



Consumer Behaviour

A European Perspective

Third edition

Michael Solomon
Gary Bamossy
Søren Askegaard
Margaret K. Hogg

FT Prentice Hall
FINANCIAL TIMES

CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

A European Perspective



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PREFACE

We wrote this book because we're fascinated by the everyday activities of people. The field of consumer behaviour is, to us, the study of how the world is influenced by the action of marketers. We're fortunate enough to be teachers and researchers (and occasionally consultants) whose work allows us to study consumers. Given that we're also consumers, we can find both professional and personal interest in learning more about how this process works. As consumers and future managers, we hope you find this study to be fascinating as well. Whether you're a student, manager, or professor, we're sure you can relate to the trials and tribulations associated with last-minute shopping, preparing for a big night out, agonizing over a purchase decision, fantasizing about a week skiing in the Swiss Alps, celebrating a holiday on the Cote d'Azur, or commemorating a landmark event, such as graduating from university, getting a driver's licence, or (dreaming about) winning the lottery.

Buying, having and being

Our understanding of this field goes beyond looking at the act of *buying* only, but to both *having* and *being* as well. Consumer behaviour is much more than buying things; it also embraces the study about how having (or not having) things affects our lives, and how our possessions influence the way we feel about ourselves and about each other – our state of being. In addition to understanding why people buy things, we also try to appreciate how products, services and consumption activities contribute to the broader social world we experience. Whether shopping, cooking, cleaning, playing football or hockey, lying on the beach, emailing or texting friends, or even looking at ourselves in the mirror, our lives are touched by the marketing system.

The field of consumer behaviour is young, dynamic and in flux. It is constantly being cross-fertilized by perspectives from many different disciplines. We have tried to express the field's staggering diversity in this text. Consumer researchers represent virtually every social science discipline, plus a few represent the physical sciences and the arts for good measure. From this melting pot has come a healthy debate among research perspectives, viewpoints regarding appropriate research methods, and even deeply held beliefs about what are and what are not appropriate issues for consumer researchers to study in the first place.

A European perspective on consumers and marketing strategy

The main objective for this adaptation has been to significantly increase its relevance for European students and scholars, while retaining the accessibility, contemporary approach, and the level of excellence in the discussions of consumer behaviour theory and applications established over the last six editions of Michael Solomon's *Consumer Behavior*. Based on the 6th American edition, we have tried to satisfy the need for a comprehensive consumer behaviour textbook with a significant European content. Hence, we have added illustrative examples and cases which are analysed and discussed in a European consumer context, as well as numerous European scholarly references. The text also includes a number of advertisements of European origin to visualize various elements in the marketing applications of consumer behaviour theory. These changes,

which focus on European consumers and research, have been made throughout the book. However, the most substantial changes have been made in the chapters dealing with demographic groups, subcultures and lifestyles, where the American perspective provided in earlier editions of Solomon's text has been replaced with a European one. EU enlargement to 25 Member States has increased the population by 20 per cent, to more than 450 million people. At the same time, this significant increase in population has only raised EU Gross Domestic Production by 4.5 per cent. This 3rd edition examines the demographics and social changes inherent in the structure of the new EU-25, and offers readers a variety of perspectives on European consumer desires and aspirations. The new edition also offers many examples of the new opportunities and challenges in this marketplace, as well as discussing the implications and challenges of carrying out business strategies and tactics.

The internationalization of market structures makes it increasingly necessary for business people to acquire a clear perspective and understanding of cultural differences and similarities among consumers from various countries. One of the challenges of writing this book has been to develop materials which illustrate *local* as well as *pan-European* and *global* aspects of consumer behaviour. In this spirit, we have kept a number of American and other non-European examples to illustrate various similarities and differences on the global consumer scene. The book also emphasizes the importance of understanding consumers in formulating marketing strategy. Many (if not most) of the fundamental concepts of marketing are based on the practitioner's ability to understand people. To illustrate the potential of consumer research to inform marketing strategy, the text contains numerous examples of specific applications of consumer behaviour concepts by marketing practitioners.

Pedagogical features

Throughout the text there are numerous boxed illustrative examples which highlight particular aspects of the impact and informing role that consumer behaviour has on marketing activities. These colour-coded boxes are called:

- **Multicultural dimensions,**
- **Marketing opportunity,** and
- **Marketing pitfall,**

and represent examples from several European and global markets. There are several other features within each chapter to assist you in learning and reviewing this text, and to check and critically review your understanding of topics; these include:

- an opening illustrative **vignette,**
- highlighted **Key terms,**
- a **Chapter summary,** and
- **Consumer behaviour challenge** questions.

To familiarize yourself with these features and how they will benefit your study from this text, they are reproduced and described in the Guided Tour on pages xviii–xxi.

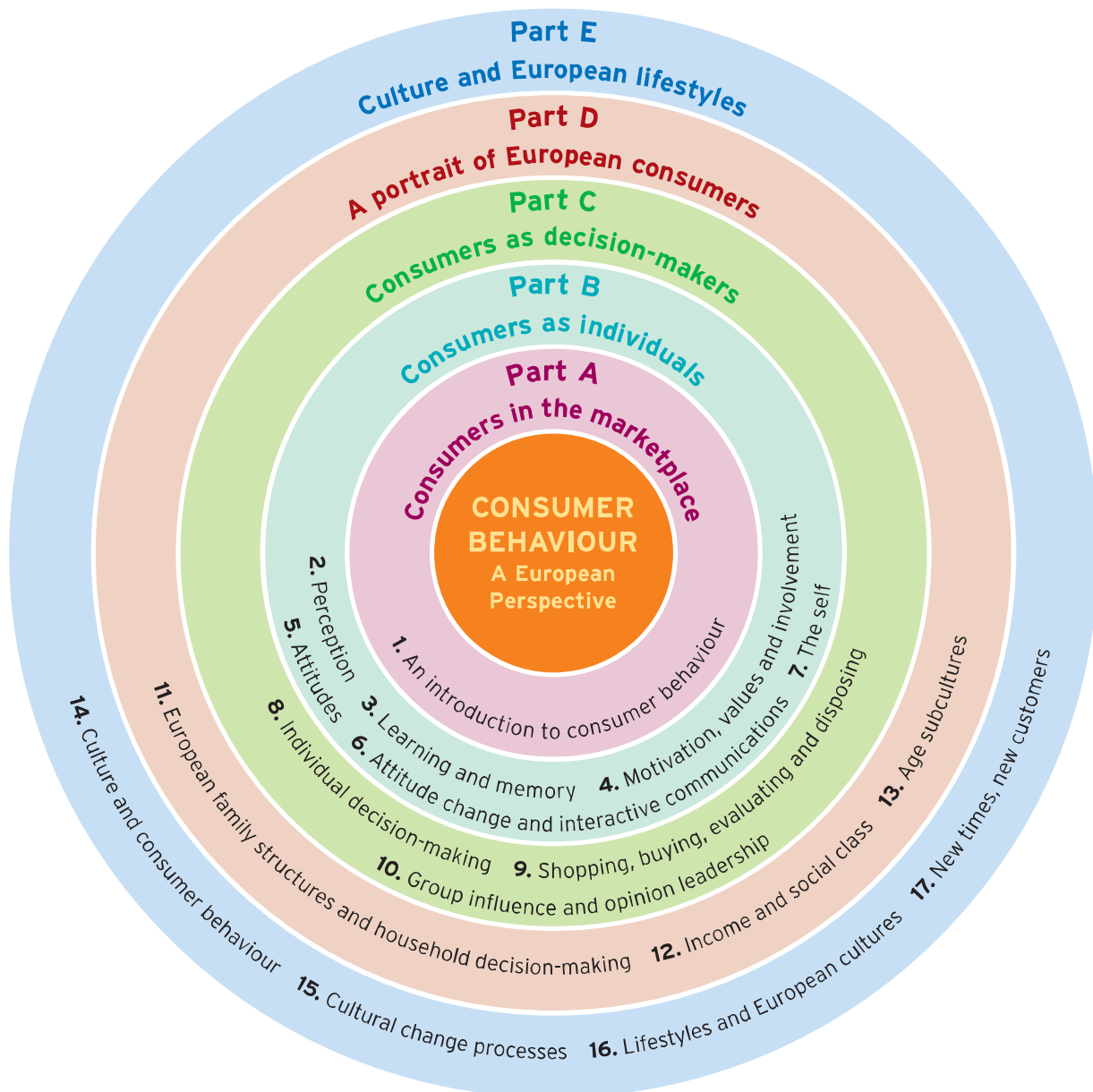
Case study problems

The 3rd edition has 20 new cases! These cases were written by our European colleagues who teach and research consumer behaviour. The case material covers various companies, industries (e.g. the Greek wine industry, the Portuguese port wine industry, and the UK funeral industry) and countries (e.g. Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Eire, France, Germany, Greece, Portugal, Scotland, Sweden, Spain, Turkey and the UK). The cases

integrate the topics covered in the preceding chapters, and appear at the end of each section. The questions at the end of each case study are designed to allow you to apply your understanding to real-life events and consumer behaviour activities; to develop your analytical skills; and to facilitate understanding of the different markets and cultural contexts across Europe. The questions often invite you to draw cross-cultural comparisons with your own consumer society.

Structure of the text

The structure of this textbook is simple: it goes from micro to macro. Think of the book as a sort of photograph album of consumer behaviour: each chapter provides a 'snapshot' of consumers, but the lens used to take each picture gets successively wider. The book begins with issues related to the individual consumer and expands its focus until it eventually considers the behaviours of large groups of people in their social settings. The topics to be covered correspond to the Wheel of Consumer Behaviour presented in the following figure.



Following the Introductory chapter, Part B 'Consumers as individuals', considers the consumer at the most micro level. It examines how the individual receives information from his or her immediate environment and how this material is learned, stored in memory, and used to form and modify individual attitudes – both about products and about oneself. Part C, 'Consumers as decision-makers', explores the ways in which consumers use the information they have acquired to make decisions about consumption activities, both as individuals and as group members. Part D, 'A portrait of European consumers', further expands the focus by considering how the consumer functions as a part of a larger social structure. No other consumer behaviour textbook offers as complete and up-to-date materials on the consumers of the EU-25. This structure includes the influence of different social groups to which the consumer belongs and/or identifies with, featuring social class and age groups. Finally, Part E, 'Culture and European lifestyles', completes the picture as it examines marketing's impact on mass culture. This discussion focuses on the relationship of marketing to the expression of cultural values and lifestyles, how products and services are related to rituals and cultural myths, and the interface between marketing efforts and the creation of art, music, and other forms of popular culture that are so much a part of our daily lives. It also includes a section on major cultural change processes, analyzed from the perspectives of globalization and postmodernism.

GUIDED TOUR OF THE BOOK



Key terms

Colour-highlighted within the text where they first appear, and with an icon (▶) in the margin to assist rapid navigation, key terms aid in reinforcing important points.

Opening vignette

Each chapter opens with a short, country-specific illustrative scenario, setting the scene for the chapter material and highlighting the interrelationships between the individual and his or her social realities.

■ THE POWER OF ATTITUDES

Leah is just the kind of fan sponsoring companies like Nike, Gatorade and Adidas hope will turn women's soccer into an ongoing source of sports fanaticism. In America, attitudes towards the game have changed dramatically since the US women's team lost in the 1996 semi-finals in Sweden before a crowd of less than 3,000. The 1999 World Cup was won before an audience of over 90,000 screaming fans, many of whom were soccer moms who saw the players as important role models for their young daughters. In 1998 a record 7.5 million women and girls enrolled for soccer teams in the United States. There, women now represent just under half of all soccer player registrations.¹ These kinds of growth figures are not to be found in Europe. Soccer has a much richer, longer tradition here, and has been a sport dominated by male patronage at the stadiums and male viewership on the television. While amateur soccer clubs for women can be found in the UK and on the Continent, they are not nearly as popular as in the United States, and have to compete with other sports which attract female participants, such as field hockey.

On the other hand, following Chastain's exuberant show of skin there has been much written in the United States over the so-called 'babe factor' as some critics wonder whether women's athletics will ever be taken seriously by male fans. Others feel that attitudes towards the game are more complex than that; they argue that sex appeal does not have to be sacrificed for professionalism. The big question is whether these positive feelings will endure. The goal of the Women's World Cup is to establish a women's professional league over the next few years. Time will tell if this ambitious project will score big or be red-carded and left to dwindle on the sidelines in the United States.² To score big in professional sports in the United States, or in Europe, is all a question of attitudes, and the dominant attitude among European fans is that women's soccer just isn't that important, at least so far. As you'll see throughout this book, attitudes can vary significantly along gender lines, and from one culture to another.

- ▶ The term **attitude** is widely used in popular culture. You might be asked, 'What is your attitude towards abortion?' A parent might scold, 'Young man, I don't like your attitude.' Some bars even euphemistically refer to Happy Hour as 'an attitude adjustment period.' For our purposes, though, an attitude is a lasting, general evaluation of people (including oneself), objects, advertisements or issues.³ Anything towards which one has an attitude is called an **attitude object** (A_o).
- ▶ This chapter will consider the contents of an attitude, how attitudes are formed, how they can be measured, and review some of the surprisingly complex relationships between attitudes and behaviour. Both as a theoretical concept, and as a tool to be used in the marketplace, the notion and dynamics of attitudes remain one of the most studied and applied of all behavioural constructs.⁴ In the next chapter, we'll take a closer look at how attitudes can be changed – certainly an issue of prime importance to marketers.

■ THE CONTENT OF ATTITUDES

An attitude is *lasting* because it tends to endure over time. It is *general* because it applies to more than a momentary event, like hearing a loud noise (though over time you might develop a negative attitude towards all loud noises). Consumers have attitudes towards very product-specific behaviours (such as using Mentos[®] rather than Colgate toothpaste), as well as towards more general consumption-related behaviours (for example, how often you should brush your teeth). Attitudes help to determine who a person goes out with, what music he or she listens to, whether he or she will recycle or discard cans, or whether he or she chooses to become a consumer researcher for a living.

Marketing pitfalls

Marketing pitfall boxes bring to life possible marketing situations or dilemmas that might arise due to cultural differences or lack of knowledge.

Multicultural dimensions

These boxes highlight cultural differences in consumer behaviour across countries and continents to drive home diversity across the globe.

THE SOURCE 179

advertised product is overtly related to attractiveness or sexuality.²³ The social adaptation perspective assumes that information seen to be instrumental in forming an attitude will be more heavily weighted by the perceiver. We filter out irrelevant information to minimize cognitive effort.

Under the right circumstances, an endorser's level of attractiveness constitutes a source of information instrumental to the attitude change process and thus functions as a central, task-relevant cue.²⁴ An attractive spokesperson, for this reason, is more likely to be an effective source when the product is relevant to attractiveness. For example, attractiveness affects attitudes toward ads about perfume or aftershave (where attractiveness is relevant) but not toward coffee ads, where attractiveness is not. Finally, in the global marketplace the notions of what comprises 'beauty' and 'attractiveness' are certainly culturally based (see the 'Marketing opportunity' for Gillette).



marketing opportunity

The best a man can get each morning is a clean, close shave with a razor, shaving cream and same-brand toiletries, according to the global ad campaign of Gillette Co., the Boston-based shaving industry giant. But to a wet shave with a razor the best a European woman can get, too? That's the question facing Gillette and other companies as they pitch their new generation of designed-for-women shaving systems in Europe, hoping to entice women to wet shave. Currently, the world's biggest markets are the US, India and Russia. In eastern Europe, razor blades were in short supply during the Communist era. Today, sales of premium shaving systems are exploding in countries such as Russia and Poland.

The market potential in western Europe is huge. Only 20 per cent of European women wet shave, compared to 75 per cent in the United States. What's more, there is still a large number of European women who don't remove hair from their underarms and legs at all. If the percentage of women wet shaving in Europe were to reach American levels, the total sales of blades would increase by 500 million annually.

Unlike in the US, where women have been removing body hair for decades, attitudes differ in Europe, and are often deeply rooted in cultural traditions, economic conditions and varying perceptions of beauty. Many of these behaviours are learned from the family or from female role models, and changing culturally linked behaviour is difficult. In France and the UK, for example, most women share behaviours of their American counterparts and wet shave. Spanish women also remove body hair – a habit which can be traced back to the Moorish influence – but they usually go to waxing salons, or they wax at home. In Germany, shaving has more of a generational influence, with wet shaving being more common among younger women who have been influenced by the media, cinema, foreign travel and supermodels with sleek legs and underarms.


Due to the complex market structure, shaving companies confront two challenges: one is to convince women who wet shave (but usually grab a simple disposable razor for use in the shower) to switch to new shaving systems which include ergonomically designed razors, pastel colours, built-in lubricants and special blade design elements to avoid nicks and cuts. The other major goal is to introduce women to hair removal – and wet shaving as the preferred method.²⁵

Non-human endorses

Celebrities can be effective endorses, but there are drawbacks to using them. As noted previously, their motives may be suspect if they promote products that don't fit their images or if they come to be seen as never having met a product they didn't like (for a fee). They may be involved in a scandal or upset customers, as when Madonna's controversial comments about the Catholic Church caused trouble for Coca-Cola. Or, they may be prima donnas who don't show up on time for a shoot or who are overly demanding.

For these reasons some marketers seek alternatives, including cartoon characters and mascots. After all, as the marketing director for a company that manufactures costumed characters for sports teams and businesses points out, 'You don't have to worry about your mascot checking into rehab.' Such characters were popular between the 1930s and

USING ATTITUDES TO PREDICT BEHAVIOUR 157




marketing pitfall

Free the carp?

For Joseph Vlasday, the night came one December evening in Warsaw at a supermarket packed with Christmas shoppers. While walking past the fish department, he saw something that dropped him in his tracks. There, in white plastic tubs, were carp – more carp, it seemed, than water. Some were floating belly up. A group of shoppers peered eagerly into the tubs, selecting the main course for their holiday supper. Shop assistants in stained aprons fished out the chosen carp, tossed them onto scales, then dropped them, still flopping, into plastic bags. If asked, the shop assistants would kill the carp with a quick blow to the head from a thick wooden stick or metal pipe. 'Christmas is supposed to be a joyful time,' Mr Vlasday recalls thinking, 'but then you go to the market, and there's a tank of fish, dying, being killed. How terrible.'

Carp have graced east European holiday tables since the seventeenth century, when Christian monks first recognized the Asian import as a substitute for meatless feasts. Hundreds of years later, having carp for Christmas came to symbolize defiance of Communist rule. Today, Polish consumers still buy their carp live, and deliver the fatal blow at home, letting the fish swim out their final days in the family bathtub. Lately, however, sales have been stagnant, even though the price has fallen more than 30 per cent over the past three years. Newly affluent Poles seem to prefer salmon or mahi-mahi. Others simply hate waiting for the carp to get out of the bathtub and into the oven (there is a lingering smell in the tub), and then there are those like Mr Vlasday who object to the seasonal slaughter. Recent media coverage by the Animal Protection Society regarding the inhumane and unsanitary conditions surrounding 'Christmas Carp' have slowed the consumption of carp. In Mr Vlasday's case, his children became so attached to the carp in their friend's bathtub that they gave them names, and started treating them as pets. Slowly, attitudes towards killing live carp for Christmas are changing. ...²⁶

Question: How would you apply Fishbein's (no pun intended) multi-attitude model to predict future behaviour of Polish consumption of carp, given the changing attitudes described above?



multicultural dimensions

The theory of reasoned action has primarily been applied in the West. Certain assumptions inherent in the model may not necessarily apply to consumers from other cultures. Several of the following diminish the universality of the theory of reasoned action:

- The model was developed to predict the performance of any voluntary act. Across cultures, however, many consumer activities, ranging from taking sales and entering military service to receiving an inoculation or even choosing a marriage partner, are not necessarily voluntary.
- The relative impact of subjective norms may vary across cultures. For example, Asian cultures tend to value conformity and face-saving, so it is possible that subjective norms involving the anticipated reactions of others to the choice will have an even greater impact on behaviour for many Asian consumers.
- The model measures behavioural intentions and thus presupposes that consumers are actively anticipating and planning future behaviour. The intention concept assumes that consumers have a linear time sense, i.e. they think in terms of past, present and future. As will be discussed in a later chapter, this time perspective is not held by all cultures.
- A consumer who forms an intention is (implicitly) claiming that he or she is in control of his or her actions. Some cultures tend to be fatalistic and do not necessarily believe in the concept of free will. Indeed, one study comparing students from the United States, Jordan and Thailand found evidence for cultural differences in assumptions about fatalism and control over the future.²⁷

Marketing opportunities

These boxes show how consumer research informs marketing strategy, and the actual or potential application of consumer behaviour concepts by marketing practitioners.

