



EXTENDED CONSUMER END-UTILITY THEORY (ECEUT): REDEFINING VOLUNTARY AND INVOLUNTARY CONSUMPTION IN MODERN MARKETS

ANEESH B ANIYAN

Assistant Professor, Department of Commerce

Mary Matha College of Arts and Science, Periyakulam, Theni

Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, Tamil Nadu, India

Abstract

The *Extended Consumer End-Utility Theory (ECEUT)* advances consumer theory by redefining the concept of a consumer beyond voluntary purchase and satisfaction. Unlike traditional frameworks that equate consumption with rational choice and personal utility, ECEUT recognizes both voluntary and involuntary consumers, thereby expanding the boundaries of consumption analysis. Voluntary consumers acquire goods and services by choice, either for direct or delegated use. In contrast, involuntary consumers emerge in contexts where acquisition is shaped by coercion, manipulation, obligation, or emotional influence. This shift acknowledges that consumption in real markets is not always based on free will, rational utility, or satisfaction.

The theory further introduces a triadic structure: *producer–middleman–consumer*. Producers generate value, middlemen function with profit motives as facilitators, and consumers—whether voluntary or involuntary—constitute the ultimate end-users. By including non-monetary consumption, delegated use, and coerced acquisition, ECEUT captures a broader spectrum of consumer experiences.

Theoretical implications extend across law, marketing ethics, and economics. ECEUT broadens consumer protection laws to cover manipulated purchases, challenges exploitative marketing practices, and expands demand analysis to include obligatory consumption. By emphasizing both voluntary and involuntary dimensions, the theory provides a holistic, realistic, and ethically grounded framework for understanding consumption in complex and coercive environments. This reconceptualization offers policymakers, marketers, and researchers a

new paradigm for analysing consumer identity, rights, and behavior in a globalized, socially pressured marketplace.

Keywords

Consumer Theory, Extended Consumer End-Utility Theory, Voluntary vs Involuntary Consumers, Consumer Protection, Market Ethics

Introduction

Consumption has long been studied as a process rooted in voluntary choice and satisfaction. Classical economics positions the consumer as a rational actor who purchases goods and services for personal use and utility maximization. However, this narrow definition does not reflect the complexities of modern markets, where social pressure, coercion, and institutional obligations often shape consumption. Emotional manipulation, charity appeals, obligatory purchases (such as school uniforms), and regulatory enforcement create situations in which consumption occurs without satisfaction or even against the consumer's will.

The *Extended Consumer End-Utility Theory (ECEUT)* seeks to address this gap by broadening the definition of consumer identity. It proposes that a consumer is not solely an individual seeking satisfaction but also an entity that acquires or uses goods and services under voluntary or involuntary conditions. By integrating coercive and delegated consumption, ECEUT advances a more comprehensive framework that reflects both economic and social realities.

Literature Review

Classical consumer theory has largely equated consumption with voluntary purchase and rational choice. Kotler and Keller [1] emphasized satisfaction as the essence of consumer identity, while Keller [2] highlighted loyalty and brand-driven preferences. Day [3] extended this by introducing *market-driven capabilities* that align firm performance with consumer expectations. Christensen [4] highlighted the vulnerability of firms that fail to adapt innovations to consumer needs, whereas Barney [5] explained competitive advantage through unique resources and organizational capabilities.

While classical works by Kotler, Keller, Day, Christensen, and Barney established the foundation of consumer behavior and strategic management, recent research highlights new challenges that traditional frameworks fail to

capture. Studies on **consumer coercion in digital markets** show how algorithmic personalization, dark patterns, and nudging strategies restrict consumer autonomy and force unintended purchases [1]. Similarly, research on **emotional persuasion in charitable giving** demonstrates that many consumers participate not by rational choice but by social and emotional obligation, blurring the line between voluntary and involuntary consumption [2]. Finally, work on **dark marketing practices** reveals how manipulative advertising techniques—such as scarcity appeals, hidden fees, or deceptive labeling—create coerced consumption environments [3].

