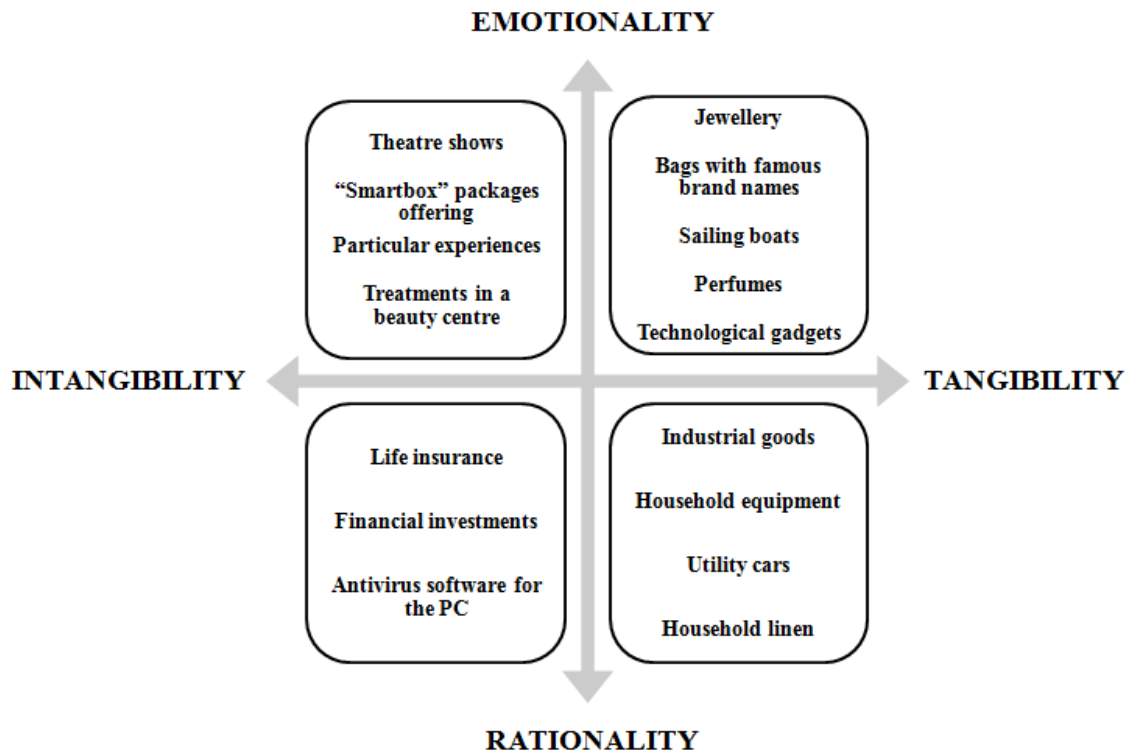
<b>Key purchasing factors</b>	<b>Offer A</b>	<b>Offer B</b>	<b>Offer C</b>	<b>Offer D</b>
Cost-Premium	0	2	1	1
Excess liability	1	1	1	0
Maximum sum insurable	1	2	1	1
Name of the company	1	1	2	1
Coverage	0	1	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>

In the figure which shows an example taken from the insurance sector, it can be noted that with regard to the key purchasing factors pinpointed for a car insurance policy (cost-premium, excess liability, maximum sum insurable, name of the company, coverage), the Company “B” option is the winner as it obtains a higher score than the other rival companies. In this case, the assessment attributes a score of 2 for a higher than average strength compared with the specific key purchasing factor, a score of 1 for an average strength and a score of 0 for no strength.

**IE Intangible Emotional:** in this second value combination we find those goods/services which add an emotional/experiential involvement (Cavallone, 2008) to a lack of tangibility, encouraging the purchase for the very reason that it recalls positive sensations that urge customers to decide to buy. Some examples that could be mentioned include shows such as the “Cirque du Soleil” which, apart from the spectacularity offered by the artistes, involve the audience on an emotive level and are experienced as a holistic experience rather than just a

simple show. The same can also be said for the so-called “Smartboxes”, which offer days out at spas, overnight stays in castles or historical houses, combining an experience with the knowledge of a place. Purchasing a perfume falls within the IE category: spraying the perfume protects the core function of the product (to give a fragrance) while at the same time it links the instant to the experiential meanings that perception recalls. The same quadrant of the matrix may also include going to see a film on the big screen, a theatre show, a live concert: in this case too, the *core* performance is amplified by the sphere of the individual perceptions, the atmosphere, the public, the closeness and the act of sharing.

Figure 4. The I.T.E.R model



**TR Tangible Rational:** in this cluster we find those goods, the choice of which is not only based on actual criteria of rationality, for which reference should be made to the comparative analyses mentioned previously, but it is also combined with the tangibility of the goods, which in itself is already an element of evaluation. Choosing industrial goods, such as a multi-spindle lathe or a press requires an assessment based on the know-how of the buyer who has to understand the uses to which the item will be put and on the documents which demonstrate by means of “facts and data” the capacity of the goods considered to satisfy such specifications. Other items that may fall within this category could be household equipment such as a blender, a washing machine, a dishwasher, an oven, a fridge<sup>5</sup>, a utility car or household linen.

**TE Tangible Emotional:** the last alternative combines aspects of tangibility and concreteness with those of experience. It is logical to place luxury goods in this quadrant, even though it should be borne in mind that the price and situational variants are, undoubtedly, discriminating and in some cases exclusive in the sociological sense of the term.

<sup>5</sup> Some products are exceptions such as a SMEG fridge which could fall more within the emotional quadrant owing to its trendy appearance.



The purchase of an item of jewellery (often for another person) involves aspects linked to tangibility such as the shape, size, carats, design and, at the same time, aspects of emotionality such as the prestige, the brand, exclusivity and allure. The same can also be applied when referring to “status symbol” products, such as the Kelly bag by Hermes, the Louis Vuitton Speedy, the symbolic aspect of which has a higher value compared with the inherent performance of the product (to contain objects in a safe and practical way). Again in this area we can also identify smart phones and tablets which, especially for teenagers, represent tools, the possession of which confers a sense of belonging to reference groups and prestige that go beyond the functional aspects of the various models (pixels, mega bytes, screen size, accessory functions, apps).

#### 4. Conclusions and limitations of the research

In conclusion, it can be stated that extreme positions do not exist and every single combination must be pondered and checked on the basis of the type of customer, his buying power at the time in which the purchase took place and the type of purchase (ordinary or extraordinary), the situation (contingent or on-going), for which each consideration must be contextualised and analysed case by case.

The descriptions given so far of the I.T.E.R model wish to represent an initial presentation to demonstrate its existence and paternity; the studies and research on this approach will continue both with regard to the categorising of the goods and services and concerning the measurements and weights with which the same are positioned within the four clusters; the author will soon return to consider these and other topics concerning the model.

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