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product or service. Many ads take the form of an *allusion*, a story told about an abstract trait or concept that has been personified as a person, animal or vegetable.

▶ A *metaphor* involves placing two dissimilar objects into a close relationship. 'A is B', where 'a' is a simile compares two objects. 'A is like B'. A metaphor involves the use of an explicit comparison, for example, 'United Airlines is your friend in faraway places'. This is accomplished because A and B however seemingly dissimilar, share some quality that is, in turn, highlighted by the metaphor. The device was used literally by Reebok to



Kellogg's using cartoon characters to advertise to children.
The Advertising Archives

Colour photographs

Over 80 colour photographs and company advertisements are integrated throughout the text to help bring consumer behaviour topics to life.

Changes to look for over time

Some of the dimensions that can be included in attitude tracking include the following:

- *A focus on changes in different age groups.* Attitudes tend to change as people age (a life-cycle effect), and this will be of continual interest to government and business as the demographic profile of Europe continues to get older. More on this in Chapter 13. In addition, cohort effects occur: that is, members of a particular generation (e.g. teens, generation X, or the elderly) tend to share certain outlooks. Also, historical effects can be observed as large groups of people are affected by profound cultural changes (for example, the democratization of eastern European countries, and their admission to the European Union).
- *Scenarios about the future.* Consumers are frequently tracked in terms of their future plans, confidence in the economy, and so on. These measures can provide valuable data about future behaviour and yield insights for public policy.
- *Identification of change agents.* Social phenomena can change people's attitudes towards basic consumption activities over time, as when consumers' willingness to buy fur products shifts. Or people's likelihood of seeking divorce may be affected by such facilitators as changes in the legal system that make this easier, or by inhibitors, such as the prevalence of AIDS and the value of two salaries in today's economy.²⁶

CHAPTER SUMMARY

- An attitude is a predisposition to evaluate an object or product positively or negatively.
- Social marketing refers to attempts to change consumers' attitudes and behaviours in ways that are beneficial to society as a whole.
- Attitudes are made up of three components: beliefs, affect and behavioural intentions.
- Attitude researchers traditionally assumed that attitudes were learned in a predetermined sequence, consisting first of the formation of beliefs (cognitions) regarding an attitude object, followed by an evaluation of that object (affect) and then some action (behaviour). Depending on the consumer's level of involvement and the circumstances, though, attitudes can result from other hierarchies of effects.
- A key to attitude formation is the function the attitude plays for the consumer (e.g. is it utilitarian or ego-defensive?).
- One organizing principle of attitude formation is the importance of consistency among attitudinal components - that is, some parts of an attitude may be altered to conform with others. Such theoretical approaches to attitudes as cognitive dissonance theory, balance theory and congruity theory stress the vital role of consistency.
- The complexity of attitudes is underscored by multi-attribute attitude models, in which sets of beliefs and evaluations are identified and combined to predict an overall attitude. Factors such as subjective norms and the specificity of attitude scales have been integrated into attitude measures to improve predictability.

Chapter summary

End-of-chapter summaries provide the key concepts and issues, along with a concise checklist of the topics and issues covered.

Key terms

A list of key terms in the chapter, including a page reference where each term is first introduced, serves as a convenient revision tool.

► KEY TERMS

Behavioural influence perspective (p. 260)	Information search (p. 265)
Brand loyalty (p. 259)	Limited problem-solving (p. 262)
Cognitive structure (p. 275)	Market beliefs (p. 281)
Compensatory decision rules (p. 291)	Mental accounting (p. 269)
Country of origin (p. 283)	Non-compensatory decision rule (p. 290)
Cybermediary (p. 279)	Perceived risk (p. 271)
Determinant attributes (p. 277)	Problem recognition (p. 263)
Ethnocentrism (p. 285)	Product signal (p. 280)
Evaluative criteria (p. 277)	Prospect theory (p. 269)
Evoked set (p. 273)	Purchase momentum (p. 259)
Experiential perspective (p. 260)	Rational perspective (p. 259)
Extended problem-solving (p. 261)	Silent commerce (p. 263)
Habitual decision-making (p. 262)	Stereotype (p. 283)
Heuristics (p. 280)	Variety seeking (p. 267)
Inertia (p. 289)	

Consumer behaviour challenge

Each chapter ends with short, discursive-style questions to encourage critical examination of topics and issues. These can be used individually or as a part of a group discussion.

CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR CHALLENGE

- 1 If people are not always rational decision-makers, is it worth the effort to study how purchasing decisions are made? What techniques might be employed to understand experiential consumption and to translate this knowledge into marketing strategy?
- 2 List three product attributes that can be used as quality signals and provide an example of each.
- 3 Explain the 'evoked set'. Why is it difficult to place a product in a consumer's evoked set after it has already been rejected? What strategies might a marketer use in an attempt to accomplish this goal?
- 4 Define the three levels of product categorization described in the chapter. Diagram these levels for a health club.
- 5 Discuss two different non-compensatory decision rules and highlight the difference(s) between them. How might the use of one rule versus another result in a different product choice?
- 6 Choose a friend or parent who shops for groceries on a regular basis and keep a log of their purchases of common consumer products during the term. Can you detect any evidence of brand loyalty in any categories based on consistency of purchases? If so, talk to the person about these purchases. Try to determine if his or her choices are based on true brand loyalty or on inertia. What techniques might you use to differentiate between the two?
- 7 Form a group of three. Pick a product and develop a marketing plan based on each of the three approaches to consumer decision-making: rational, experiential and behavioural influence. What are the major differences in emphasis among the three

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3. Bill Superville, 'That outcast fan!', <i>Time</i> (19 July 1999): 58 (2).	
4. Mark Hyman, 'The "babe factor" in women's soccer', <i>Business Week</i> (26 July 1999): 118.	
5. Robert A. Baron and Donn Byrne, <i>Social Psychology: Understanding Human Interaction</i> , 5th edn (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1997).	
6. D. Ahlert-Davies, R. Johnson and M.P. Zanna (eds.), <i>The Handbook of Attitudes</i> (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 2000); see also J.A. Prentice, D. Narvik-Jørgensen, M.A. Fleming and J. Goidel, 'The ADOCE2 model: The influence of attitudes and attitude strength on consideration of choice', <i>Journal of Consumer Research</i> 30(1) (2000): 274-87 for a study on how the strength of attitudes influences and guides a consumer's consideration of brands.	
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Notes

Fully updated notes at the end of each chapter allow readers to find more sources to learn about a topic.

Case studies

At the end of each major section case studies cover various companies, industries and countries, and integrate the topics from the preceding chapters. Questions then allow the reader to test his or her understanding to real-life events and consumer behaviour activities, thus helping develop analytical skills.

case study 3

Prams are not just for babies ...¹

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PRAMS IN DENMARK

Many foreigners in Denmark have noticed the high prevalence of prams on the streets and have expressed surprise about their large size and their solid and practical appearance. And just as many have reacted with disbelief when they learn that most Danish children up to the age of two or three, sleep out of doors during the day in their prams, regardless of the time of year. It is assumed that sleeping outside will improve the immune defence system of the child. Many parents also find that their children sleep better, and for longer, when they sleep outside. Guidelines from the Danish health authorities confirm that if the mattress, the cover, and the child's clothing is appropriate it is safe to let the child sleep outside at temperatures as low as minus 10 degrees Celsius.

In the eyes of most Danish parents and parents-to-be, a pram is considered a necessity, a necessity that they will need within the first week or two of the child's birth. Therefore, the acquisition of a pram is typically organized before the birth of the child and thus becomes part of the preparations for the forthcoming addition to the family. However, even though the pram is considered a necessity, its acquisition is rarely considered a trivial matter.

In many cases the purchase of a pram represents the most expensive single item among the acquisitions made before the birth. And it is likely that the vehicle will stay with the family for at least five or six years, as it will probably be used by more than one child. It is also a very visible consumer good, that is, a consumer good that when used as a means of transportation is consumed in the public space - and is subject to the public gaze.

And, certainly, it appears to be a common experience that a pram has a clear potential to signal 'what kind of people we are', so that a pram potentially has a high symbolic value, very much in the same way as a car can have. This symbolic potential is a feature that most parents-to-be seem to be aware of - at one level or another. And this awareness may indeed spur speculations about 'what kind of parents would we like to be' - and maybe also 'what kind of parents would we not like to be'.

Thus, as Dorte's case below will illustrate, the acquisition and usage of a pram is not just a practical matter. It may also include speculations about one's current identity and values, as well as one's future identity as a parent - a whole range of possible selves.

DORTHE

Dorte is 25 years old and is currently training to become a pre-school teacher. She lives in a flat with her husband, Jesper, and her two-year-old son Mattias, in Ishøj, a suburb of Copenhagen, in a lower-income bracket neighbourhood inhabited by people of various ethnic origins. Compared with most other Danish first-time mothers, Dorte was fairly young when she gave birth to her first child. She is now seven months pregnant with her second child and she is telling the story of the prams she has had.

'We bought our first pram in a sale about three months before Mattias was born. Back then money meant a lot. At that time we were both students. Now Jesper has a well-paid job as a production engineer. But back then the price was an important issue. Jesper knew all about certain quality standards that he wanted to be fulfilled, while all I cared for was that I wanted it to be black or grey in order for it to be able to match my clothes, no matter what colours I decided to wear. You know, it's a bit silly, but I wanted the pram and me to be a unified whole. I was very self-conscious at the time, because I had gained a lot of weight. So at least I wanted to look the best I could. Well, I also liked the kind of sporty design of the pram. We both used to do a lot of sports, so the design appealed to me somehow. Not that I have felt very sporty ever since, for sure, but at the time, it was still something that was kind of important for me. I remember we had browsed around quite a few stores, and we felt lucky to find a model that fulfilled our criteria at a price that we could afford. It was a name-brand pram bought at a discount retailer. But I loved it, and we took it home. I remember just sitting next to the pram and looking at it. It was the first time I really tried to imagine what it was going to be like ... I tried to stand in front of the pram and to hold on to it to see how it felt. Well, I would rather not have anyone see how silly I was!

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But then I went to water aerobics with other pregnant women and they talked a lot about what pram they wanted. Deep down I also wished I had been able to afford one of the prams they were talking about. They made it sound like you are not a very good mother if you buy a cheap pram. Or maybe that was just what I thought to myself. I felt like they did not want to talk to me anymore, because I was someone who was not interested enough in my child, since I hadn't bought an expensive pram. Even though, deep down you know that your child doesn't care at all if it's in an "Odde"-pram or a no-name pram. The child is completely indifferent as long as it is content and warm, which it will be in both prams. In fact this is not about the child - it's all about the mother.

After the birth of my child I started using my pram. I went for long walks in the neighbourhood. And that's when I finally decided to get rid of it. You know, a lot of the people in my neighbourhood are unemployed and a lot of them are of a different ethnic origin. And after a while I realized that they had all bought the same pram that I had. Consequently I was mistaken for one of them. They approached me and spoke to me in some foreign language that I didn't understand. I felt very uncomfortable. Also, I felt that other people looked at me as if I was some young, poor, unemployed loser who was never going to get any education.

I guess I realized that it is with prams as it is with a lot of other things: they say a lot about who you are as a person. Just like clothes do. So I told my husband that for this baby we would have to get another pram. He couldn't quite understand why, but he supported me. I talked to friends who had bought a high-end pram to figure out which one to buy and studied a lot of brochures. So now we have saved enough money to buy the 'Rolls Royce' of prams: an "Odde"-pram, it's 1000 euros but it's worth it! It looks classy and stylish in a discrete way. I cannot wait. It will make me feel so good

to take my baby for a walk in the new pram. We want it to be black or grey again, but we have considered having a red pattern on it since we know that I am carrying a girl. This time I want to be sure to get it right!

QUESTIONS

1 How can the symbolic self-completion theory discussed in Chapter 7 help us to understand the way Dorte relates herself to her prams? What does the pram mean to her in her role as a mother? What does it mean to her in her role as a citizen in her neighbourhood?

2 Discuss the idea of the 'ideal mother' that Dorte is confronted with in her water aerobics class. How does she relate/react to this ideal? How does it make her feel? Could she have reacted differently to this ideal? If yes, how?

3 Consider the symbolic interactionism perspective discussed in Chapter 7. How is the meaning of Dorte's first pram negotiated? You could construct a chart and/or time line containing the different influencers and their associated meanings.

4 Consider other life role transitions that may comprise major changes of the self (becoming an adult, leaving home, going to university, entering the job market, marriage, children leaving home, divorce, retirement, death of a spouse ...). What generalizations could be drawn from Dorte's case about these transitions, concerning the role of and meanings around the consumption of goods?

Note

1. This case is partly fictitious and partly based on interview material, which is reported in Thomsen, T.U. and E. Sørensen (2006). The first four-wheeled status symbol: Pram consumption as a vehicle for the construction of motherhood identity. *Journal of Marketing Management: Special Issue on Consuming Families*, forthcoming.

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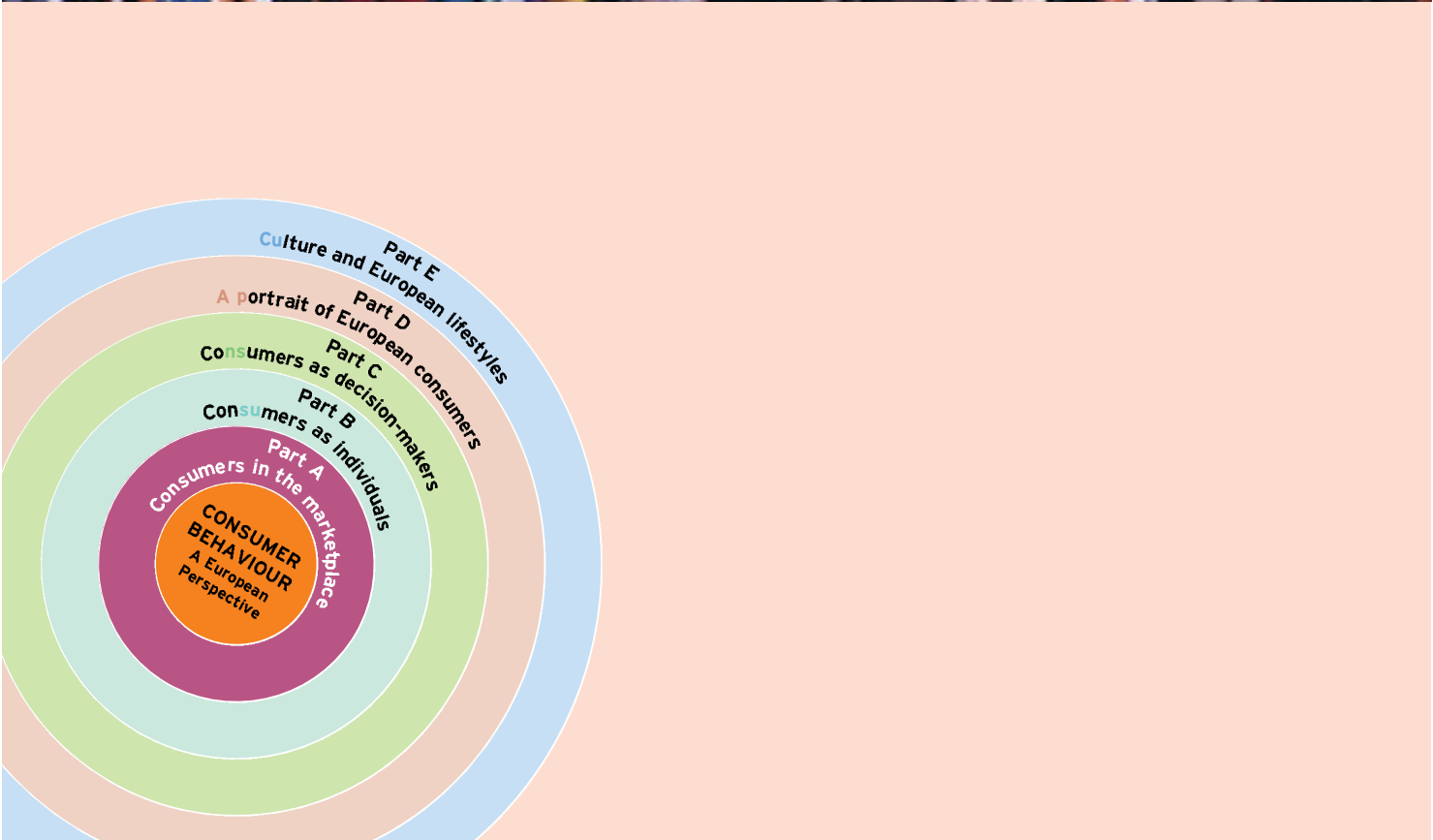
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CONSUMERS IN THE MARKETPLACE

part

This introductory part comprises one chapter, which previews much of what this book is about and gives an overview of the field of consumer behaviour. The chapter examines how the field of marketing is influenced by the actions of consumers, and also how we as consumers are influenced by marketers. It also overviews consumer behaviour as a discipline of enquiry, and describes some of the different approaches that researchers use in order better to understand what makes consumers behave as they do.

1

An
introduction
to consumer
behaviour

AN INTRODUCTION TO CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR



Nathalie is working at her computer. It is early autumn and the beginning of a new term at her Danish university. Time for getting new books and study materials. As a second-year student, she's not surprised to find that several of the required books are still unavailable at the campus bookshop.

She goes online to check if she can get her books from one of the internet bookshops. She uses her favourite portal (www.jubii.dk) to check out the Scandinavian bookshops, which she thinks might be able to deliver the books faster than their international competitors. None of them have all of

the books in stock that she needs, and she really feels that she should get all of the books from the same store. On an impulse, Nathalie visits a student shop which sells used books and provides search facilities for Barnes & Noble. She searches for a couple of the titles she is looking for, but the search facility does not seem to work. For a moment, she considers putting some of her used books up for sale, then decides not to let herself be distracted, and moves on to the UK version of **Amazon.com**. She has heard from friends that prices are a little steeper here (relative to the other internet bookshops), but she knows this site well by now. Besides, the books she wants are in stock and can be delivered in about a week, maybe less. Considering that the chances of the books she needs appearing in the campus bookshop on time seem pretty slim, Nathalie decides to go ahead and buy them now online.

While she fills out the order form, she tries to plan where to go next. She and her friend are looking for an interesting topic for a course project and she wants to look in the social science section of www.yahoo.com for some inspiration. Also, she wants to visit a few of her favourite sites for news, music and travel. 'A little information update before meeting the girls this afternoon for coffee,' she thinks to herself. She clicks 'OK' to her order confirmation and is glad to have that out of the way. She navigates her way to **yahoo.com** and starts her search. All the while, she is thinking to herself that it would be nice to spend a little time checking out the latest in fashion and beauty tips; a little treat to herself while she still has some time on her hands. Suddenly Nathalie remembers that there were a couple of study plans to print out from the university website - and a few emails to answer. She checks her email account and is a little surprised to see that she has received so much mail today - seems like everybody just realized that summer is over and wants to get started on new projects. It makes her feel joyful, even sort of invigorated . . .

DIANA STORM, University of Southern Denmark, Odense, Denmark

■ CONSUMPTION IN EUROPE? THE EUROPEAN CONSUMER?

This is a book about consumer behaviour, written from a European perspective. But what does that mean exactly? Obviously, to write about a 'European' consumer or a 'European's consumer behaviour' is problematic. Some of the general theory about the psychological or sociological influences on consumer behaviour may be common to all Western cultures. On the one hand, some theories may be culturally specific. Certain groups of consumers do show similar kinds of behaviour across national borders, and research on consumers in Europe suggests that we even use our understanding of the consumption environment to make sense of the foreign cultures we are visiting.¹ On the other hand, the ways in which people live their consumption life vary greatly from one European country to another, and sometimes even within different regions of the same country. As a student of consumer behaviour, you might want to ask yourself: 'In which consumption situations do I seem to have a great deal in common with fellow students from other European countries? And in what ways do I seem to resemble more closely my compatriots? In what ways do subcultures in my country exert a strong influence on my consumption patterns, and how international are these subcultures?' To add to the complexity of all this, ten countries, incorporating 75 million people, 740,000 sq km and nine languages, have joined the European Union in 2005. These 'new' European consumers come from vastly different economic and political circumstances, and each has their own unique historical and cultural development. Much more on these consumers' aspirations and consumption behaviours will be reviewed in chapters in Part D of this text, A Portrait of European Consumers.