Despite these developments, no comprehensive theoretical framework currently integrates *voluntary choice*, *involuntary coercion*, and *non-monetary transfers* within a single consumer identity model. The **Extended Consumer End-Utility Theory (ECEUT)** fills this gap by reconceptualizing the consumer not merely as a rational decision-maker but as an entity defined by end-use, whether achieved through choice, delegation, or compulsion.

While these frameworks significantly advance understanding, they remain incomplete. They often exclude consumers who participate in markets without voluntary intent, such as coerced buyers or individuals pressured through emotional appeals. Moreover, the traditional dichotomy of producer and consumer fails to recognize the critical role of middlemen, who act as both facilitators and profit-driven intermediaries.

ECEUT builds on this literature by introducing a dual consumer classification: voluntary (direct, delegated) and involuntary (coerced, manipulated, obligatory). By integrating non-monetary and forced consumption into consumer theory, ECEUT fills a conceptual gap in law, marketing ethics, and economic classification.

Extended Consumer End-Utility Theory (ECEUT)

The *Extended Consumer End-Utility Theory (ECEUT)* reconceptualizes the consumer as an entity whose status is determined not merely by voluntary purchase but by ultimate end-use of goods and services. Unlike conventional definitions, which emphasize satisfaction or profit absence as defining attributes, ECEUT expands the classification to include both voluntary and involuntary consumers.

Voluntary consumers acquire goods and services by choice, either for direct personal use or delegated consumption by others. Involuntary consumers, however, emerge in contexts where acquisition is shaped by coercion, manipulation, obligation, or social pressure. In such cases, satisfaction or utility is not a prerequisite for

consumer status. This broadening acknowledges that real-world consumption extends beyond rational choice and encompasses emotional, social, and regulatory forces.

Furthermore, ECEUT integrates the triadic relationship of producer–middleman–consumer. The producer generates value, the middleman operates with a profit motive as a facilitator, and the consumer—whether voluntary or involuntary—constitutes the ultimate end-user. This structure emphasizes that consumer identity is shaped not only by market transactions but also by delegation, gift exchange, charity, and compulsory participation.

By incorporating both voluntary and involuntary dimensions, ECEUT provides a holistic and realistic classification of consumers. It challenges traditional utility-maximization assumptions and highlights the need for broader consumer protection, ethical marketing boundaries, and expanded economic analysis. In doing so, it establishes a new paradigm for understanding consumption in contemporary markets characterized by complexity, coercion, and evolving social obligations.

The Extended Consumer End-Utility Theory (ECEUT) conceptualizes the consumer as an individual or entity that acquires or hires goods and services with the primary aim of fulfilling personal or delegated needs, wants, tastes, and preferences, deriving satisfaction or utility without the intent of commercial profit-making. The theory also acknowledges consumption scenarios where acquisition occurs without voluntary intent, such as purchases driven by coercion, manipulation, or emotional manipulation, in which satisfaction is irrelevant to consumer status. ECEUT recognizes that consumption may be direct or indirect, monetary or non-monetary, and may include personal use, family use, charitable distribution, or provision to unknown beneficiaries.

The *Extended Consumer End-Utility Theory (ECEUT)* proposes a paradigm shift in the understanding of consumers by moving beyond the narrow boundaries of voluntary purchasing behavior and rational satisfaction. In conventional economics, a consumer is typically defined as an individual who acquires goods and services for personal use, not for resale, with the underlying assumption that such consumption is driven by free will and leads to satisfaction. However, in modern markets, this definition proves inadequate as it fails to account for the wide spectrum of consumption patterns shaped by coercion, obligation, manipulation, or social pressures.

ECEUT addresses this limitation by redefining consumer identity in terms of **end-use rather than purchase intent**. Under this model, any individual who ultimately benefits from, uses, or is subject to goods and services

is recognized as a consumer—regardless of whether the acquisition was voluntary or involuntary. This reconceptualization expands the scope of analysis, allowing for a more realistic reflection of contemporary consumption.

Voluntary Consumers

Voluntary consumers are those who acquire goods or services through self-motivated decisions, whether for their own direct use or for delegated use by family, friends, or dependents. For example, a parent purchasing a toy for a child or individual buying clothes for a friend both fall under voluntary consumption. These actions, though sometimes motivated by love, respect, or social obligation, still retain an element of choice.