This book is about consumer behaviour theory in general, and we will illustrate our points with examples from various European markets as well as from the United States and other countries. Each chapter features 'Multicultural dimensions' boxes which spotlight international aspects of consumer behaviour. From both a global and a pan-European perspective, these issues will be explored in depth in Chapters 15 and 16.

Consumer behaviour: people in the marketplace

You can probably relate to at least some general aspects of Nathalie's behaviour. This book is about people like Nathalie. It concerns the products and services they buy and use, and the ways these fit into their lives. This introductory chapter briefly describes some important aspects of the field of consumer behaviour, including the topics studied, who studies them, and some of the ways these issues are approached by consumer researchers.

But first, let's return to Nathalie: the sketch which started the chapter allows us to highlight some aspects of consumer behaviour that will be covered in the rest of the book.

- As a consumer, Nathalie can be described and compared to other individuals in a number of ways. For some purposes, marketers might find it useful to categorize Nathalie in terms of her age, gender, income or occupation. These are some examples of descriptive characteristics of a population, or *demographics*. In other cases, marketers would rather know something about Nathalie's interests in fashion or music, or the way she spends her leisure time. This sort of information often comes under the category *psychographics*, which refers to aspects of a person's lifestyle and personality. Knowledge of consumer characteristics plays an extremely important role in many marketing applications, such as defining the market for a product or deciding on the appropriate techniques to employ when targeting a certain group of consumers.
- Nathalie's purchase decisions are heavily influenced by the opinions and behaviours of her friends. A lot of product information, as well as recommendations to use or avoid particular brands, is picked up in conversations among real people, rather than by way of television commercials, magazines or advertising messages. The bonds

among Nathalie's group of friends are in part cemented by the products they all use. There is also pressure on each group member to buy things that will meet with the group's approval, and often a price to pay in the form of group rejection or embarrassment when one does not conform to others' conceptions of what is good or bad, 'in' or 'out'.

- As a member of a large society, people share certain cultural values or strongly held beliefs about the way the world should be structured. Other values are shared by members of *subcultures*, or smaller groups within the culture, such as ethnic groups, teens, people from certain parts of the country, or even 'Hell's Angels'. The people who matter to Nathalie – her *reference group* – value the idea that women in their early twenties should be innovative, style-conscious, independent and up front (at least a little). While many marketers focus on either very young targets or the thirty-somethings, some are recognizing that another segment which ought to be attracting marketers' interest is the rapidly growing segment of older (50+) people.²
- When browsing through the websites, Nathalie is exposed to many competing 'brands'. Many offerings did not grab her attention at all; others were noticed but rejected because they did not fit the 'image' with which she identified or to which she aspired. The use of *market segmentation strategies* means targeting a brand only to specific groups of consumers rather than to everybody – even if that means that other consumers will not be interested or may choose to avoid that brand.
- Brands often have clearly defined *images* or 'personalities' created by product advertising, packaging, branding and other marketing strategies that focus on positioning a product a certain way or by certain groups of consumers adopting the product. One's leisure activities in particular are very much lifestyle statements: it says a lot about what a person is interested in, as well as something about the type of person he or she would like to be. People often choose a product offering, a service or a place, or subscribe to a particular idea, because they like its image, or because they feel its 'personality' somehow corresponds to their own. Moreover, a consumer may believe that by buying and using the product, its desirable qualities will somehow magically 'rub off'.
- When a product succeeds in satisfying a consumer's specific needs or desires, as <http://www.amazon.co.uk> did for Nathalie, it may be rewarded with many years of *brand* or *store loyalty*, a bond between product or outlet and consumer that may be very difficult for competitors to break. Often a change in one's life situation or self-concept is required to weaken this bond and thus create opportunities for competitors.
- Consumers' evaluations of products are affected by their appearance, taste, texture or smell. We may be influenced by the shape and colour of a package, as well as by more subtle factors, such as the symbolism used in a brand name, in an advertisement, or even in the choice of a cover model for a magazine. These judgements are affected by – and often reflect – how a society feels that people should define themselves at that point in time. Nathalie's choice of a new hairstyle, for example, says something about the type of image women like her want to project. If asked, Nathalie might not be able to say exactly why she considered some websites and rejected others. Many product meanings are hidden below the surface of the packaging, the design and advertising, and this book will discuss some of the methods used by marketers and social scientists to discover or apply these meanings.
- **Amazon.co.uk** has a combined American and international image that appeals to Nathalie. A product's image is often influenced by its *country of origin*, which helps to determine its 'brand personality'. In addition, our opinions and desires are increasingly shaped by input from around the world, thanks to rapid advancements in communications and transportation systems (witness the internet!). In today's global culture,

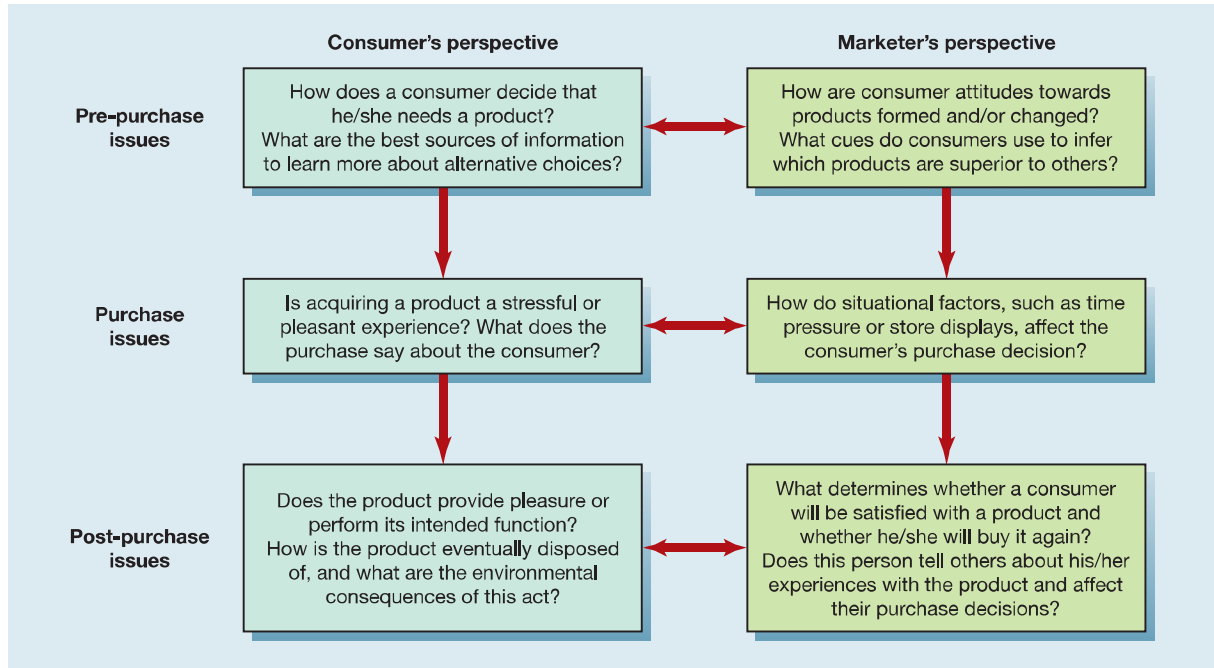
consumers often prize products and services that ‘transport’ them to different locations and allow them to experience the diversity of other cultures. Clearly, the internet has changed many young Europeans’ consumer behaviours. Global music sales continues to fall, with Germany, Denmark, France, Sweden, Belgium, Greece and Ireland all having double digit decreases in sales of recorded music. While music sales fall, young European consumers seem to be searching the internet for another form of ‘shopping’, with 50 per cent of ‘singles’ reporting visiting a dating website at least once in the past year.³

- The field of **consumer behaviour** covers a lot of ground: it is the study of the processes involved when individuals or groups select, purchase, use or dispose of products, services, ideas or experiences to satisfy needs and desires. Consumers take many forms, ranging from a 6-year-old child pleading with her mother for wine gums to an executive in a large corporation deciding on an extremely expensive computer system. The items that are consumed can include anything from tinned beans to a massage, democracy, rap music, and even other people (the images of rock stars, for example). Needs and desires to be satisfied range from hunger and thirst to love, status or even spiritual fulfilment. There is a growing interest in consumer behaviour, not only in the field of marketing but from the social sciences in general. This follows a growing awareness of the increasing importance of consumption in our daily lives, in our organization of daily activities, in our identity formation, in politics and economic development, and in the flows of global culture, where consumer culture seems to spread, albeit in new forms, from North America and Europe to other parts of the world. This spread of consumer culture via marketing is not always well received by social critics and consumers, as we shall see in subsequent chapters.⁴ Indeed, consumption can be regarded as playing such an important role in our social, psychological, economic, political and cultural lives that today it has become the ‘vanguard of history’.⁵

Consumers are actors on the marketplace stage

- The perspective of **role theory**, which this book emphasizes, takes the view that much of consumer behaviour resembles actions in a play,⁶ where each consumer has lines, props and costumes that are necessary to a good performance. Since people act out many different roles, they may modify their consumption decisions according to the particular ‘play’ they are in at the time. The criteria that they use to evaluate products and services in one of their roles may be quite different from those used in another role.

Another way of thinking about consumer roles is to consider the various ‘plays’ that the consumer may engage in. One classical role here is the consumer as a ‘chooser’ – somebody who, as we have seen with Nathalie, can choose between different alternatives and explores various criteria for making this choice. But the consumer can have many other things at stake than just ‘making the right choice’. We are all involved in a communication system through our consumption activities, whereby we communicate our roles and statuses. We are also sometimes searching to construct our identity, our ‘real selves’, through various consumption activities. Or the main purpose of our consumption might be an exploration of a few of the many possibilities the market has to offer us, maybe in search of a ‘real kick of pleasure’. On the more serious side, we might feel victimized by fraudulent or harmful offerings, and we may decide to take action against such risks from the marketplace by becoming active in consumer movements. Or we may react against the authority of the producers by co-opting their products, and turning them into something else, as when military boots all of a sudden became ‘normal’ footwear for peaceful girls. We may decide to take action as ‘political consumers’ and boycott products from companies or countries whose behaviour does not meet our ethical or environmental standards. Hence, as consumers we can be choosers, communicators, identity-seekers, pleasure-seekers, victims, rebels and activists – sometimes simultaneously.⁷

Figure 1.1 Some issues that arise during stages in the consumption process

Consumer behaviour is a process

In its early stages of development, the field was often referred to as *buyer behaviour*, reflecting an emphasis on the interaction between consumers and producers at the time of purchase. Marketers now recognize that consumer behaviour is an ongoing *process*, not merely what happens at the moment a consumer hands over money or a credit card and in turn receives some good or service.

- The **exchange**, in which two or more organizations or people give and receive something of value, is an integral part of marketing.⁸ While exchange remains an important part of consumer behaviour, the expanded view emphasizes the entire consumption process, which includes the issues that influence the consumer before, during and after a purchase. Figure 1.1 illustrates some of the issues that are addressed during each stage of the consumption process.

Consumer behaviour involves many different actors

A consumer is generally thought of as a person who identifies a need or desire, makes a purchase and then disposes of the product during the three stages in the consumption process. In many cases, however, different people may be involved in the process. The *purchaser* and *user* of a product may not be the same person, as when a parent chooses clothes for a teenager (and makes selections that can result in 'fashion suicide' from the teenager's point of view). In other cases, another person may act as an *influencer*, providing recommendations for (or against) certain products without actually buying or using them. For example, a friend, rather than a parent, accompanying a teenager on a shopping trip may pick out the clothes that he or she decides to purchase.

Finally, consumers may be organizations or groups in which one person may make the decisions involved in purchasing products that will be used by many, as when a purchasing agent orders the company's office supplies. In other organizational situations, purchase decisions may be made by a large group of people – for example, company accountants, designers, engineers, sales personnel and others – all of whom will have a say in the various stages of the consumption process. As we'll see in a later chapter, one important organization is the family, where different family members play pivotal roles in decision-making regarding products and services used by all.

■ CONSUMERS' IMPACT ON MARKETING STRATEGY

Surfing websites or discussing products and brands can be a lot of fun – almost as much fun as actually making the purchases! But, on the more serious side, why should managers, advertisers and other marketing professionals bother to learn about this field?

The answer is simple: understanding consumer behaviour is good business. A basic marketing concept states that firms exist to satisfy consumers' needs. These needs can only be satisfied to the extent that marketers understand the people or organizations that will use the products and services they offer, and that they do so *better* than their competitors.

Consumer response may often be the ultimate test of whether or not a marketing strategy will succeed. Thus, knowledge about consumers is incorporated into virtually every facet of a successful marketing plan. Data about consumers help marketers to define the market and to identify threats and opportunities in their own and other countries that will affect how consumers receive the product. In every chapter, we'll see how developments in consumer behaviour can be used as input to marketing strategies. Boxes headed 'Marketing opportunity' will highlight some of these possibilities. Sony's introduction of the Walkman is one good example of how consumers initially turned down the product when the concept was tested in the market.⁹ The product was launched anyway and the Walkman was an immense success – Sony revolutionized the mobile music experience and sold almost 300 million Walkmans in the process. This does not mean that Sony now eschews consumer research, as is demonstrated by these few examples of marketing actions that resulted from studies focused on understanding consumers:

- Recent research found that today's teens see portable cassette players as dinosaurs. Sony's advertising agency followed 125 teens to see how they use products in their day-to-day lives. Now, even portable CD players seem obsolete and not cool – with the consumer movement to removable 'memory sticks' instead of a CD player that can work with MP3 files. The Walkman also needed a fresh message, so Sony's agency decided to use an alien named Plato to appeal to teens. This character was chosen to appeal to today's culturally ethnically diverse marketplace. As the account director explained, 'An alien is no one, so an alien is everyone.'¹⁰ In addition to the memory stick players, the Apple iPod has also greatly changed the consumer music scene. The designer of the iPod, Jonathan Ives, has himself become part of popular culture, and in a recent poll was voted Most Influential Person in British Culture, beating author J.K. Rowling and Ricky Gervais, star and creator of the popular television programme *The Office*.¹¹
- A woman in a consumer group which was discussing dental hygiene commented that tartar felt 'like a wall' on her teeth. This imagery was used in ads for Colgate Tartar Control, in which room-sized teeth were shown covered by walls of tartar.¹²
- Researchers for a manufacturer of Swiss chocolate found that many chocolate lovers hide secret 'stash' around their house. One respondent confessed to hiding chocolate bars inside her lingerie drawer. The result was an ad campaign theme of 'The True Confessions of Chocaholics'.¹³

Market segmentation: to whom are we marketing?

- Whether within or across national boundaries, effective **market segmentation** delineates segments whose members are similar to one another in one or more characteristics and different from members of other segments. Depending on its goals and resources, a company may choose to focus on just one segment or several, or it may ignore differences among segments by pursuing a mass market strategy. In the internet-based market,

Table 1.1 Variables for market segmentation

Category	Variables	Location of discussion
Demographics	Age	Chapter 13
	Gender	Chapter 7
	Social class, occupation, income	Chapter 12
	Ethnic group, religion	Chapter 16
	Stage in life	Chapter 11
	Purchaser vs. user	Chapter 11
Geographic	Region	Chapter 16
	Country differences	Chapter 16
Psychographic	Self-concept, personality	Chapter 7
	Lifestyle	Chapter 16
Behavioural	Brand loyalty, extent of usage	Chapter 8
	Usage situation	Chapter 9
	Benefits desired	Chapter 4

Amazon.com tries to reach multiple segments at the same time, while Google News UK focuses on being a search engine for information and news for consumers in the United Kingdom.¹⁴

In many cases, it makes a lot of sense to target a number of market segments. The likelihood is that no one will fit any given segment description exactly, and the issue is whether or not consumers differ from our profile in ways that will affect the chances of their adopting the products we are offering.

Many segmentation variables form the basis for slicing up a larger market, and a great deal of this book is devoted to exploring the ways marketers describe and characterize different segments. The segmentation variables listed in Table 1.1 are grouped into four categories, which also indicate where in the book these categories are considered in more depth.

While consumers can be described in many ways, the segmentation process is valid only when the following criteria are met:

- Consumers within the segment are similar to one another in terms of product needs, and these needs are different from consumers in other segments.
- Important differences among segments can be identified.
- The segment is large enough to be profitable.
- Consumers in the segment can be reached by an appropriate marketing mix.
- The consumers in the segment will respond in the desired way to the marketing mix designed for them.

► **Demographics** are statistics that measure observable aspects of a population, such as birth rate, age distribution or income. The national statistical agencies of European countries and pan-European agencies such as EuroStat¹⁵ are major sources of demographic data on families, but many private firms gather additional data on specific population groups. The changes and trends revealed in demographic studies are of great interest to marketers, because the data can be used to locate and predict the size of markets for many products, ranging from mortgages to baby food.

In this book, we'll explore many of the important demographic variables that make consumers the same as, or different from, others. We'll also consider other important

► characteristics that are not so easy to measure, such as **psychographics** – differences in

consumers' personalities and tastes which can't be measured objectively. For now, let's summarize a few of the most important demographic dimensions, each of which will be developed in more detail in later chapters. However, a word of caution is needed here. The last couple of decades have witnessed the growth of new consumer segments that are less dependent on demographics and more likely to borrow behavioural patterns and fashions across what were formerly more significant borders or barriers. It is now not so uncommon to see men and women, or grandmothers and granddaughters, having similar tastes. Hence, useful as they might be, marketers should beware of using only demographic variables to predict consumer tastes.

Age

Consumers in different age groups have very different needs and wants, and a better understanding of the ageing process of European consumers will continue to be of great importance to marketers as well as public policy decision-makers.¹⁶ While people who belong to the same age group differ in many other ways, they do tend to share a set of values and common cultural experiences that they carry throughout life.¹⁷ *Marie Claire*, the French magazine that is published in 25 editions and 14 languages, has noticed that its circulation and readership has fallen in past years, due primarily to not keeping pace with its younger readers and their reading habits. In the past, article length was typically nine to ten pages, and what is now desired is two to five pages. Rather than concentrating on serious articles on contemporary women's issues, the newer and younger readership is looking for something more fun and entertaining. Finding the balance of 'fun' (e.g. 'Four Celebs secrets to fabulous legs') and 'serious' (e.g. 'The role of the veil in Islamic dress') has been the challenge in bridging women readers of different age groups.¹⁸

Gender

Many products, from fragrances to footwear, are targeted at men or women. Differentiating by sex starts at a very early age – even nappies are sold in pink-trimmed versions for girls and blue for boys. As proof that consumers take these differences seriously, market research has revealed that many parents refuse to put baby boys in pink nappies!¹⁹

One dimension that makes segmenting by gender so interesting is that the behaviours and tastes of men and women are constantly evolving. In the past most marketers assumed that men were the primary decision-makers for car purchases, but this perspective is changing with the times.

Sometimes, the gender segmentation can be an unintended product of an advertising strategy. Wranglers launched a European campaign featuring macho Wild West values such as rodeo riding, after an earlier campaign, featuring a supermodel, had made their sales of jeans to women grow 400 per cent but put men off their brand.²⁰



**marketing
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Websites for women

Segmenting by gender is alive and well in cyberspace.²¹ In France, for example, a group of women started the country's first women's electronic magazine and web portal called **Newsfam.com**. These entrepreneurs are hoping to reproduce the success of American sites like **iVillage.com** and **Women.com**.²² To underscore the idea that men and women differ in their tastes and preferences (the French would say *vive la différence!*), a website for high-tech products called **Hifi.com** opened a sister site just for women called **herhifi.com**. It avoids jargon, offers friendly advice and finds ways to make home entertainment systems relevant to women.²³ Probably a sound strategy, considering that six out of every ten new internet users are female.²⁴



Marketers are paying increasing attention to demographic changes throughout Europe, and particularly with respect to changing income levels in Eastern Europe.

Mitsubishi

Family structure

A person's family and marital status is yet another important demographic variable, since this has such a big effect on consumers' spending priorities. Young bachelors and newly-weds are the most likely to take exercise, go to wine bars and pubs, concerts and the cinema and to consume alcohol. Families with young children are big purchasers of health foods and fruit juices, while single-parent households and those with older children buy more junk food. Home maintenance services are most likely to be used by older couples and bachelors.²⁵

Social class and income

People in the same social class are approximately equal in terms of their incomes and social status. They work in roughly similar occupations and tend to have similar tastes in music, clothing and so on. They also tend to socialize with one another and share many ideas and values.²⁶ The distribution of wealth is of great interest to marketers, since it determines which groups have the greatest buying power and market potential.

Race and ethnicity

Immigrants from various countries in Africa and Asia are among the fastest-growing ethnic groups in Europe. As our societies grow increasingly multicultural, new opportunities

develop to deliver specialized products to racial and ethnic groups, and to introduce other groups to these offerings.

Sometimes, this adaptation is a matter of putting an existing product or service into a different context. For example, in Great Britain there is a motorway service station and cafeteria targeted at the Muslim population. It has prayer facilities, no pork menus and serves *halal* meat.²⁷ And now, Turks in Berlin do not have to rely solely on the small immigrants' greengroceries and kiosks known from so many other European cities. A Turkish chain has opened the first department store in Berlin, carrying Turkish and Middle Eastern goods only, catering to both the large Turkish population as well as to other immigrant groups and Germans longing for culinary holiday memories.²⁸



multicultural dimensions

As we will discuss shortly, people can express their self and their cultural and religious belonging through consumption patterns. At times, this has led to cultural clashes, as in an example involving France or Denmark, where young Muslim women's wearing of headscarves either in school or at work has been debated for several years, and has even led to legislation prohibiting the wearing of 'conspicuous religious symbols' in French public schools.²⁹ Wearing a headscarf is criticized for being a religious statement, which should not be allowed in the explicitly secular French public schools, as a sign of oppression of women or as incompatible with the 'modern' image of the employing company. However, a headscarf is not just a headscarf. There are at least four culturally bound ways of displaying this controversial textile: the 'Italian way', known from stars of the 1950s and 1960s such as Sophia Loren, Claudia Cardinale or Gina Lollobrigida on the back seats of scooters and revived by nostalgia movements; the 'women's lib' way with the knot in the back as displayed by many Scandinavian women in the 1970s; the 'German Hausfrau' version with a bow in the front; and the much-disputed Muslim version. In Turkey, one may see a lot of women wearing headscarves, but one can tell from the way they are tied whether this is a religious expression from a religious woman or rather an expression of a cultural tradition, and as such more a rural than a religious reference.³⁰

Geography

In Europe, most of the evidence points to the fact that cultural differences persist in playing a decisive role in forming our consumption patterns and our unique expressions of consumption. At the same time, global competition tends to have a homogenizing effect in some markets such as music, sports, clothing and entertainment, and multinational companies such as Sony, Pepsi, Nintendo, Nike and Levi Strauss continue to dominate or play important roles in shaping markets.³¹ With the creation of the single European market, many companies have begun to consider even more the possibilities of standardized marketing across national boundaries in Europe. The increasing similarity of the brands and products available in Europe does not mean that the consumers are the same, however! Variables such as personal motivation, cultural context, family relation patterns and rhythms of everyday life, all vary substantially from country to country and from region to region. And consumption of various product categories is still very different: in 1995 the per capita consumption of cheese per annum was 16.9 kg in France and 6.1 kg in Ireland; consumption of potatoes was 13.8 kg in Italy and 59.9 kg in Finland.³² In marketing research, the possibility of operating with standard criteria for something as 'simple' as demographics for market segmentation is constantly under discussion. But to date the results have not always been encouraging.³³

To sum up, a European segmentation must be able to take into consideration:

- consumption which is common across cultures (the global or regional, trends, lifestyles and cultural patterns that cross borders); and
- consumption which is specific between different cultural groups (differences in values, lifestyles, behavioural patterns, etc. among different cultures and subcultures).



**marketing
opportunity**

New segments

Marketers have come up with so many ways to segment consumers – from the overweight to overachievers – that you might think they had run out of segments. Hardly. Changes in lifestyle and other characteristics of the population are constantly creating new opportunities. The following are some 'hot' market segments.

The gay community: In more and more societies, the gay minority is becoming increasingly visible. New media featuring homosexual lifestyles and the consumption patterns attached to them flourish and marketers claim that the gay community is as attractive a marketing niche as many other subcultures and that this group forms a 'hungry target'.³⁴ For example, in the marketing of Copenhagen as a tourist destination, the gay community has been explicitly chosen as one of the target markets. The gay segment tends to be economically upmarket and is frequently involved in travelling and short holidays to metropolitan areas. So the tourist board has tried to reach it through specific marketing activities targeted at gay environments in Europe. Recently, London has emerged as 'more than a destination' tourist spot for gays, based on the city's overall welcome to gays, which is not focused on just one specific area or neighbourhood. The government-funded 'visitbrittain' website targets gay visitors, touting Britain as the 'United Queendom'.³⁵

Single females: A worldwide study by Young and Rubicam has discovered a new and interesting market segment, that of well-educated, intelligent women who choose to stay single and pursue their life and career goals without husband or children. Furthermore, they represent heavy-spending consumers. They are reportedly brand-loyal and highly influenced by their friends in terms of consumption choices. The way to reach this attractive consumer group is to speak to their feelings of independence and self-respect.³⁶

Disabled people: In the wake of legislation on the rights of disabled people, some marketers are starting to take notice of the estimated 10-15 per cent of the population who have some kind of disability. Initiatives include special phone numbers for hearing-impaired customers and assistance services for disabled people. IBM and Nissan have also used disabled actors in their advertising campaigns.³⁷ Mattel Inc., which produces Barbie, launched a sister doll, Becky, in a wheelchair – a reflection of the growing awareness of the disabled population in society.

Even then, the problem of specifying the relevant borders arises. Cultural borders do not always follow national borders. Although national borders are still very important for distinguishing between cultures, there may be important regional differences within a country, as well as cultural overlap between two countries.³⁸ Add to this immigration and the import of foreign (often American) cultural phenomena, and you begin to understand why it is very difficult to talk about European countries as being culturally homogeneous. For example, it is important to distinguish between, say, Dutch *society* with all its multicultural traits and Dutch *culture*, which may be one, albeit dominant, cultural element in Dutch society. Furthermore, Dutch culture (as is the case with all cultures) is not a *static* but a *dynamic* phenomenon, which changes over time and from contact, interaction and integration with other cultures.

Relationship marketing: building bonds with consumers

Marketers are carefully defining customer segments and listening to people as never before. Many of them have realized that the key to success is building lifetime relationships between brands and customers. Marketers who believe in this philosophy – so-called **relationship marketing** – are making an effort to keep in touch with their customers on a regular basis, and are giving them reasons to maintain a bond with the company over time. Various types of membership of retail outlets, petrol companies and co-operative movements illustrate this. One co-operative chain offers reductions to

its members on such diverse goods as travelling, clothing, home appliances, electronics and garden furniture.³⁹ A new trend is to form consortia of diverse companies from different sectors, such as supermarkets, banks, petrol retailers, telecommunications and the entertainment and leisure industry. The consortium then issues a loyalty card to help secure a stable clientele.⁴⁰

Some companies establish these ties by offering services that are appreciated by their customers. Many companies donate a small percentage of the purchase price to a charity such as the Red Cross or the World Wildlife Fund, or for the care of the poor and marginalized in society. This cements the relationship by giving customers an additional reason to continue buying the company's products year after year.

▶ **database marketing.** This involves tracking consumers' buying habits by computer and crafting products and information tailored precisely to people's wants and needs.

Keeping close tabs on their customers allows database marketers to monitor their preferences and communicate with those who show an interest in their products or services. Information is passed to the appropriate division for follow-up. DVD online rental companies such as ScreenSelect in the UK and Web.DE in Germany are testing a system that makes recommendations based on a consumer's prior rentals and offers special promotions based on these choices.⁴¹ However, some consumers feel threatened by this kind of surveillance and resist such marketing efforts. Hence, attempts have been made to ensure that database marketing conforms to the requirements of respondent confidentiality.⁴²

■ MARKETING'S IMPACT ON CONSUMERS

For better or worse, we live in a world that is significantly influenced by marketers. We are surrounded by marketing stimuli in the form of advertisements, shops and products competing for our attention and our cash. Much of what we learn about the world is filtered by marketers, whether through conspicuous consumption depicted in glamorous magazine advertising or via the roles played by family figures in TV commercials. Ads show us how we ought to act with regard to recycling, alcohol consumption and even the types of house or car we aspire to. In many ways we are at the mercy of marketers, since we rely on them to sell us products that are safe and perform as promised, to tell us the truth about what they are selling, and to price and distribute these products fairly.

Popular culture

▶ **Popular culture**, the music, films, sports, books and other forms of entertainment consumed by the mass market, is both a product of and an inspiration for marketers. Our lives are also affected in more fundamental ways, ranging from how we acknowledge social events such as marriages, deaths or holidays to how we view societal issues such as air pollution, gambling and addiction. The football World Cup, Christmas shopping, tourism, newspaper recycling, cigarette smoking and Barbie dolls are all examples of products and activities that touch many of us in our lives.

Marketing's role in the creation and communication of popular culture is especially emphasized in this book. This cultural influence is hard to ignore, although many people fail to appreciate the extent to which their view of the world – their film and music icons, the latest fashions in clothing, food and interior design, and even the physical features that they find attractive or not in sexual partners – is influenced by the marketing system. Product placement, whereby products and brands are exposed in popular films or TV series, or sponsorships of various mediated or live events such as concerts or quizzes, are examples of companies' new ways to command our attention. How about sleeping in

your own culture, even when you're travelling abroad? Holland International's travel catalogue offers Dutch tourists the opportunity to sleep in 'Amsterdam canal houses' or 'farm village cottages' complete with Dutch traditional foods, and they can even register for their room at the reception desk using the Dutch language. All the comforts of home . . . in Turkey!⁴³

Consider the product characters that marketers use to create a personality for their products. From the Michelin Man to Ronald McDonald, popular culture is peopled with fictional heroes. In fact, it is likely that more consumers will recognize characters such as these than can identify former prime ministers, captains of industry or artists. They may not exist, but many of us feel that we 'know' them, and they certainly are effective *spokes-characters* for the products they promote. If you don't believe it, visit www.toymuseum.com.

The meaning of consumption

One of the fundamental premises of consumer behaviour is that people often buy products not for what they do, but for what they *mean*.⁴⁴ This principle does not imply that a product's primary function is unimportant, but rather that the roles products play and the **meaning** that they have in our lives go well beyond the tasks they perform. The deeper meanings of a product may help it to stand out from other, similar goods and services – all things being equal, a person will choose the brand that has an image (or even a personality!) consistent with his or her underlying ideas.

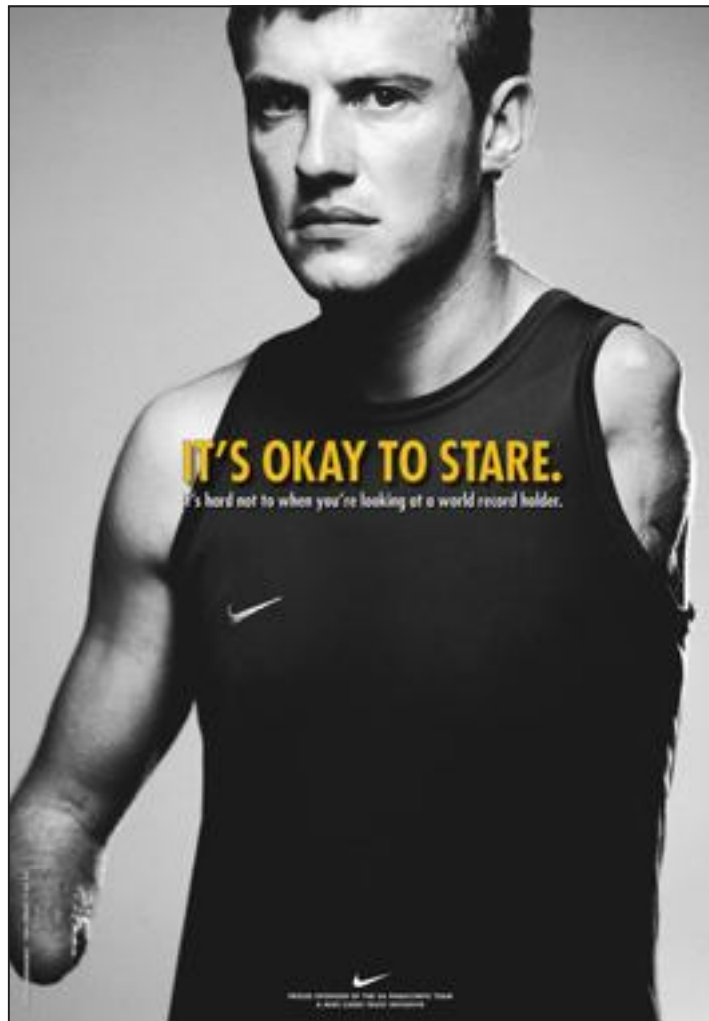
For example, although most people probably can't run faster or jump higher if they are wearing Nikes rather than Reeboks, many diehard loyalists swear by their favourite brand. These arch-rivals are marketed in terms of their image – meanings that have been carefully crafted with the help of legions of rock stars, athletes, slickly produced commercials – and many millions of dollars. So, when you buy a Nike 'swoosh' you may be doing more than choosing footwear – you may also be making a lifestyle statement about the type of person you are, or want to be. For a relatively simple item made of leather and laces, that's quite a feat!

As we have already seen, the hallmark of marketing strategies at the beginning of the twenty-first century is an emphasis on building relationships with customers. The nature of these relationships can vary, and these bonds help us to understand some of the possible meanings products have for us. Here are some of the types of relationship a person may have with a product:⁴⁵

- *Self-concept attachment* – the product helps to establish the user's identity.
- *Nostalgic attachment* – the product serves as a link with a past self.
- *Interdependence* – the product is a part of the user's daily routine.
- *Love* – the product elicits bonds of warmth, passion or other strong emotion.

One American consumer researcher has developed a classification scheme in an attempt to explore the different ways that products and experiences can provide meaning to people.⁴⁶ This consumption typology was derived from a two-year analysis of supporters of a baseball team, but it is easily transferable to the European context. This perspective views consumption as a type of action in which people make use of consumption objects in a variety of ways. Focusing on an event such as a football match is a useful reminder that when we refer to consumption, we are talking about intangible experiences, ideas and services (the thrill of a goal or the antics of a team mascot) in addition to tangible objects (like the food and drink consumed at the stadium). This analysis identified four distinct types of consumption activities:

- 1 *Consuming as experience* – when the consumption is a personal emotional or aesthetic goal in itself. This would include activities like the pleasure derived from learning



People with disabilities are beginning to be a more common focus of advertising messages, as exemplified by this South African ad for Nike.

© The Jupiter Drawing Room (South Africa)

how to interpret the offside rule, or appreciating the athletic ability of a favourite player.

- 2 *Consuming as integration* – using and manipulating consumption objects to express aspects of the self. For example, some fans express their solidarity with the team by identifying with, say, the mascot and adopting some of its characteristic traits. Attending matches in person rather than watching them on TV allows the fan to integrate his or her experience more completely with his/her self – the feeling of 'having been there'.
- 3 *Consuming as classification* – the activities that consumers engage in to communicate their association with objects, both to self and to others. For example, spectators might dress up in the team's colours and buy souvenirs to demonstrate to others that they are diehard fans. Unfortunately, the more hard core express their contempt for opponents' supporters violently. There is a profound 'us' and 'them' dichotomy present here.
- 4 *Consuming as play* – consumers use objects to participate in a mutual experience and merge their identities with that of a group. For example, happy fans might scream in unison and engage in an orgy of jumping and hugging when their team scores a goal – this is a different dimension of shared experience compared with watching the game at home.

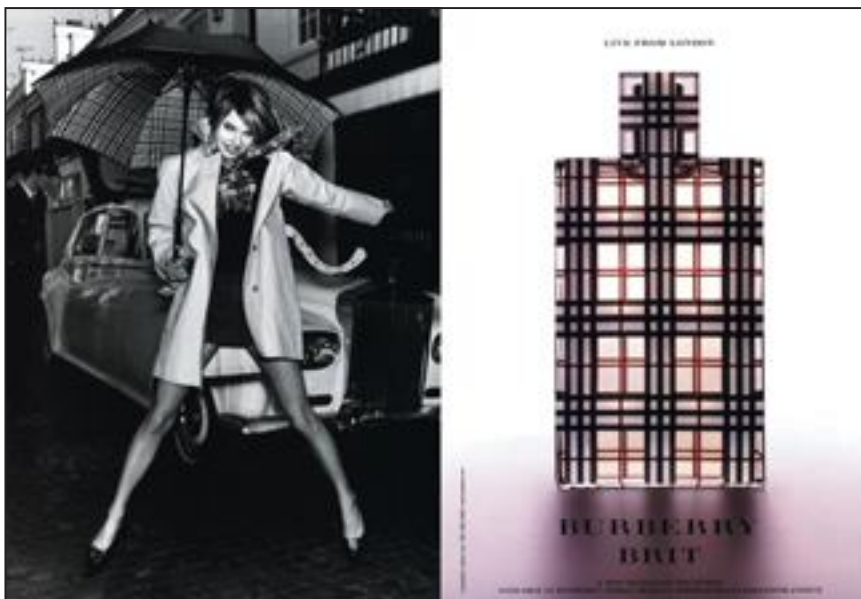
The global consumer

By 2006, the majority of people on earth will live in urban centres – the number of megacities, defined as urban centres of 10 million or more, is projected to grow to 26 in 2015.⁴⁷

- One highly visible – and controversial – by-product of sophisticated marketing strategies is the movement towards a **global consumer culture**, in which people are united by their common devotion to brand-name consumer goods, film stars and rock stars.⁴⁸ Some products in particular have become so associated with an American lifestyle that they are prized possessions around the world. In Chapters 16 and 17 we will pay special attention to the good and bad aspects of this cultural homogenization.⁴⁹

On the other hand, popular culture continues to evolve as products and styles from different cultures mix and merge in new and interesting ways. For example, although superstars from the USA and the UK dominate the worldwide music industry, there is a movement afoot to include more diverse styles and performers. In Europe, local music acts are grabbing a larger share of the market and pushing international (that is, English-speaking) acts down the charts. Revenue from Spanish-language music has quadrupled in five years.

A 'cousin' of the global consumer is the much debated Euro-consumer. Marketing researchers are heavily involved in a debate about the possibilities of finding market segments that are European rather than national in character. In a study on the consumption of luxury goods, it was concluded that one could draw a demographic portrait of the average European consumer of luxury goods. However, important differences between the countries were also detected. Consumers who expressed more positive attitudes towards cultural change were also more likely to consume luxury goods, independent of their demographics and social class.⁵⁰ Given these findings, it is questionable how much is gained from working with the concept of the Euro-consumer in terms of segment description. For a product such as cars, which intuitively and in terms of functionality would seem relatively easy to market as a European-wide product, the models still appear in a variety of versions to suit particular national needs and wants. The Euro-consumer will be discussed in detail in Chapter 16.



The Burberry brand ties the traditional with the modern by placing a Rolls Royce in the background, with fashion model Stella Tennant in the foreground, showing the Burberry plaids.

The Advertising Archives

Marketing ethics

In business, conflicts often arise between the goal to succeed in the marketplace and the desire to conduct business honestly and maximize the well-being of consumers by providing them with safe and effective products and services. Some people argue that by the time people reach university, secondary school or are actually employed by companies, it is a little late to start teaching them ethics! Still, many universities and corporations are now focusing very intently on teaching and reinforcing ethical behaviour.

Prescribing ethical standards of conduct

Professional organizations often devise a code of ethics for their members. For example, European or national consumer protection laws or various national marketing associations' codes of ethics provide guidelines for conduct in many areas of marketing practice. These include:

- Disclosure of all substantial risks associated with a product or service.
- Identification of added features that will increase the cost.
- Avoidance of false or misleading advertising.
- Rejection of high-pressure or misleading sales tactics.
- Prohibition of selling or fund-raising under the guise of conducting market research.