Involuntary Consumers

Involuntary consumers emerge in situations where goods and services are consumed without genuine free choice. This may occur under **emotional manipulation** (e.g., charity appeals that pressure individuals into donating), **social or institutional obligation** (e.g., mandatory school uniforms, compulsory insurance), or **coercion and force** (e.g., goods purchased under threat or blackmail). In such cases, consumer identity is not tied to satisfaction but rather to end-use, even when the individual derives no personal utility from the transaction.

Core Assumptions with Examples

1. **Delegated Use** – The buyer may not be the user; usage can be by a designated person or group.
 - *Example:* A father buying a laptop for his daughter — the daughter is the consumer.
2. **Non-Monetary Enjoyment** – Consumption can occur without direct payment.
 - *Example:* Donating food to a shelter — the recipients are consumers.
3. **Post-Purchase Satisfaction Loss** – Loss of satisfaction after purchase does not remove consumer status.
 - *Example:* Buying a new mobile phone that becomes slow after a week — you are still the consumer.
4. **Monetary-to-Non-Monetary Transfer** – Buyer is the customer; recipient is the consumer.
 - *Example:* Buying clothes and gifting them — the gift receiver is the consumer.
5. **Optional Direct Use** – Purchaser need not use the goods personally.

- *Example:* A mother hiring a taxi for her children — the children are consumers.

6. **Role Classification** – End-user = Consumer, Reseller = Middleman, Producer = Creator.

- *Example:* A distributor buying electronics from a factory and selling to households — households are consumers.

7. **Middleman Functionality** – Middlemen link producers and consumers.

- *Example:* Amazon connects sellers with buyers.

Middleman as Facilitator

The middleman functions as a **connecting link** between producers and consumers, ensuring the efficient transfer of goods and services. In this role, the middleman reduces transaction costs, provides accessibility, and acts as a bridge for consumers who might otherwise lack direct contact with producers. This creates what may be termed a **market magnet effect**, where both suppliers and buyers are drawn into a common exchange platform.

Example: A supermarket or e-commerce platform that consolidates multiple producers under one roof, giving consumers convenient access while providing visibility for producers.

Middleman as Profit-Driven Agent

In addition to facilitation, the middleman often acts as a **profit maximiser**, reselling goods and services at a margin. In this capacity, the middleman is less a neutral bridge and more an independent economic actor whose strategies—such as product bundling, pricing, or branding—directly shape consumer behavior. While this role maintains the flow between producer and consumer, it introduces **power asymmetry**, as the middleman influences both supply-side positioning and demand-side perception.

8. **Market Magnetic Effect** – Middlemen draw both suppliers and buyers together.

- *Example:* A supermarket attracts brands and shoppers into one space.

9. **Coerced or Manipulated Purchase** – When goods or services are purchased under pressure, emotional blackmail, or coercion, the purchaser is still treated as a consumer, even if satisfaction is absent.

- *Example:* A student buys a ticket to a fundraising event after persistent emotional appeals from friends, even though they have no interest in attending — they are still classified as a consumer.

Propositions

- **P1:** Consumer status is determined by the nature of end-use, not by voluntary intent alone.
- **P2:** Coercive or manipulative acquisition still constitutes consumption if goods/services are ultimately acquired.
- **P3:** Utility maximization is not a mandatory requirement for consumer classification.
- **P4:** A consumer is identified by end-use rather than intention or satisfaction.
- **P5:** Delegated consumption (family, friends, charity) maintains consumer identity despite indirect use.
- **P6:** Involuntary consumption occurs under coercion, manipulation, or obligation, independent of satisfaction.
- **P7: Non-monetary transfers** (e.g., gifts, donations) sustain consumer identity even without financial exchange.
- **P8: Middlemen simultaneously perform a dual role** as both facilitators and profit-driven agents, thereby shaping consumer identity and market dynamics.

As facilitators, they reduce transaction costs, provide accessibility, and connect producers with consumers.