Socially responsible behaviour

Whether intentionally or not, some marketers do violate their bond of trust with consumers. In some cases these actions are illegal, as when a manufacturer deliberately mislabels the contents of a package or a retailer adopts a 'bait-and-switch' selling strategy, whereby consumers are lured into the store with promises of inexpensive products with the sole intention of getting them to switch to higher-priced goods. A similar problematic issue of the luring of consumers is the case of misleading claims, for instance on food product labels.⁵¹ For example, what about a label such as '100 per cent fat-free strawberry jam'?

In other cases, marketing practices have detrimental effects on society even though they are not explicitly illegal. The introduction of so-called alcopops, a mix of alcohol and soda or lemonade, targeted more or less explicitly at the teen market, has caused considerable debate in various European countries. Following negative press coverage, sales have gone down in Sweden and the UK, and the two largest retail chains in Denmark withdrew these drinks from their product range.⁵² Others have run into difficulties by sponsoring commercials depicting groups of people in an unfavourable light to get the attention of a target market. One may recall the heated debate as to whether Benetton's advertising campaigns are attempts to sensitize consumers to the world's real problems, as the company contends, or to exploit unfortunate people – as in the ads depicting an AIDS victim, a dead Croat soldier or a ship packed with Albanian refugees – in order to sell more Benetton clothing.⁵³

A crucial barometer of ethical behaviour is what actions a marketer takes once a company is made aware of a problem with its advertising or products. In 1996 a Danish hypermarket chain, which for years had run a campaign guaranteeing the lowest prices compared to competitors, was involved in a scandal when it was discovered that employees were under instruction to change price tags just before a newspaper journalist checked them.⁵⁴

In contrast, Procter & Gamble voluntarily withdrew its Rely tampons following reports of women who had suffered toxic shock syndrome (TSS) after using them. Although scientists did not claim a causal link between Rely and the onset of TSS, the company agreed to undertake extensive advertising notifying women of the symptoms of TSS and asking them to return their boxes of Rely for a refund. The company took a

\$75 million loss and sacrificed an unusually successful new product which had already captured about 25 per cent of the huge sanitary product market.⁵⁵

Faced with the rising phenomenon of the 'political consumer' – a consumer who expresses his or her political and ethical viewpoints by selecting and avoiding products from companies which are antithetical to these viewpoints – the industry is increasingly coming to realize that ethical behaviour is also good business in the long run, since the trust and satisfaction of consumers translates into years of loyalty from customers. However, many problems remain. Throughout this book, ethical issues related to the practice of marketing are highlighted. Special boxes headed 'Marketing pitfall' feature dubious marketing practices or the possible adverse effects on consumers of certain marketing strategies.



marketing pitfall

Women for s@le! The charge against abuse of marketing techniques has taken on new dimensions with the rise of the internet. Would you like to buy a Latvian girl for escort service? Or a Russian bride by mail order? The trade in women from eastern Europe, Asia or Latin America has reached new heights with the easier contact made possible by the internet. Obvious problems are created by the difficulty of distinguishing between serious marriage bureaus or au pair agencies on the one side and organized traders of women for various kinds of prostitution services on the other. According to human rights organizations, many women who believe that they are going to marry the prince of their lives end up as 'sexual services workers', sometimes under slavery-like conditions.⁵⁶

Public policy and consumerism

- Public concern for the welfare of consumers has been an issue since at least the beginning of the twentieth century. This is normally referred to as **consumer policy**. Partly as a result of consumers' efforts, many national and international agencies have been established to oversee consumer-related activities. Consumers themselves continue to have a lively interest in consumer-related issues, ranging from environmental concerns, such as pollution caused by oil spills or toxic waste, the use of additives and genetically manipulated material in food and so on, to excessive violence and sex on television.

Consumer research and consumer welfare

The field of consumer behaviour can play an important role in improving our lives as consumers.⁵⁷ Many researchers play a role in formulating or evaluating public policies, such as ensuring that products are labelled accurately, that people can comprehend important information presented in advertising, or that children are not exploited by programme-length toy commercials masquerading as television shows.

Of course, to a large degree consumers are dependent on their governments to regulate and police safety and environmental standards. The extent of supervision may depend on such factors as the national political and cultural climate. Debates within the EU concerning regulation of the use of pesticides and food additives are examples here. In addition, a country's traditions and beliefs may make it more sympathetic to one or the other point of view expressed by consumers or producers. For example, the cross-Atlantic debate concerning market acceptance of genetically modified food products has also given rise to research about consumers' attitudes toward the acceptability and labelling of such products.⁵⁸

- There is also a growing movement to develop knowledge about **social marketing**, which attempts to encourage such positive behaviours as increased literacy and to discourage negative activities such as drink-driving.⁵⁹ A project in Sweden aimed at curbing adolescent drinking illustrates social marketing at work. The Swedish Brewers'

Table 1.2 EU priorities for consumer policy

Ten major priorities for the future development of consumer policy have been defined by the European Commission:

- Major improvement in the education and information of consumers
- Completion, review and updating of the legislative framework to protect consumer interests in the internal market
- Review of the consumer aspects of financial services
- Review of the protection of consumer interests in the supply of essential public utility services
- Helping consumers to benefit from the information society
- Improving consumer confidence in foodstuffs
- Practical encouragement of sustainable consumption
- Strengthening and increasing consumer representation
- Helping the development of consumer policies in central and eastern Europe
- Review of consumer policy in developing countries.

Source: European Commission, www.cec.org.uk (accessed 25 July 2005).

Association is investing 10 million Skr (about \$7.5 million) in a cooperative effort with the Swedish Non-Violence Project to change teens' attitudes to alcohol consumption. Consumer researchers working on the project discovered that Swedish adolescents freely admit that they 'drink in order to get drunk' and enjoy the feeling of being intoxicated, so persuading them to give up alcohol is a formidable task. However, the teens reported that they are also afraid of losing control over their own behaviour, especially if there is a risk of their being exposed to violence. And while worries about the long-term health effects of drinking don't concern this group (after all, at this age many believe they will live forever), female adolescents reported a fear of becoming less attractive as a result of prolonged alcohol consumption.



This German ad for Unicef makes a statement about the problem of child labour.

© German National Committee for UNICEF and Springer & Jacoby Fuenfte Werbeagentur GmbH & Co. KG. Photo: Jan Burwick

Based on these findings, the group commissioned to execute this project decided to stress a more realistic message of 'drink if you want to, but within a safe limit. Don't lose control, because if you do, you might get yourself into violent situations.' They made up the motto 'Alco-hole in your head' to stress the importance of knowing one's limits. This message is being emphasized along with strong visual images that appear on billboards, in video spots that depict situations involving young drinkers getting out of control, and in school presentations given by young people who will be credible role models for teens.⁶⁰

■ DO MARKETERS MANIPULATE CONSUMERS?

One of the most common and stinging criticisms of marketing is that marketing techniques (especially advertising) are responsible for convincing consumers that they 'need' many material goods and that they will be unhappy and somehow inferior if they do not have these 'necessities'. The issue is complex, and one that is certainly worth considering: do marketers give people what they want, or do they tell people what they ought to want?

Philosophers have approached this issue when considering the concept of free will. It has been argued that in order to claim that consumers are acting autonomously in response to ads, the capacity for free will and free action must be present. That is, the consumer must be capable of deciding *independently* what to do, and not be prevented from carrying out that decision. This, it has been argued, is probably true for purely informative advertising, where only the product or store information required to make a rational decision is provided, whereas the case for advertising where imagery or underlying motivations are tapped is not as clear.⁶¹ Such a view presupposes that informative advertising is somehow more objective than imagery-based advertising. But functionality and utility are also important images of a specific cultural context that uses references to our reason to seduce us.⁶² Three issues related to the complex relationship between marketing practices and consumers' needs are considered here.

Do marketers create artificial needs?

The marketing system has come under fire from both ends of the political spectrum. On the one hand, some conservative traditionalists believe that advertising contributes to the moral breakdown of society by presenting images of hedonistic pleasure. On the other hand, some leftists argue that the same misleading promises of material pleasure function to buy off people who would otherwise be revolutionaries working to change the system.⁶³ Through advertising, then, the system creates demand that only its products can satisfy.

One possible response to such criticism is that a need is a basic biological motive, while a want represents one way that society has taught us that the need can be satisfied. For example, while thirst is biologically based, we are taught to want Coca-Cola to satisfy that thirst rather than, say, goat's milk. Thus, the need is already there: marketers simply recommend ways to satisfy it. A basic objective of advertising is to create awareness that these needs exist, rather than to create them.

However, marketers are important engineers of our environment. And beyond the level of banality, needs are always formed by the social environment. Thus, in a sense, needs are always 'artificial' because we are interested in needs only in their social form. Alternatively, needs are never artificial because they are always 'real' to the people who feel them. 'Needs' are something we are socialized to have. In the case of the Coca-Cola vs. goat's milk example, it should be remembered that we do not eat and drink solely to satisfy a biological need. We eat and drink for a number of reasons, all of them embedded in our cultural context. What is the need of a sofa? A TV? A car? A textbook



This ad was created by the American Association of Advertising Agencies to counter charges that ads create artificial needs. Compare this message with the Marketing opportunity on page 23. What is your conclusion?

American Association of Advertising Agencies

on consumer behaviour? Thus, a better response would be that marketers do not create artificial needs, but they do contribute heavily to the socialization of people in contemporary society and thus to the establishment of the *social* system of needs. Consequently, marketers must take a share of responsibility for the development of society.

Is advertising necessary?

As the social commentator Vance Packard wrote nearly 50 years ago, 'Large-scale efforts are being made, often with impressive success, to channel our unthinking habits, our purchasing decisions, and our thought processes by the use of insights gleaned from psychiatry and the social sciences.'⁶⁴ The economist John Kenneth Galbraith believed that radio and television are important tools to accomplish this manipulation of the masses. Since virtually no literacy is required to use these media, they allow repetitive and compelling communications to reach almost everyone.

Goods are arbitrarily linked to desirable social attributes. One influential critic even argued that the problem is that we are not materialistic enough – that is, we do not sufficiently value goods for the utilitarian functions they deliver, but instead focus on the irrational value of goods for what they symbolize. According to this view, 'Beer would be enough for us, without the additional promise that in drinking it we show ourselves

to be manly, young at heart, or neighbourly. A washing machine would be a useful machine to wash clothes, rather than an indication that we are forward-looking or an object of envy to our neighbours.⁶⁵

Such arguments seem somewhat outdated at the beginning of the twenty-first century, when advertising has been embraced as an art form in itself. Today, children are brought up to be both consumers and readers of advertising. A predominantly functional approach to consumption, as in the former planned economies of eastern Europe, did not make people happier, nor did it prevent them from establishing mythologies about other goods, such as the scarce and expensive ones from the West. Advertisers, just like marketers, are important communicators. Their importance must be accompanied by a sense of responsibility concerning the social and individual effect of their messages.



**marketing
opportunity**

As eastern European countries turn into market economies, some fear that consumers are being exploited as Western advertisements bombard them with products they didn't know they needed. In Poland, for example, previously taboo items like women's sanitary towels are being advertised for the first time, and new markets are being created for products such as pet food. The actions of one Polish entrepreneur illustrate how a consumer's search for social approval can be channelled into a want for a product.

Beginning with an ad campaign featuring Miss Poland, he single-handedly created a market for electronic hair removers (Polish women usually did not shave their legs). He also persuaded a leading Polish fashion designer to announce that hairy legs were out of fashion in Europe, and he organized local beauty contests to find the best legs. At the last report, he was selling 30,000 hair removers a month.⁶⁶

Do marketers promise miracles?

Consumers are led to believe via advertising that products have magical properties; they will do special and mysterious things for them that will transform their lives. They will be beautiful, have power over others' feelings, be successful, be relieved of all ills, and so on. In this respect, advertising functions as mythology does in primitive societies: it provides simple, anxiety-reducing answers to complex problems. Is this a problem in itself?

Yes and no. The consumer is not an automaton that will react in a predefined way to certain stimuli. On the other hand, we are all partly socialized by the market and its messages. So, whereas the manipulative effectiveness of advertising is often overstated, there is little doubt that advertising creates and changes patterns of consumption. This is especially so in the new market economies, where the population does not maintain the same distance from and critical attitude to advertising messages and imagery.

But the effect is in general more subtle than simple manipulative persuasion. In most cases, advertisers simply do not know enough about people to manipulate them directly. Consider that the failure rate for new products ranges from 40 to 80 per cent. The main effect of advertising may often be found on the more general level, in the promotion of the idea that your self and your personal relationships, your success and your image all depend on your consumer choices.

■ CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR AS A FIELD OF STUDY

Although people have been consumers for a very long time, it is only recently that consumption per se has been the focus of formal study. In fact, while many business schools now require that marketing students take a consumer behaviour course, most universities and business schools did not even offer such a course until the 1970s. Much of the

impetus for the attention now being given to consumer behaviour was the realization by many business people that the consumer really *is* the boss.

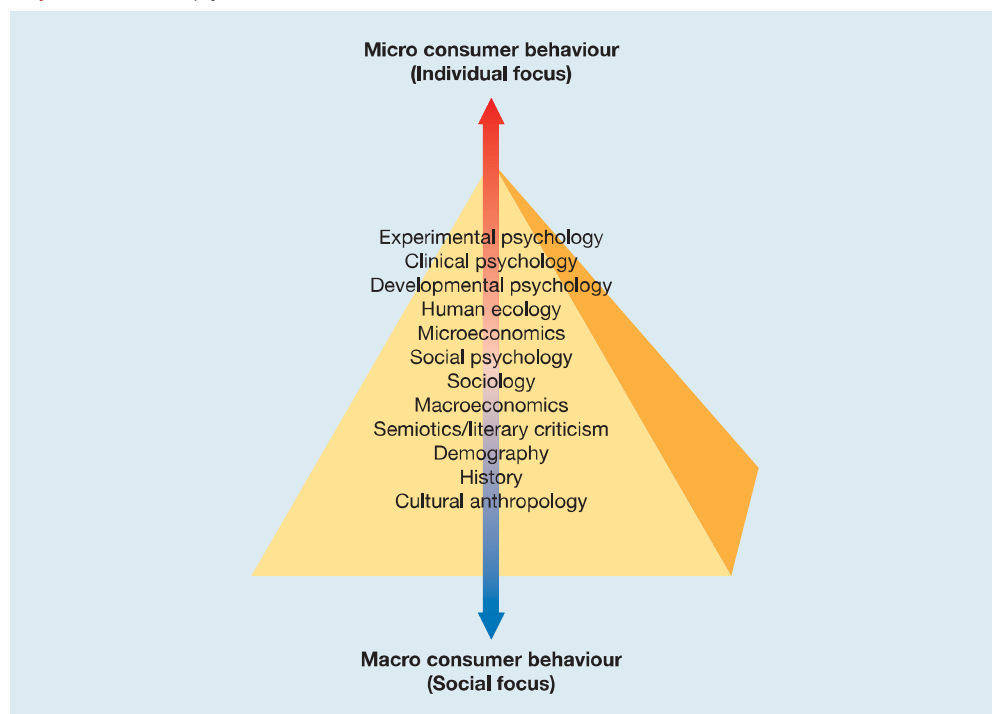
Interdisciplinary influences on the study of consumer behaviour

Consumer behaviour is a very new field and, as it grows, it is being influenced by many different perspectives. Indeed, it is hard to think of a field that is more interdisciplinary. People with a background in a very wide range of fields – from psychophysiology to literature – can now be found doing consumer research. Consumer researchers are employed by universities, manufacturers, museums, advertising agencies and governments. Professional groups, such as the Association for Consumer Research, have been formed since the mid-1970s, and European academics and practitioners are major contributors to the growing literature on consumer behaviour.

Researchers approach consumer issues from different perspectives. You might remember a fable about blind men and an elephant. The gist of the story is that each man touched a different part of the animal, and, as a result, the descriptions each gave of the elephant were quite different. This analogy applies to consumer research as well. A similar consumer phenomenon can be studied in different ways and at different levels depending on the training and interests of the researchers studying it.

Figure 1.2 covers some of the disciplines in the field and the level at which each approaches research issues. These disciplines can be loosely characterized in terms of their focus on micro vs. macro consumer behaviour topics. The fields closer to the top of the pyramid concentrate on the individual consumer (micro issues), while those towards the base are more interested in the aggregate activities that occur among larger groups of people, such as consumption patterns shared by members of a culture or subculture (macro issues).

Figure 1.2 The pyramid of consumer behaviour



The issue of strategic focus

Many people regard the field of consumer behaviour as an applied social science. Accordingly, the value of the knowledge generated has traditionally been measured in terms of its ability to improve the effectiveness of marketing practice. Recently, though, some researchers have argued that consumer behaviour should not have a strategic focus at all; the field should not be a 'handmaiden to business'. It should instead focus on understanding consumption for its own sake, rather than because the knowledge can be applied by marketers.⁶⁷ This view is probably not held by most consumer researchers, but it has encouraged many to expand the scope of their work beyond the field's traditional focus on the purchase of consumer goods. And it has certainly led to some fierce debates among people working in the field! In fact, it can also be argued that business gets better research from non-strategic research projects because they are unbiased by strategic goals. Take a relatively simple and common consumer object like the women's magazine, found in every culture in a variety of versions. How much is there to say about the 'simple' act of buying such a magazine? Well, quite a lot. Table 1.3 lists some potential issues relevant for the marketing of or advertising in women's

Table 1.3 Interdisciplinary research issues in consumer behaviour

Disciplinary focus	Magazine usage sample research issues
Experimental Psychology: product role in perception, learning and memory processes	How specific aspects of magazines, such as their design or layout, are recognized and interpreted; which parts of a magazine are most likely to be read
Clinical Psychology: product role in psychological adjustment	How magazines affect readers' body images (e.g. do thin models make the average woman feel overweight?)
Microeconomics/Human Ecology: product role in allocation of individual or family resources	Factors influencing the amount of money spent on magazines in a household
Social Psychology: product role in the behaviours of individuals as members of social groups	Ways that ads in a magazine affect readers' attitudes towards the products depicted; how peer pressure influences a person's readership decisions
Sociology: product role in social institutions and group relationships	Pattern by which magazine preferences spread through a social group
Macroeconomics: product role in consumers' relations with the marketplace	Effects of the price of fashion magazines and expense of items advertised during periods of high unemployment
Semiotics/Literary Criticism: product role in the verbal and visual communication of meaning	Ways in which underlying messages communicated by models and ads in a magazine are interpreted
Demography: product role in the measurable characteristics of a population	Effects of age, income and marital status of a magazine's readers
History: product role in societal changes over time	Ways in which our culture's depictions of 'femininity' in magazines have changed over time
Cultural Anthropology: product role in a society's beliefs and practices	Ways in which fashions and models in a magazine affect readers' definitions of masculine vs. feminine behaviour (e.g. the role of working women, sexual taboos)

magazines which can be researched based on the variety of disciplines influencing consumer research.

This more critical view of consumer research has led to the recognition that not all consumer behaviour and/or marketing activity is necessarily beneficial to individuals or to society. As a result, current consumer research is likely to include attention to the 'dark side' of consumer behaviour, such as addiction, prostitution, homelessness, shoplifting or environmental waste. This activity builds upon the earlier work of researchers who, as we have seen, have studied consumer issues related to public policy, ethics and consumerism.

The issue of two perspectives on consumer research

- One general way to classify consumer research is in terms of the fundamental assumptions the researchers make about what they are studying and how to study it. This set of beliefs is known as a **paradigm**. Like other fields of study, consumer behaviour is dominated by a paradigm, but some believe it is in the middle of a *paradigm shift*, which occurs when a competing paradigm challenges the dominant set of assumptions.

- The basic set of assumptions underlying the dominant paradigm at this point in time is called **positivism**. This perspective has significantly influenced Western art and science since the late sixteenth century. It emphasizes that human reason is supreme and that there is a single, objective truth that can be discovered by science. Positivism encourages us to stress the function of objects, to celebrate technology and to regard the world as a rational, ordered place with a clearly defined past, present and future. Some feel that positivism puts too much emphasis on material well-being, and that its logical outlook is dominated by an ideology that stresses the homogeneous views of a predominantly Western and male culture.