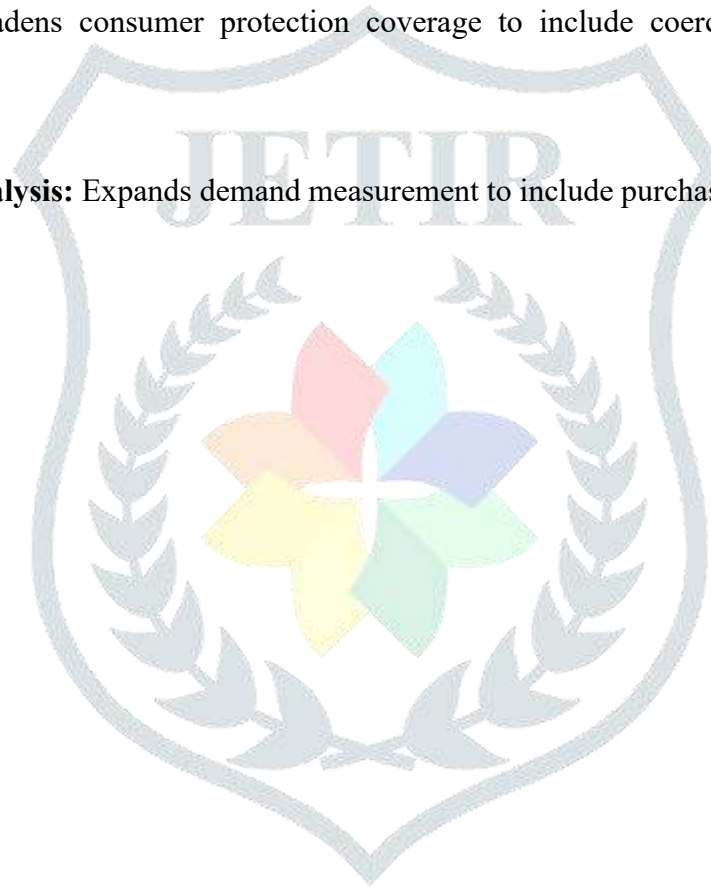
As profit-driven agents, they influence pricing, branding, and product visibility, creating potential asymmetries in consumer choice.

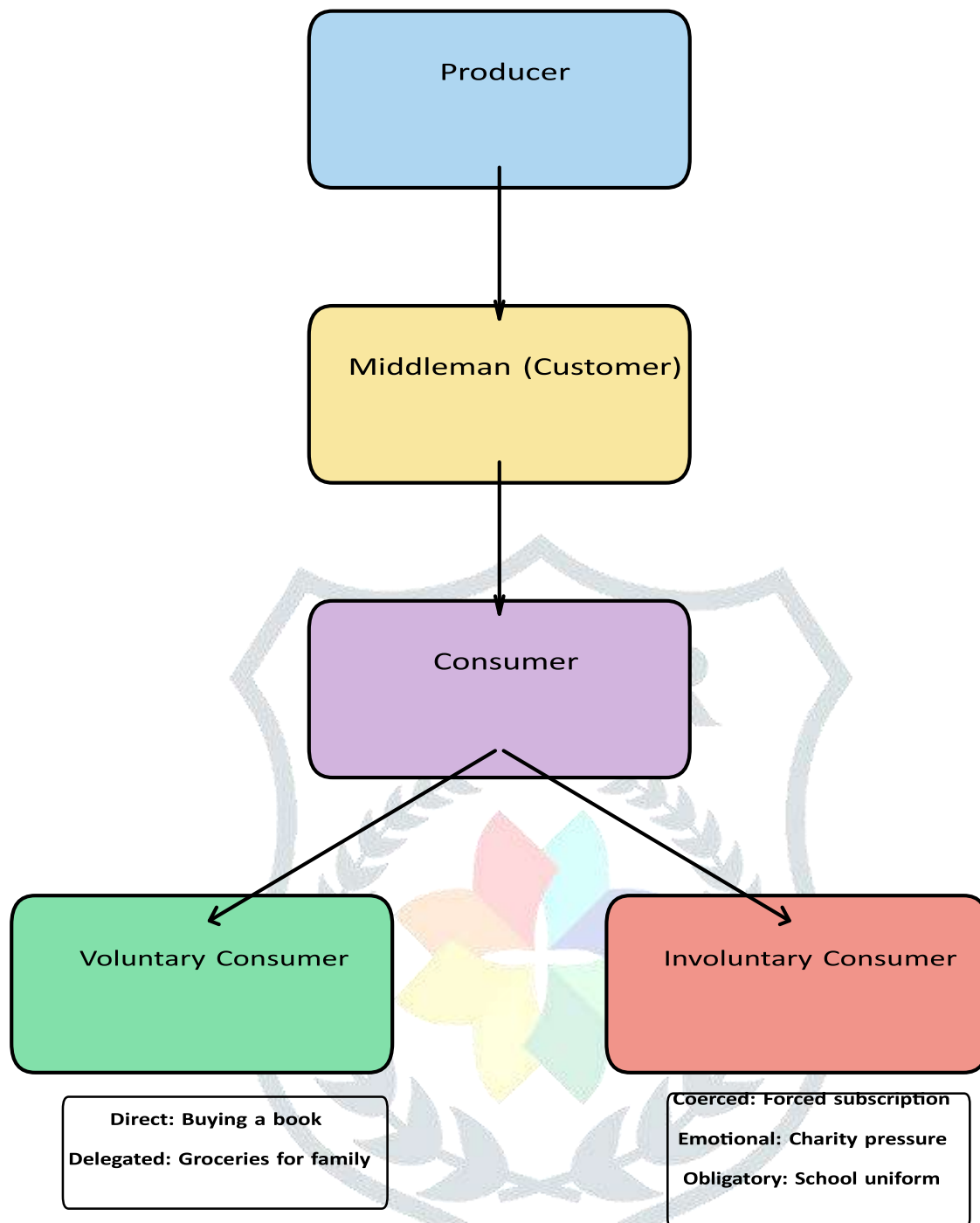
The balance between these two roles determines the extent of consumer empowerment versus consumer manipulation in any given market.