- The newer paradigm of **interpretivism** questions these assumptions. Proponents of this perspective argue that our society places too much emphasis on science and technology, and that this ordered, rational view of consumers denies the complexity of the social and cultural world in which we live. Interpretivists stress the importance of symbolic, subjective experience, and the idea that meaning is in the mind – that is, we each construct our own meanings based on our unique and shared cultural experiences, so that there are no single right or wrong references. To the value we place on products, because they help us to create order in our lives, is added an appreciation of consumption as a set of diverse experiences.

The major differences between these two perspectives are summarized in Table 1.4.

Table 1.4 Positivist vs. interpretivist approaches to consumer behaviour

Assumptions	Positivist approach	Interpretivist approach
Nature of reality	Objective, tangible Single	Socially constructed Multiple
Goal	Prediction	Understanding
Knowledge generated	Time-free Context-independent	Time-bound Context-dependent
View of causality	Existence of real causes	Multiple, simultaneous shaping events
Research relationship	Separation between researcher and subject	Interactive, co-operative, with researcher being part of phenomenon under study

Source: Adapted from Laurel A. Hudson and Julie L. Ozanne, 'Alternative ways of seeking knowledge in consumer research', *Journal of Consumer Research* 14 (March 1988): 508-21. Reprinted with the permission of The University of Chicago Press.

In addition to the cross-cultural differences in consumer behaviour discussed earlier, it is also clear that research styles differ significantly between Europe and North America and also within European countries. For example, studies have shown that European researchers tend to consider the cultural dimension much more than their American counterparts.⁶⁸ Further, two special sessions at a European consumer research conference revealed that there seem to be important differences between the way consumer behaviour is conceived in Germany and Great Britain, for example.⁶⁹ A recent and more 'bridging' perspective on approaches to the study of consumer research argues that the study of particular consumption contexts are not an end in themselves, but rather that studying human behaviour in a consumption context is useful for generating new constructs and theoretical insights. This approach, consumer culture theory (CCT), embraces a variety of methodological approaches (used by both positivist and interpretivist), and recognizes that managers can make use of multiple methods to better understand trends in the marketplace, such as the complexities of lifestyle, multicultural marketing, and how consumers use media as part of their lives.⁷⁰

Consumer research is still moving on. From its original emphasis on buying behaviour and the factors influencing the decision-making process, the field gradually widened to become a study of consumer behaviour in a more general sense, also taking into consideration what happened before and after the purchase. After the introduction of the interpretivist approach, a broader research perspective has included many new and non-psychological facets in the increasingly complex portraits of consumers. And it can be argued that the field increasingly looks beyond the single individual and his or her social background and environment to describe and analyse the complex relationships that have led us to start characterizing our present society as a **consumer society**.⁷¹ The facts of living in a consumer society and being surrounded by consumer culture permeate this book but will be dealt with in more detail in Chapter 14.

■ CHAPTER SUMMARY

- Consumer behaviour is the study of the processes involved when individuals or groups select, purchase, use or dispose of products, services, ideas or experiences to satisfy needs and desires.
- A consumer may purchase, use and/or dispose of a product, but these functions may be performed by different people. In addition, consumers may be thought of as role players who need different products to help them play their various parts.
- Market segmentation is an important aspect of consumer behaviour. Consumers can be segmented along many dimensions, including product usage, demographics (the objective aspects of a population, such as age and sex) and psychographics (psychological and lifestyle characteristics). Emerging developments, such as the new emphasis on relationship marketing and the practice of database marketing, mean that marketers are much more attuned to the wants and needs of different consumer groups.
- Marketing activities exert an enormous impact on individuals. Consumer behaviour is relevant to our understanding of both public policy issues (e.g. ethical marketing practices) and of the dynamics of popular culture.
- It is often said that marketers create artificial needs. Although this criticism is oversimplified, it is true that marketers must accept their share of the responsibility for how society develops and what is considered necessary to have and what is acceptable, nice and fun to do within society.

- The field of consumer behaviour is interdisciplinary: it is composed of researchers from many different fields who share an interest in how people interact with the marketplace. These disciplines can be categorized by the degree to which their focus is micro (the individual consumer) or macro (the consumer as a member of groups or of the larger society).
- There are many perspectives on consumer behaviour, but research orientations can roughly be divided into two approaches. The positivist perspective, which currently dominates the field, emphasizes the objectivity of science and the consumer as a rational decision-maker. The interpretivist perspective, in contrast, stresses the subjective meaning of the consumer's individual experience and the idea that any behaviour is subject to multiple interpretations rather than one single explanation.

► KEY TERMS

Consumer behaviour (p. 5)

Consumer policy (p. 19)

Consumer society (p. 27)

Database marketing (p. 14)

Demographics (p. 9)

Exchange (p. 7)

Global consumer culture (p. 17)

Interpretivism (p. 26)

Market segmentation (p. 8)

Meaning (p. 15)

Paradigm (p. 26)

Popular culture (p. 14)

Positivism (p. 26)

Psychographics (p. 9)

Relationship marketing (p. 13)

Role theory (p. 6)

Social marketing (p. 19)



CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR CHALLENGE

- 1 This chapter states that people play different roles and that their consumption behaviours may differ depending on the particular role they are playing. State whether you agree or disagree with this perspective, giving examples from your own life.
- 2 Some researchers believe that the field of consumer behaviour should be a pure, rather than an applied, science. That is, research issues should be framed in terms of their scientific interest rather than their applicability to immediate marketing problems. Do you agree?
- 3 In recent years, there has been a large debate about the influence that internet shopping will have on our consumer lives. Try listing the changes that you personally have made in your buying and consumption patterns due to e-commerce. Compare these changes with changes experienced by other people from various social groups, e.g. somebody from your parents' generation, an IT freak, or somebody with a lower educational background.

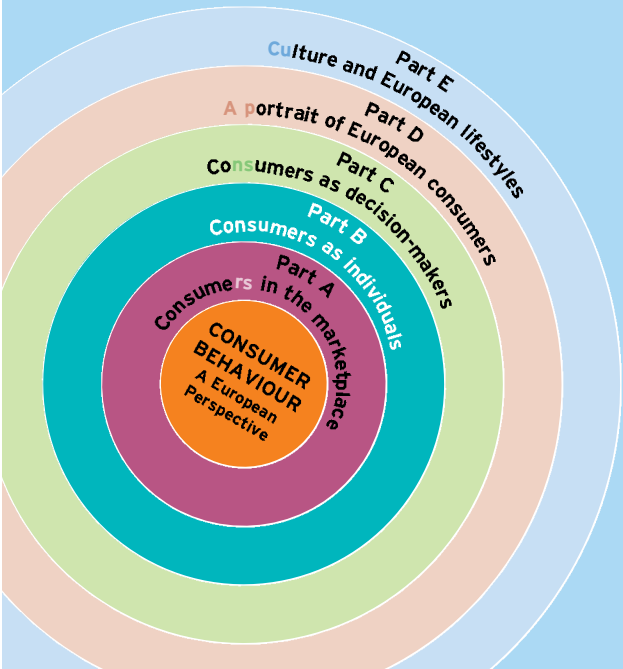
- 4 Name some products or services that are widely used by your social group. State whether you agree or disagree with the notion that these products help to form bonds within the group, and support your argument with examples from your list of products used by the group.
- 5 Although demographic information on large numbers of consumers is used in many marketing contexts, some people believe that the sale of data on customers' incomes, buying habits and so on constitutes an invasion of privacy and should be banned. Comment on this issue from both a consumer's and a marketer's point of view.
- 6 List the three stages in the consumption process. Describe the issues that you considered in each of these stages when you made a recent important purchase.
- 7 State the differences between the positivist and interpretivist approaches to consumer research. For each type of inquiry, give examples of product dimensions that would be more usefully explored using that type of research over the other.
- 8 What aspects of consumer behaviour are likely to be of interest to a financial planner? To a university administrator? To a graphic arts designer? To a social worker in a government agency? To a nursing instructor?
- 9 Select a product and brand that you use frequently and list what you consider to be the brand's determinant attributes. Without revealing your list, ask a friend who is approximately the same age but of the opposite sex to make a similar list for the same product (the brand may be different). Compare and contrast the identified attributes and report your findings.
- 10 Collect ads for five different brands of the same product. Report on the segmentation variables, target markets and emphasized product attributes in each ad.

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 - (3) voyages-sncf.com: 3,304,000 of which 43.6 per cent were women.
 - (4) Opodo: 2,193,000 of which 43.5 per cent were women.
 - (5) Yahoo! Travel: 1,748,000 of which 46.4 per cent were women.
 - (6) TUI: 1,726,000 of which 48.9 per cent were women.
 - (7) ebookers: 1,276,000 of which 51.0 per cent were women.
 - (8) eDreams: 1,217,000 of which 42.5 per cent were women.
 - (9) Virgin Travel: 1,190,000 of which 46.2 per cent were women.
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2
Perception

3
Learning
and
memory

CONSUMERS AS INDIVIDUALS

B

part

In this part, we focus on the internal dynamics of consumers. While 'no man is an island', each of us is to some degree a self-contained receptor for information from the outside world. We are constantly confronted with advertising messages, products, other people persuading us to buy, and reflections of ourselves. Each chapter in this part will consider a different aspect of the consumer - sensations, memories and attitudes - that is invisible to others.

Chapter 2 describes the process of perception, in which information from the outside world about products and other people is absorbed by the individual and interpreted. Chapter 3 focuses on the ways this information is stored mentally and how it adds to our existing knowledge about the world as it is learned. Chapter 4 discusses our reasons or motivations for absorbing this information and how particular needs and wants influence the way we think about products.

Chapters 5 and 6 discuss how attitudes - our evaluations of all these products, ad messages, and so on - are formed and (sometimes) changed by marketers. When all of these 'internal' parts are put together, the unique role of each individual consumer as a self-contained agent in the marketplace will become clear. The last chapter in this part, Chapter 7, further explores how our views about ourselves affect what we do, want and buy.

4

Motivation,
values and
involvement

5

Attitudes

6

Attitude
change and
interactive
communications

7

The self

Case studies

1-4

the 1990s, the number of people in the world who are under 15 years of age is expected to increase from 1.2 billion to 1.5 billion.

As the world's population grows, the demand for food and other resources will increase. This will put pressure on the environment and on the world's food supply.

One way to meet this demand is to increase the amount of food that is produced. This can be done by using more land for agriculture, or by increasing the productivity of the land that is already being used.

Another way to meet this demand is to reduce the amount of food that is wasted. This can be done by improving the way that food is stored and distributed, or by changing the way that people eat.

There are many other ways to meet the world's growing demand for food and other resources. It is up to us to decide which way is the best.

One of the most important things we can do is to make sure that we are using our resources wisely. This means that we need to be careful about how we use the land, the water, and the other resources that we have.

Another important thing we can do is to make sure that we are producing food in a way that is sustainable. This means that we need to make sure that we are not using more resources than we can replace.

There are many other things that we can do to help meet the world's growing demand for food and other resources. It is up to us to decide which way is the best.

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PERCEPTION



Fabienne is a 35-year-old mother of two and works at the French National Railway Company's headquarters in Lyon Part Dieu. Twice a week she uses her two-hour lunch break to go to the nearby shopping centre, the biggest in Lyons. Today she had just two things in mind: a quick bite to eat and a present for her son, Georges-Hubert. As she enters the shopping centre she is immediately drawn to the appetizing aroma of pizza coming from a nearby fast-food restaurant. She decides to stop and buy a slice and a small bottle of mineral water. Next she decides to go to a shop called Nature et Découvertes, the French version of the Californian Nature

Company. She has never been there before, but Catherine, her 14-year-old daughter, says that all her friends are talking about it. It seems to be the perfect place to buy a small microscope for Georges-Hubert's birthday.

On entering the shop she is very surprised. As in all shops her eyes are immediately and highly stimulated, but what makes this shop different is that there is more to it than that: all five of her senses are appealed to. The background music lets Fabienne discover birdsong, the sound of the forest, nature itself. As she is able to handle the products, Fabienne can familiarize herself with new shapes, new materials. An appeal is also made to her sense of taste when she is offered a cup of herbal tea. Finally, the natural aromas from the woods and plants combined with synthetic aromatics recreate the delicious atmosphere of the undergrowth to appeal to her sense of smell.

Fabienne likes the shop very much and for half an hour loses all sense of time. She wanders round as if in a trance. When she finally goes to the cash desk she realizes that not only does she have the little microscope in her hands, but a candle as well, and a book on trees.

PATRICK HETZEL, University of Paris II, Panthéon-Assas

■ INTRODUCTION

We live in a world overflowing with sensations. Wherever we turn, we are bombarded by a symphony of colours, sounds and odours. Some of the 'notes' in this symphony occur naturally, such as the barking of a dog, the shadows of the evening sky or the heady smell of a rose bush. Others come from people; the person sitting next to you might have dyed blonde hair, bright pink jeans, and be wearing enough perfume to make your eyes water.

Marketers certainly contribute to this commotion. Consumers are never far from advertisements, product packages, radio and television commercials, and advertising hoardings that clamour for their attention. Each of us copes with this bombardment by paying attention to some stimuli and screening out others. When we do make a decision to purchase, we are responding not only to these influences but to our interpretations of them. The aim of *Nature et Découvertes* is to open the doors to the emotions, to a sense of wonder, to get in touch with one's capacity for pleasure. Unlike many other sales outlets there is a determined motivation to create sensory effects to the utmost, to play on all five senses simultaneously. In a situation like this, the appeal is not so much to Fabienne's mind as to her perceptions, her emotions.

This chapter focuses on the process of perception, in which sensations are absorbed by the consumer and used to interpret the surrounding world. After discussing the stages of this process, the chapter examines how the five senses (sight, smell, sound, touch and taste) affect consumers. It also highlights some of the ways in which marketers develop products and communications that appeal to the senses.

The chapter emphasizes that the way in which a marketing stimulus is presented plays a role in determining whether the consumer will make sense of it or even notice it at all. The techniques and marketing practices that make messages more likely to be noticed are discussed. Finally, the chapter discusses the process of interpretation, in which the stimuli that are noticed by the consumer are organized and assigned meaning.

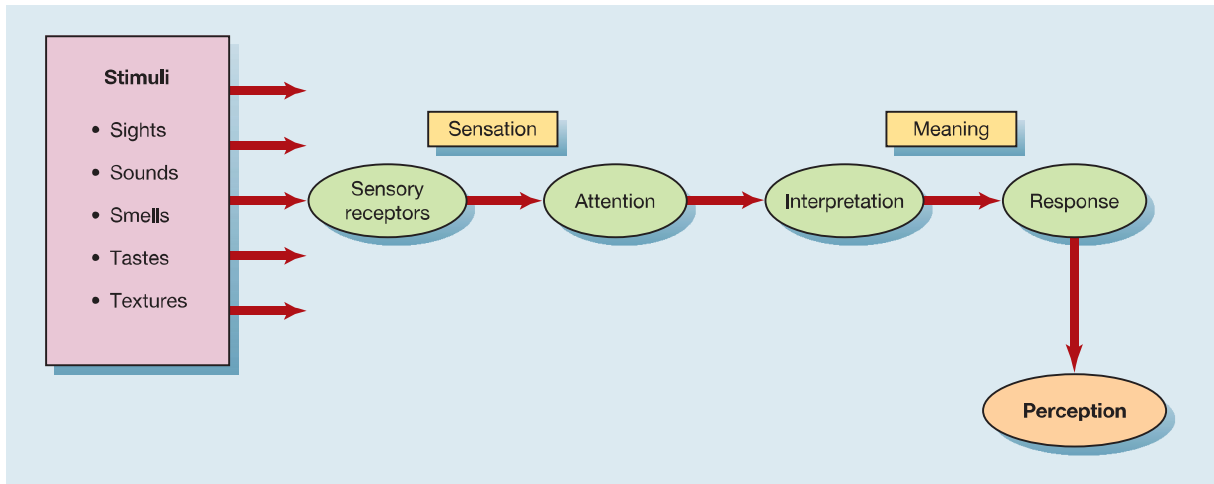
■ THE PERCEPTUAL PROCESS

As you sit in a lecture hall, you may find your attention shifting. One minute you are concentrating on the lecture, and in the next, you catch yourself daydreaming about the weekend ahead before you realize that you are missing some important points and tune back into the lecture.

People undergo stages of information processing in which stimuli are input and stored. However, we do not passively process whatever information happens to be present. Only a very small number of the stimuli in our environment are ever noticed. Of these, an even smaller number are attended to. And the stimuli that do enter our consciousness are not processed objectively. The meaning of a stimulus is interpreted by the individual, who is influenced by his or her unique biases, needs and experiences. These three stages of *exposure (or sensation)*, *attention* and *interpretation* make up the process of perception. The stages involved in selecting and interpreting stimuli are illustrated in Figure 2.1, which provides an overview of the perceptual process.

From sensation to perception

- ▶ **Sensation** refers to the immediate response of our sensory receptors (e.g. eyes, ears, nose, mouth, fingers) to such basic stimuli as light, colour and sound. **Perception** is the process by which these stimuli are selected, organized and interpreted. We process raw data (sensation); however, the study of perception focuses on what we add to or take away from these sensations as we assign meaning to them.

Figure 2.1 An overview of the perceptual process

The subjective nature of perception is demonstrated by a controversial advertisement developed for Benetton. Because a black man and a white man were handcuffed together, the ad was the target of many complaints about racism after it appeared in magazines and on hoardings, even though the company has a reputation for promoting racial tolerance. People interpreted it to mean that the black man had been arrested by a white man.¹ Even though both men are dressed identically, people's prior assumptions shaped the ad's meaning. Of course, the company's goal was exactly that: to expose us to our own perceptual prejudice through the ambiguity of the photo.

- ▶ Such interpretations or assumptions stem from **schemas**, or organized collections of beliefs and feelings. That is, we tend to group the objects we see as having similar characteristics, and the schema to which an object is assigned is a crucial determinant of how we choose to evaluate this object at a later time.

The perceptual process can be illustrated by the purchase of a new aftershave. We have learned to equate aftershave with romantic appeal, so we search for cues that (we believe) will increase our attractiveness. We make our selection by considering such



One in a series of controversial ads from Benetton, trying to expose our prejudice to ourselves.

Handcuffs - © Copyright 1989
Benetton Group S.p.A. Photo: Oliviero
Toscani

factors as the image associated with each alternative and the design of the bottle, as well as the actual scent. We thus access a small portion of the raw data available and process it to be consistent with our wants. These expectations are largely affected by our cultural background. For example, a male consumer self-conscious about his masculinity may react negatively to an overtly feminine brand name, even though other men may respond differently.

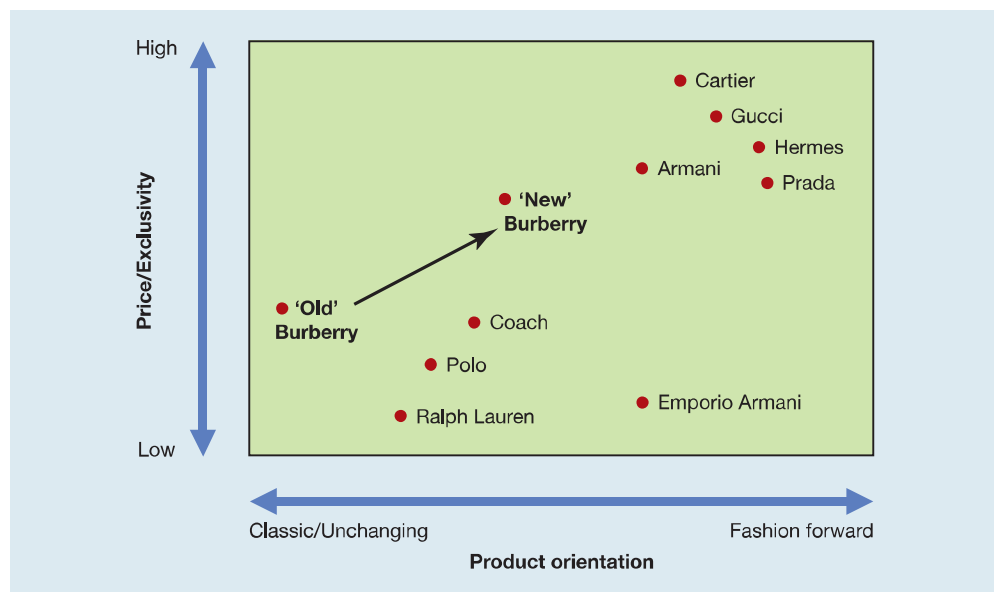
A perceptual process can be broken down into the following stages:²

- 1 *Primitive categorization*, in which the basic characteristics of a stimulus are isolated: our male consumer feels he needs to bolster his image, so he chooses aftershave.
- 2 *Cue check*, in which the characteristics are analysed in preparation for the selection of a schema: everyone has his own unique, more or less developed schemas or categories for different types of aftershave, such as 'down-to-earth macho', 'mysterious' or 'fancy French'. We use certain cues, such as the colour of the bottle, to decide in which schema a particular cologne fits.
- 3 *Confirmation check*, in which the schema is selected: the consumer may decide that a brand falls into his 'mysterious' schema.
- 4 *Confirmation completion*, in which a decision is made as to what the stimulus is: the consumer decides he has made the right choice, and then reinforces this decision by considering the colour of the bottle and the interesting name of the aftershave.

Such experiences illustrate the importance of the perceptual process for product positioning. In many cases, consumers use a few basic dimensions to categorize competing products or services, and then evaluate each alternative in terms of its relative standing on these dimensions.

- This tendency has led to the use of a very useful positioning tool – a **perceptual map**. By identifying the important dimensions and then asking consumers to place competitors within this space, marketers can answer some crucial strategic questions, such as which product alternatives are seen by consumers as similar or dissimilar, and what opportunities exist for new products that possess attributes not represented by current brands. Figure 2.2 offers a perceptual map of the iconic Burberry brand, showing its 'old' position from the 1980s and 1990s, and the shift in perceptions of the brand in more recent years.

Figure 2.2 Perceptual map of the Burberry brand, relative to competitors





marketing opportunity

'When a British public official recently described one of the government's public relations issues as 'a complete Horlicks' - by which he is supposed to have meant a right mess - the incident surely counted as the lowest point in the 130-year history of GlaxoSmithKline's classic bedtime drink. A year later, however, things have started to look up. In an attempt to change the perceptions of the product, the veteran brand has revamped its appearance and has worked to convince sleep-deprived party-goers and stressed-out working mothers that Horlicks is a product that speaks to their needs.

Horlicks' attempt to draw in a new generation of drinkers highlights a dilemma faced by many so-called heritage brands, which have seen the average age of their customers creep up year by year. The first option for brand owners is to proceed gradually, updating the look and feel of the brand through fine adjustments to its imagery and tone. Such an approach aims to attract younger people to the brand without alienating existing customers. The other option is to reinterpret the traditional values of the brand in contemporary idiom to reach younger consumers.

The product was given a creamier taste and repackaged in an eye-catching carton, with a moon-shaped 'do-not-disturb sign' symbolising restful sleep. An aversion to taking risks with brands that consumers hold in affection - even if they are no longer buying them so heavily - may explain why companies often prefer to modernise gradually when sales start to slip. The danger, however, is that in a crowded marketplace changes that are subtly communicated risk being drowned out by the surrounding media cacophony.

No amount of clever marketing will restore the fortunes of a brand for which consumers no longer have a need, however. To avoid becoming irrelevant, says Jez Frampton, chief executive of Interbrand in the UK, companies must invest in their products as well as their image. Whether Horlicks can connect with a younger market remains to be seen. In the brand's favour is the fact that its central idea - offering people something that will help them to unwind at the end of a hectic day, and promote restful sleep - seems more relevant today than at any time in the past.³

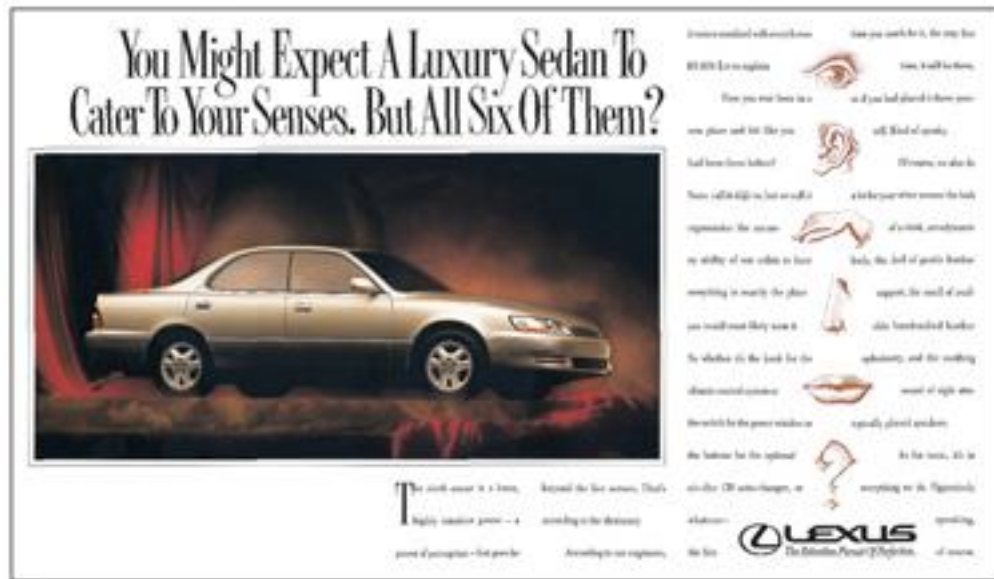
■ SENSORY SYSTEMS

External stimuli, or sensory inputs, can be received on a number of channels. We may see an advertising hoarding, hear a jingle, feel the softness of a cashmere sweater, taste a new flavour of ice cream or smell a leather jacket.

The inputs picked up by our five senses constitute the raw data that generate many types of responses. For example, sensory data emanating from the external environment (hearing a song on the radio) can generate internal sensory experiences when the song on the radio triggers a young man's memory of his first dance and brings to mind the smell of his date's perfume or the feel of her hair on his cheek.

Sensory inputs evoke historical imagery, in which events that actually occurred are recalled. Fantasy imagery results when an entirely new, imaginary experience is the response to sensory data. These responses are an important part of **hedonic consumption**, or the multi-sensory, fantasy and emotional aspects of consumers' interactions with products.⁴ The data that we receive from our sensory systems determine how we respond to products.

Although we usually trust our sensory receptors to give us an accurate account of the external environment, new technology is making the linkage between our senses and reality more questionable. Computer-simulated environments, or *virtual reality*, allow surgeons to 'cut into' a person without drawing blood or an architect to see a building design from different perspectives. This technology, which creates a three-dimensional



This ad for a luxury car emphasizes the contribution of all our senses to the evaluation of a driving experience. Lexus use a lot of sensory imagery in their campaigns. In a recent British campaign, Lexus used the slogan 'The loudest sound you will hear inside the Lexus is yourself thinking', thereby alluding to a classic campaign for Rolls Royce, which in the 1950s stated: 'At sixty miles an hour, the loudest sound you'll hear is the electric clock'.

Courtesy of Lexus and Team One Advertising

perceptual environment which the viewer experiences as being virtually real, is already being adapted to everyday pursuits, such as virtual reality games.

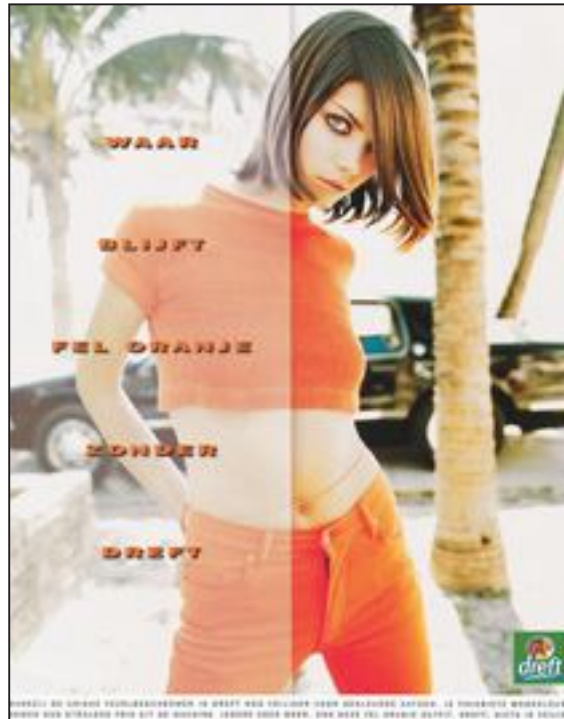
Enterprising business people will no doubt continue to find new ways to adapt this technology for consumers' entertainment – perhaps by developing 'virtual catalogues' which allow a person to browse through a shop without leaving his or her armchair. Until that time, though, we are mostly affected by marketers' ability to manipulate real sensory inputs along five distinct channels. In this section, we'll take a brief look at some of the processes involved in the business applications of sensory stimuli.

Vision

Marketers rely heavily on visual elements in advertising, store design and packaging. Meanings are communicated on the visual channel through a product's size, styling, brightness and distinctiveness compared with competitors.

Colour in the marketplace

Colours are rich in symbolic value and cultural meanings. For example, the display of red, white and blue evokes feelings of patriotism for both British and French people. Such powerful cultural meanings make colour a central aspect of many marketing strategies. Colour choices are made with regard to packaging, advertising, and even shop fittings. Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that some colours (particularly red) are arousing while others (such as blue) are relaxing. The power of colours to evoke positive and negative feelings makes this an important consideration in advertising design. Like the colour of your teeth? Europeans have recently paid attention to a new route to pearly white teeth. Tooth whiteners (peroxide strips) in the European Union will soon be available with a 6 per cent solution (the current limit is .1 per cent), and this reworking of the European Community Cosmetic Directive will allow consumers to switch from



The text in the ad reads: 'Where would the bright orange be without Dreft?' Orange is the national colour of the Netherlands, so the ad simultaneously underlines the colour-protecting qualities of the product and, through the national colour code, refers to the strength of the Dutch nation.

Procter and Gamble Nederland B.V.

costly dental treatments to off-the-shelf treatments. What does having white teeth suggest to you?⁵

A special use of colour was introduced in a TV commercial by the brand Circle Coffee. This showed an orange circle with a coffee bean inside while the voice-over told the viewer to stare at the bean for 30 seconds; then, when the screen went black, a blue circle 'magically' appeared on the screen. This illusion is created by the perceptual law of complementary colours – a fitting illusion, given that another of the company's coffee brands is Blue Circle.⁶

The ability of colours to 'colour' our expectations is frequently exploited by marketers. Recently, marketers of products from beer and soft drinks to deodorant and petrol have launched new 'clear' products, which are intended to convey such qualities as purity and simplicity as a counter to over-elaborate product claims.⁷ Green, too, has been gaining in popularity as consumers' ecological consciousness has grown.



**multicultural
dimensions**

Cultural differences in colour preferences create the need for marketing strategies tailored to different countries. While many northern European women now believe that heavy makeup is unprofessional and not very flattering, traditional femininity is still valued by Latin Americans. Mexican women, for example, are passionate in their love for vibrant lipsticks and nail varnish. Mexican girls are taught to be attentive to their appearance from early childhood. Baby girls have pierced ears, and housewives typically get dressed up in brightly coloured high heels to go to the supermarket. For these women, the 'natural look' is out. As one legal secretary in Mexico City explained, 'When you don't wear makeup, men look at you like you are sick or something.'⁸

Today colour is a key issue in package design. But the choice used to be made casually. The familiar Campbell's Soup can was produced in red and white because a company executive liked the football kit at a particular university! Now colour is a serious

business, and companies frequently employ consultants to assist in these decisions. In Switzerland, an instant coffee container was redesigned with diagonal strips of mauve. The package won a design award, but sales dropped off significantly. Consumers did not associate the colour mauve with coffee.⁹

Some colour combinations come to be so strongly associated with a particular corporation that they become known as the company's livery, and the company may even be granted exclusive use of the colours. Eastman Kodak is one such company and has successfully protected its yellow, black and red in court. As a rule, however, this protection is granted only if there is the possibility that consumers might be confused about what they are buying if a competitor uses the same colour combination.¹⁰

Since the number of competing brands has proliferated for many types of products, colour can be a critical spur to sales. When introducing a white cheese as a 'sister product' to an existing blue Castello cheese, a Danish company launched it in a red package and under the name of Castello Bianco. The red package was chosen for maximum visibility and signal effect. Although taste tests were very positive, sales were disappointing. A semiotic analysis of consumer interpretations showed that the red packaging and the name gave the consumers the wrong association about the product type and its degree of sweetness (due to associations with the vermouth Martini Bianco). It was relaunched in a white packaging and with the name 'white Castello', and almost immediately sales figures more than doubled.¹¹

In a given year, certain colours appear to be 'hot' and show up over and over again in clothing, home furnishings, cars, and so on. But favourite colours disappear as fast as they come, to be replaced by another set of 'hot' colours the next year or season.

Consumers' colour choices may be affected by these trends. One simple reason is that consumers' choices are largely limited by the colours available in the stores. Few people, however, realize the extent to which these 'hot' colours result from choices made by industry insiders, in a process known as colour forecasting. Colour experts in various consulting groups meet periodically to predict what colours will best reflect a season in



The slight changes in the design of Campbell's canned soups illustrate the company's efforts to keep the central, traditional features of the brand packaging while making sure that the product does not begin to look dated.

Campbell Soup Company

one year's, five years' and sometimes even ten years' time. Members make colour predictions based on cultural and social trends, and these recommendations are then used by manufacturers in production forecasting.

Smell

Odours can stir the emotions or have a calming effect. They can invoke memories or relieve stress. Some of our responses to scents result from early associations with other experiences. As one marketer noted, an example 'is a baby-powder scent that is frequently used in fragrances because the smell connotes comfort, warmth, and gratification'.¹²

Consumers' love of fragrances has contributed to a very large industry. Because this market is extremely competitive (30–40 new scents are introduced each year) and expensive (it costs an average of £30 million to introduce a new fragrance), manufacturers are scrambling to find new ways to expand the use of scents and odours in our daily lives. While traditional floral scents, such as rose and jasmine, are still widely used, newer fragrances feature such scents as melon peach (Elizabeth Arden's Sunflowers) and a blend of peach, mandarin orange, waterlily and white cloud rose (Sun Moon Stars by Karl Lagerfeld).¹³ A later trend, supported by the marketing efforts of, among others, Calvin Klein, are perfumes positioned as unisex. In addition to the perfume market, home fragrance products, consisting primarily of potpourri, room sprays and atomizers, drawer liners, sachets and scented candles, represent important markets. But the use of smell goes further than that. An association of employers in the wood industry used a scratch'n'sniff card to convince potential apprentices of the advantages of smell in the wood industry compared with other professions.¹⁴

Sound

Music and sound are also important to marketers. Consumers spend vast amounts of money each year on compact discs and cassettes, advertising jingles maintain brand awareness and background music creates desired moods.¹⁵ In a novel development, greetings card manufacturers are prospering by selling consumers the ability to send their own sounds to others: Hallmark Cards Inc. sells 'Recordable Greetings Cards' that allow the sender to record a personal 10-second message on a microchip. The message plays automatically when the card is opened.¹⁶ There is also evidence that the literal sound that one makes when pronouncing a brand's name can influence perceptions of the product's attributes. English-language speaking consumers infer that brands containing the vowel sound of short 'i' are lighter than brands containing the vowel sound of 'a'.¹⁷

Many aspects of sound affect people's feelings and behaviours. One British company stresses the importance of the sound a packaging gives when opened, after having watched consumers open, close and reopen it several times during a test, clearly also listening to the right sound of the opening procedure.¹⁸ Two areas of research that have widespread applications in consumer contexts are the effects of background music on mood and the influence of speaking rate on attitude change and message comprehension.

Muzak is heard by millions of people every day. This so-called 'functional music' is played in stores, shopping centres and offices either to relax or stimulate consumers. There is general agreement that muzak contributes to the well-being and buying activities of customers, but no scientific proof exists. *Time compression* is a technique used by broadcasters to manipulate perceptions of sound. It is a way to pack more information into a limited time by speeding up an announcer's voice in commercials. The speaking rate is typically accelerated to about 120–130 per cent of normal. Most people fail to notice this effect.



This ad metaphorically illustrates the natural quality and taste sensation of a lemon as a substitute for salt.

Sunkist Growers, Inc.

The evidence for the effectiveness of time compression is mixed. It has been shown to increase persuasion in some situations but to reduce it in others. One explanation for a positive effect is that the listener uses a person's speaking rate to infer whether the speaker is confident; people seem to think that fast talkers must know what they are talking about.

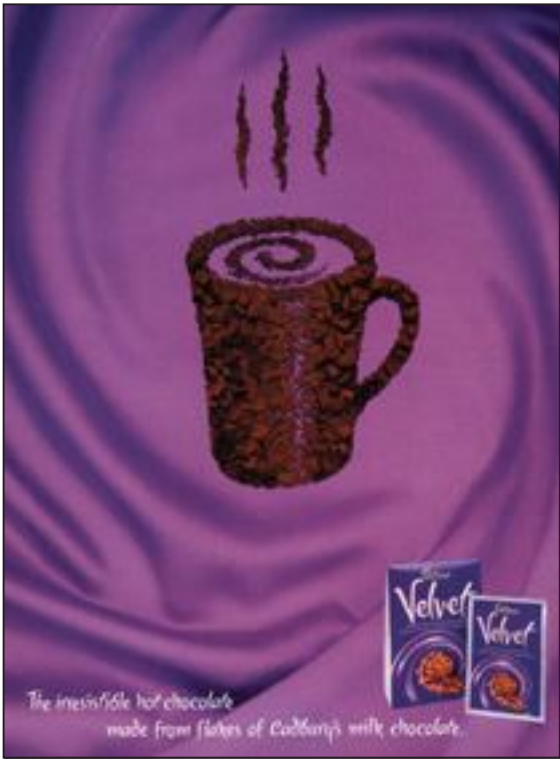
Another explanation is that the listener is given less time to elaborate on the assertions made in the commercial. The acceleration disrupts normal responses to the ad and changes the cues used to form judgements about its content. This change can either hinder or facilitate attitude change, depending on other conditions.¹⁹

Touch

Although relatively little research has been done on the effects of tactile stimulation on consumer behaviour,²⁰ common observation tells us that this sensory channel is important. Moods are stimulated or relaxed on the basis of sensations of the skin, whether from a luxurious massage or the bite of a winter wind.

Touch has even been shown to be a factor in sales interactions. There are considerable cultural differences in the world as well as within Europe concerning the appropriate amount and kind of touching in interpersonal interactions. In general, northern Europeans touch less than their southern European counterparts. Many British think the French shake hands excessively.²¹

Tactile cues have symbolic meaning. People associate the textures of fabrics and other products with underlying product qualities. The perceived richness or quality of the material in clothing, bedding or upholstery is linked to its 'feel', whether it is rough or smooth, soft or stiff. A smooth fabric such as silk is equated with luxury, while denim is considered practical and durable. The vibration of a mobile phone against the owner's body signals a personal telephone call coming in, as well as some degree of respect about not disturbing others in the area. Some of these tactile/quality associations are summarized in Table 2.1. Fabrics that are composed of rare materials or that require a high degree of processing to achieve their smoothness or fineness tend to be more expensive and thus are seen as being classier. Similarly, lighter, more delicate textures are assumed to be feminine. Roughness is often positively valued for men, while smoothness is sought by women.



Just as fabrics are prized for their texture, some drinks are presented as having a luxurious 'feel'. This ad for Velvet Hot Chocolate links the chocolate drink to a well known brand of chocolate, and ties them together as 'irresistible'.
The Advertising Archives

Table 2.1 Tactile oppositions to fabrics

Perception	Male	Female	
High-class	Wool	Silk	Fine
Low-class	Denim	Cotton	↕
	Heavy	Light	Coarse

Taste

Our taste receptors contribute to our experience of many products. Sensory analysis is used to account for the human perception of sensory product qualities. One study used sensory analysis to assess butter biscuits: the crispness, buttery-taste, rate of melt, density, 'molar packing' (the amount of biscuit that sticks to the teeth) and the 'notes' of the biscuit, such as sweetness, saltiness or bitterness.²²

Food companies go to great lengths to ensure that their products taste as they should. Philips's highly successful Senseo coffee machine produces a creamy head of foam on the top of a cup of home-brewed coffee.²³ Companies may use a group of 'sensory panellists' as tasters. These consumers are recruited because they have superior sensory abilities, and are then given six months' training. Or they rely on lay people, i.e. ordinary consumers. In a blind taste test, panellists rate the products of a company and its competitors on a number of dimensions. The results of such studies are important to discover both different consumer preferences and, thus, different consumer segments, and the positioning of a company or a brand in terms of the most important sensory qualities of the product.²⁴

Are blind taste tests worth their salt? While taste tests often provide valuable information, their results can be misleading when it is forgotten that objective taste is only one

component of product evaluation. The most famous example of this mistake concerns New Coke, Coca-Cola's answer to the Pepsi Challenge.²⁵ The new formulation was preferred to Pepsi in blind taste tests (in which the products were not identified) by an average of 55 per cent to 45 per cent in 17 markets, yet New Coke ran into problems when it replaced the older version. People do not buy a cola for taste alone; they are buying intangibles like brand image as well.