- **P9:** Consumer identity is dynamic and may shift between voluntary and involuntary categories depending on context (e.g., charity, emotional manipulation, forced institutional purchase).

Theoretical Implications

- **Consumer Rights & Law:** Recognizes that consumer protection laws must also apply to coerced or emotionally manipulated purchases.
- **Ethical Marketing:** Highlights the ethical boundaries in persuasion and sales practices.it Emphasizes the moral responsibility of sellers to avoid exploitative practices.
- **Economic Classification:** Expands the definition of “consumer” beyond voluntary market participation.
- **Legal:** Broadens consumer protection coverage to include coercive and manipulative sales contexts.
- **Market Analysis:** Expands demand measurement to include purchases made without satisfaction intent





Consumer Classification in ECEUT

Graphical Representation (Conceptual Model)

1. **Top Layer:** Producer
2. **Middle Layer:** Middleman (Customer) – profit motive
3. **Bottom Layer:** Consumer – split into *Voluntary* and *Involuntary* categories, each with subtypes.

A. Voluntary Consumers

Purchase or acquire goods/services **by choice**, with the intention to satisfy needs, wants, tastes, or preferences.

- **Direct Voluntary Consumer** – Uses goods/services personally.
 - *Example:* Buying a book to read for leisure.
- **Delegated Voluntary Consumer** – Buys for others' use.
 - *Example:* Purchasing groceries for the family.

B. Involuntary Consumers

Acquire goods/services **without full voluntary intent**, due to coercion, manipulation, emotional pressure, or unavoidable circumstances. Satisfaction is not required for consumer status.

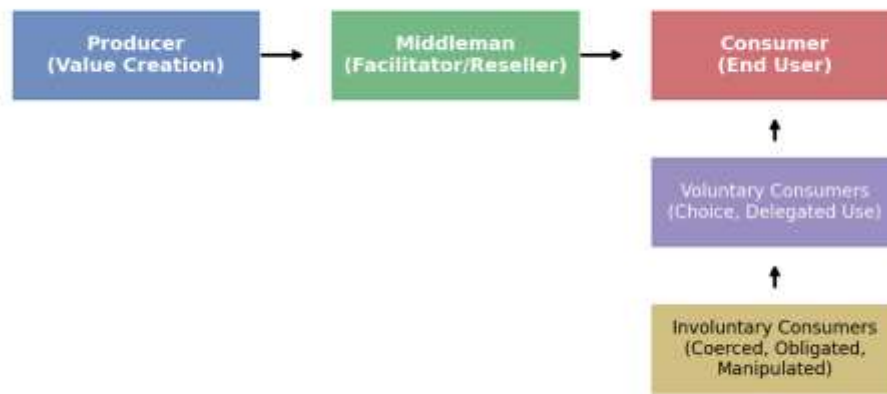
- **Coerced Consumer** – Purchase under external pressure or force.
 - *Example:* Paying a subscription fee because an organization demands it for continued service access.
- **Emotionally Manipulated Consumer** – Purchase due to guilt, sympathy, or social pressure.
 - *Example:* Buying a charity raffle ticket because friends keep insisting, even without interest.
- **Obligatory Consumer** – Purchase due to unavoidable requirement (regulatory, institutional, or social obligation).
 - *Example:* Students required to purchase a specific school uniform from an approved vendor.

Role Model

Producer → Middleman (Customer) → Consumer (Voluntary / Involuntary)

- **Producer:** Creates goods/services.
- **Middleman:** Purchases for resale or profit; facilitates transfer to end-users.
- **Consumer:** End-user, either voluntary or involuntary, who ultimately experiences the utility (or lack thereof) of goods/services.

Extended Consumer End-Utility Theory (ECEUT) Model



Model Visualization

The theoretical clarity of ECEUT is enhanced by a visual model that demonstrates the triadic relationship of Producer → Middleman → Consumer, where consumers are further classified into Voluntary and Involuntary categories. This visualization strengthens the theory by:

1. Mapping the flow of value creation and transfer.
2. Distinguishing between rational/voluntary and coerced/involuntary consumption.
3. Positioning the middleman as both facilitator and profit-driven agent.

Conclusion

The *Extended Consumer End-Utility Theory (ECEUT)* marks a significant advancement in consumer research by redefining the boundaries of consumer identity. Unlike traditional approaches that assume rationality, choice, and satisfaction as prerequisites for consumption, ECEUT acknowledges that consumers may also acquire goods and services involuntarily. This shift ensures a more realistic and ethically grounded understanding of consumption, one that reflects the diversity of modern market interactions.

The theoretical contribution of ECEUT lies in three dimensions. First, it redefines consumer status by end-use rather than voluntary intent. Second, it integrates coercion, obligation, and manipulation as legitimate conditions of consumption, thereby expanding the scope of consumer protection laws. Third, it acknowledges

the central role of middlemen as intermediaries who influence both producers and consumers, while distinguishing between resellers and end-users.

ECEUT also provides practical implications. For policymakers, it justifies broader consumer rights and safeguards in cases of coercive or manipulative marketing. For businesses, it emphasizes ethical responsibility in persuasion and sales strategies. For researchers, it offers a new paradigm that links consumer identity with broader social, emotional, and institutional forces.

In conclusion, ECEUT contributes a comprehensive and international-level framework that advances beyond utility-based models, positioning consumption as a multidimensional process shaped by voluntary choice, involuntary participation, and systemic market dynamics.

The *Extended Consumer End-Utility Theory (ECEUT)* advances consumer research by redefining consumption beyond satisfaction and voluntary choice. Its recognition of involuntary, delegated, and non-monetary consumption expands the analytical scope of consumer theory, with implications for marketing ethics, consumer protection, and economic classification.

Future research should focus on:

1. **Testing ECEUT in digital markets** to measure the impact of algorithms, dark patterns, and persuasive technologies on involuntary consumption.
2. **Measuring voluntary vs. involuntary consumer ratios** across industries (e.g., retail, healthcare, education) to assess practical significance.
3. **Cross-cultural validation** of consumer classifications, as coercion and obligation vary across socio-cultural contexts.
4. **Policy implications**, particularly how governments can strengthen consumer protection laws to address manipulative or coerced consumption.
5. **Integration with behavioral economics**, examining how bounded rationality, nudging, and emotional appeals redefine consumer autonomy.

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