Sometimes taste test failures can be overcome by repositioning the product. For example, Vernor's ginger ale did poorly in a taste test against leading ginger ales. When the research team introduced it as a new type of soft drink with a tangier taste, it won easily. As an executive noted, 'People hated it because it didn't meet the preconceived expectations of what a ginger ale should be.'²⁶

■ SENSORY THRESHOLDS

If you have ever blown a dog whistle and watched pets respond to a sound you cannot hear, you will know that there are some stimuli that people simply are not capable of perceiving. And, of course, some people are better able to pick up sensory information than are others.

- ▶ The science that focuses on how the physical environment is integrated into our personal, subjective world is known as **psychophysics**. By understanding some of the physical laws that govern what we are capable of responding to, this knowledge can be translated into marketing strategies.

The absolute threshold

- ▶ When we define the lowest intensity of a stimulus that can be registered on a sensory channel, we speak of a threshold for that receptor. The **absolute threshold** refers to the minimum amount of stimulation that can be detected on a sensory channel. The sound emitted by a dog whistle is too high to be detected by human ears, so this stimulus is beyond our auditory absolute threshold. The absolute threshold is an important consideration in designing marketing stimuli. A hoarding might have the most entertaining story ever written, but this genius is wasted if the print is too small for passing motorists to read it.

The differential threshold

- ▶ The **differential threshold** refers to the ability of a sensory system to detect changes or differences between two stimuli. A commercial that is intentionally produced in black and white might be noticed on a colour television because the intensity of colour differs from the programme that preceded it. The same commercial being watched on a black-and-white television would not be seen as different and might be ignored altogether.

The issue of when and if a change will be noticed is relevant to many marketing situations. Sometimes a marketer may want to ensure that a change is noticed, such as when merchandise is offered at a discount. In other situations, the fact that a change has been made is downplayed, as in the case of price increases or when the size of a product, such as a chocolate bar, is decreased.

A consumer's ability to detect a difference between two stimuli is relative. A whispered conversation that might be unintelligible on a noisy street can suddenly become public and embarrassing knowledge in a quiet library. It is the relative difference between the decibel level of the conversation and its surroundings, rather than the loudness of the conversation itself, that determines whether the stimulus will register.

- ▶ The minimum change in a stimulus that can be detected is also known as the **JND**, which stands for just noticeable difference. In the nineteenth century, Ernst Weber, a

psychophysicist, found that the amount of change that is necessary to be noticed is related to the original intensity of the stimulus. The stronger the initial stimulus, the greater the change must be for it to be noticed. This relationship is known as **Weber's Law**. Many companies choose to update their packages periodically, making small changes that will not necessarily be noticed at the time. When a product icon is updated, the manufacturer does not want people to lose their identification with a familiar symbol.

■ PERCEPTUAL SELECTION

Although we live in an 'information society', we can have too much of a good thing. Consumers are often in a state of sensory overload, exposed to far more information than they are capable of or willing to process. People in a noisy, crowded bar or party for several hours may feel the need to step outside periodically to take a break. A consumer can experience a similar feeling of being overwhelmed after being forced to sift through the claims made by hundreds of competing brands. Further, the competition for our attention is increasing steadily with the increasing number of exposures to television commercials and other types of advertising.

- Because the brain's capacity to process information is limited, consumers are very selective about what they pay attention to. **Perceptual selectivity** means that people attend to only a small portion of stimuli to which they are exposed. Consumers practise a form of psychic economy, picking and choosing among stimuli, to avoid being overwhelmed by *advertising clutter*. This over-abundance of advertising stimuli highlights two important aspects of perceptual selectivity as they relate to consumer behaviour: exposure and attention.



**marketing
pitfall**

Consumers and marketers are increasingly annoyed by advertising clutter. Advertising professionals feel that the proliferation of ads in both traditional media as well as non-traditional locations, such as in cinemas and on TV monitors in doctors' waiting rooms, is threatening the quality of their work. They fear that consumers will be so bombarded by competing stimuli that they won't be in a receptive frame of mind when their messages are transmitted. Consumers are also fed up. More and more surveys reveal that it takes a very good ad to avoid consumer boredom and hold the attention: either a good joke, nice aesthetics - whatever these are - or some real information.

Exposure

- **Exposure** is the degree to which people notice a stimulus that is within range of their sensory receptors. Consumers concentrate on certain stimuli, are unaware of others, and even go out of their way to ignore some messages. An experiment by a bank illustrates consumers' tendencies to miss or ignore information in which they are not interested. After a law was passed in America requiring banks to explain details about money transfer in electronic banking, the Northwestern National Bank distributed a pamphlet to 120,000 of its customers at considerable cost to provide the required information - hardly exciting bedtime reading. In 100 of the leaflets, a phrase in the middle of the pamphlet offered the reader \$10.00 just for finding that paragraph. Not a single person claimed it.²⁷

Selective exposure

Experience, which is the result of acquiring stimulation, is one factor that determines how much exposure to a particular stimulus a person accepts. Perceptual filters based on consumers' past experiences influence what we decide to process.

Perceptual vigilance is a factor in selective exposure. Consumers are more likely to be aware of stimuli that relate to their current needs. These needs may be conscious or unconscious. A consumer who rarely notices car ads will become very much more conscious of them when he or she is in the market for a new car. A newspaper ad for a fast-food restaurant that would otherwise go unnoticed becomes significant when one glances at the paper during a five o'clock class.

The advent of the video recorder has allowed consumers armed with remote control fast-forward buttons to be much more selective about which TV messages they are exposed to. By 'zipping', viewers fast-forward through commercials when watching their favourite programmes. A video recorder marketed by Mitsubishi can remove the need for zipping. It distinguishes between the different types of TV signals used to broadcast programmes and commercials and automatically pauses during ads. Witness also the market success of TIVO in the United Kingdom, and other European markets.²⁸

Zipping has enhanced the need for advertising creativity. Interesting commercials do not get zipped as frequently. Evidence indicates that viewers are willing to stop fast-forwarding to watch an appealing or novel commercial. In addition, longer commercials and those that keep a static figure on the screen (such as a brand name or a logo) appear to counteract the effects of zipping; they are unaffected by a speed increase, since the figure remains in place.²⁹

Adaptation

- ▶ Another factor affecting exposure is **adaptation**, or the degree to which consumers continue to notice a stimulus over time. The process of adaptation occurs when consumers no longer pay attention to a stimulus because it is so familiar.³⁰ Almost like drug addiction, a consumer can become 'habituated' and require increasingly stronger 'doses' of a stimulus for it to continue to be noticed. For example, a consumer on the way to work might read a new advertising hoarding, but after a few days it becomes part of the passing scenery.

Several factors can lead to adaptation:

- *Intensity*: Less intense stimuli (e.g. soft sounds or dim colours) habituate because they have less of a sensory impact.
- *Duration*: Stimuli that require relatively lengthy exposure in order to be processed tend to habituate because they require a long attention span.
- *Discrimination*: Simple stimuli tend to habituate because they do not require attention to detail.
- *Exposure*: Frequently encountered stimuli tend to habituate as the rate of exposure increases.
- *Relevance*: Stimuli that are irrelevant or unimportant will habituate because they fail to attract attention.

Attention

- ▶ **Attention** is the degree to which consumers focus on stimuli within their range of exposure. Because consumers are exposed to so many advertising stimuli, marketers are becoming increasingly creative in their attempts to gain attention for their products. Some successful advertisers such as Apple, Nike, The Gap, and Dyson have created a visual identity with their television ads, and then deliver more detailed product information in other places, such as websites and newspaper stories in which third party experts provide independent reviews.³¹

A dynamic package is one way to gain this attention. Some consulting firms have established elaborate procedures to measure package effectiveness, using such instruments as an angle meter, which measures package visibility as a shopper moves down the aisle and views the package from different angles. Also, data from eye-tracking tests,

in which consumers' eye movements as they look at packages and ads are followed and measured, can result in subtle but powerful changes that influence their impact. Eye-tracking tests are also used to evaluate in-store displays.³²

Countering advertising clutter

Many marketers are attempting to counter the sensory overload caused by advertising clutter in order to call attention to their products. One expensive strategy involves buying large blocks of advertising space in order to dominate consumers' attention. IBM has experimented with buying two or three consecutive full-page newspaper ads. And Coca-Cola once bought a full five-minute block of TV commercial time on Danish television shortly before Christmas.

Other companies are using 'bookend ads', where a commercial for one product is split into parts that are separated by commercials for other products. The first part creates conflict, and the second resolves it. This technique motivates the viewer to keep watching in order to get the rest of the story. For example, a TV commercial for Tuborg's special Christmas brew beer showed a cartoon Santa Claus in his sleigh going from one side of the screen to the other. After a couple of other commercials, he reappears, this time meeting a Tuborg delivery van going in the opposite direction. He quickly turns his sleigh round and follows the van as Tuborg wishes everybody a merry Christmas and a happy new year.

Some advertisers have taken to printing part of their ads upside down to get the reader's attention. Perhaps reflecting differences in level of cultural involvement in advertising, the editor of the Starch-Tested Copy newsletter noted, 'I find people don't like to work at reading their ads! Americans don't like it. There's a disorienting aspect they find uncomfortable. The English, on the other hand, like it.'³³

Another solution has been to put ads in unconventional places, where there will be less competition for attention. These include the backs of supermarket shopping trolleys, pedestrian underpasses, floors of sports stadiums and even films, as the growing interest in product placement has shown.³⁴ More obscure places where advertisements can be found are public toilets,³⁵ petrol pump handles and on the steps in the London Underground.³⁶ And, of course, runner Linford Christie's specially designed contact lenses with the Puma logo created a lot of publicity.³⁷ An executive at Campbell's Soup, commenting on the company's decision to place ads in church bulletins, noted, 'We have to shake consumers up these days in order to make them take notice . . . Television alone won't do that. Now we have to hit them with our ads where they shop and play and on their way to work.'³⁸ Of course, such a policy may backfire if people are getting more and more weary of the difficulty of finding advertising-free moments in their life.

Creating contrast

When many stimuli are competing to be noticed, one will receive attention to the extent that it differs from those around it. Stimuli that fall into unpredictable patterns often command a lot of attention. Size and colour differences are also powerful ways to achieve contrast. A black-and-white object in a colour ad is quite noticeable, as is a block of printed type surrounded by large amounts of white space. The size of the stimulus itself in contrast to the competition is also important.

An increasingly frequent way of creating contrast is by using advertising clichés and then giving them a twist. A mortgage company used the cliché of a homecoming soldier and the young waiting wife to advertise new restoration loans. After seeing the woman gazing out of the window and the soldier in the troop transport, he is shown finally arriving – only to hit his head hard on a low-hanging tie beam.³⁹ In general, self-referential advertisements where sympathy and credibility are created by mocking advertising or other cultural stereotypes are becoming more common.⁴⁰

■ INTERPRETATION: DECIDING WHAT THINGS MEAN

- ▶ **Interpretation** refers to the meaning that people assign to sensory stimuli. Just as people differ in terms of the stimuli that they perceive, the eventual assignment of meanings to these stimuli varies as well. Two people can see or hear the same event, but their interpretation of it may be completely different.

Consumers assign meaning to stimuli based on the *schema*, or set of beliefs, to which the

- ▶ stimulus is assigned. During a process known as **priming**, certain properties of a stimulus are more likely to evoke a schema than others. As evidenced by the case of Castello cheese quoted earlier, a brand name can communicate expectations about product attributes and colour consumers' perceptions of product performance by activating a schema.
- ▶ **Stimulus ambiguity** occurs when a stimulus is not clearly perceived or when it conveys a number of meanings. In such cases, consumers tend to project their own wishes and desires to assign meaning. Although ambiguity in product advertisements is normally seen as undesirable to marketers, it is frequently used creatively to generate contrast, paradox, controversy or interest. For example, a popular ad for Benson & Hedges cigarettes featured a group of people sitting around a dinner table, while a man wearing only pyjama bottoms stands in the background. This ambiguous character yielded valuable publicity for the company as people competed to explain the meaning of the mysterious 'pyjama man'.

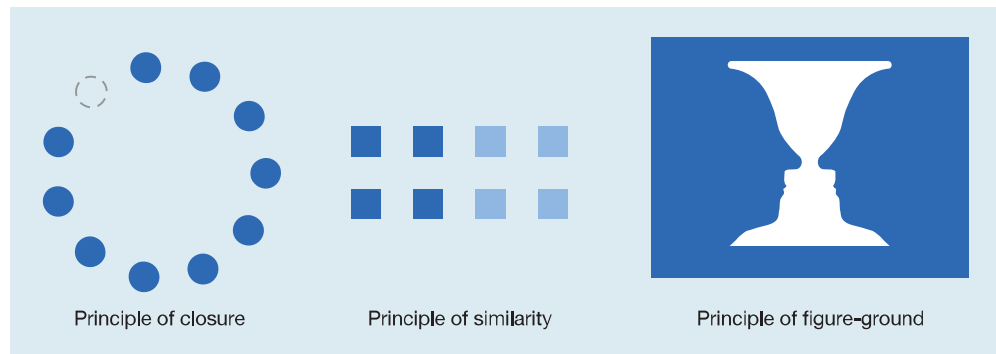
Stimulus organization

People do not perceive a single stimulus in isolation. Our brains tend to relate incoming sensations to imagery of other events or sensations already in memory based on some fundamental organizational principles. A number of perceptual principles describe how stimuli are perceived and organized.



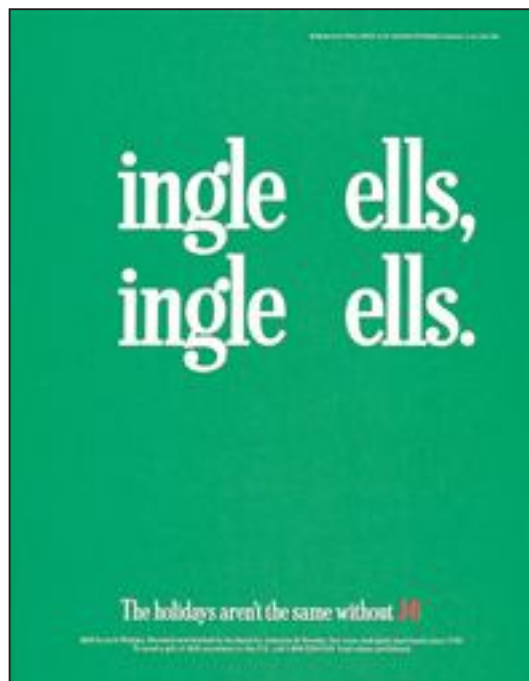
**marketing
opportunity**

Companies such as the Anglo-Dutch Unilever and France's Picard are attempting to change consumer perceptions of frozen foods. In supermarkets across the UK, it is the chiller cabinet rather than the freezer that increasing numbers of shoppers head for first. The chilled food section is where much of the innovation in convenience food is happening and where manufacturers compete most aggressively for space. Chilled food is perceived by the consumer as fresher and healthier. But, cry the champions of frozen food, it is food picked or prepared and immediately frozen that keeps its nutritional value, and does not rely on preservatives in the way that some chilled or ambient (tinned) food does. In the UK, frozen food already faces increasingly stiff competition from the chilled pretender, and suffers from stigma. 'In the UK, frozen food is seen as an inferior product, and consumer perception of freshness is warped. Frozen food is seen as the last resort, eaten when you can't get to the shops, or fed to the children.' This is less true in the other seven countries where ICF operates. 'Perception of frozen food in southern Europe is that it is modern, so they have fewer hang-ups,' says Andrew Beattie, Unilever's Rotterdam-based marketing director for frozen foods.⁴¹ Critical to the development of new perceptions regarding frozen foods is newly designed logo and packaging, with a warmer, more contemporary design, which implies that the food is the product of natural sunlight rather than factory freezing, and more pleasant lighting in the freezer area. In France, the main reasons for the surge in 'surgelé' (as frozen food is called) are two-career couples, children with overcommitted activities, and the desire to avoid spending whatever leisure time there is chopping, dredging and sautéing. In 1960, the French consumed only 2 kg of frozen food products per year, while in 2001, this figure has gone up to over 30 kg. Shopping for frozen packages in an antiseptic, ultra-white Picard store or in similar aisles at France's national supermarket chains may lack romance, but it is reliable.⁴²

Figure 2.3 Principles of stimulus organization derived from gestalt psychology

The gestalt

- ▶ These principles are based on work in **gestalt psychology**, a school of thought maintaining that people derive meaning from the totality of a set of stimuli, rather than from any individual stimulus. The German word *Gestalt* roughly means whole, pattern or configuration, and this perspective is best summarized by the saying ‘the whole is greater than the sum of its parts’. A piecemeal perspective that analyses each component of the stimulus separately will be unable to capture the total effect. The gestalt perspective provides several principles relating to the way stimuli are organized. Three of these principles, or perceptual tendencies, are illustrated in Figure 2.3.
- ▶ The gestalt **principle of closure** implies that consumers tend to perceive an incomplete picture as complete. That is, we tend to fill in the blanks based on our prior experience. This principle explains why most of us have no trouble reading a neon sign, even if one or two of its letters are burned out, or filling in the blanks in an incomplete message, as illustrated by the J&B ad shown here. The principle of closure is also at work when we hear only part of a jingle or theme. Utilization of the principle of closure in



This J&B ad illustrates the use of the principle of closure, in which people participate in the ad by mentally filling in the gaps.

The Paddington Corporation



This billboard for Wrangler jeans makes creative use of the figure-ground principle.
BooneOakley Advertising

marketing strategies encourages audience participation, which increases the chance that people will attend to the message.

- ▶ The **principle of similarity** tells us that consumers tend to group together objects that share similar physical characteristics. That is, they group like items into sets to form an integrated whole. This principle is used by companies who have extended product lines, but wish to keep certain features similar, such as the shape of a bottle, so that it is easy for the consumer to recognize that he or she is in fact buying a shampoo of brand X.
- ▶ Another important gestalt concept is the **figure-ground principle**, in which one part of a stimulus (the figure) will dominate while other parts recede into the background. This concept is easy to understand if one thinks of a photograph with a clear and sharply focused object (the figure) in the centre. The figure is dominant, and the eye goes straight to it. The parts of the configuration that will be perceived as figure or ground can vary depending on the individual consumer as well as other factors. Similarly, in marketing messages that use the figure-ground principle, a stimulus can be made the focal point of the message or merely the context that surrounds the focus.

The role of symbolism in interpretation

When we try to make sense of a marketing stimulus, whether a distinctive package, an elaborately staged television commercial or perhaps a model on the cover of a magazine, we do so by interpreting its meaning in the light of associations we have with these images. For this reason much of the meaning we take away is influenced by what we make of the symbolism we perceive. After all, on the surface many marketing images have virtually no literal connection to actual products. What does a cowboy have to do with a bit of tobacco rolled into a paper tube? How can a celebrity such as the football star Gary Lineker enhance the image of a potato crisp?⁴³

- ▶ For assistance in understanding how consumers interpret the meanings of symbols, some marketers are turning to a field of study known as **semiotics**, which examines the correspondence between signs and symbols and their role in the assignment of

meaning.⁴⁴ Semiotics is important to the understanding of consumer behaviour, since consumers use products to express their social identities. Products have learned meanings, and we rely on advertising to work out what those meanings are. As one set of researchers put it, 'advertising serves as a kind of culture/consumption dictionary; its entries are products, and their definitions are cultural meanings'.⁴⁵

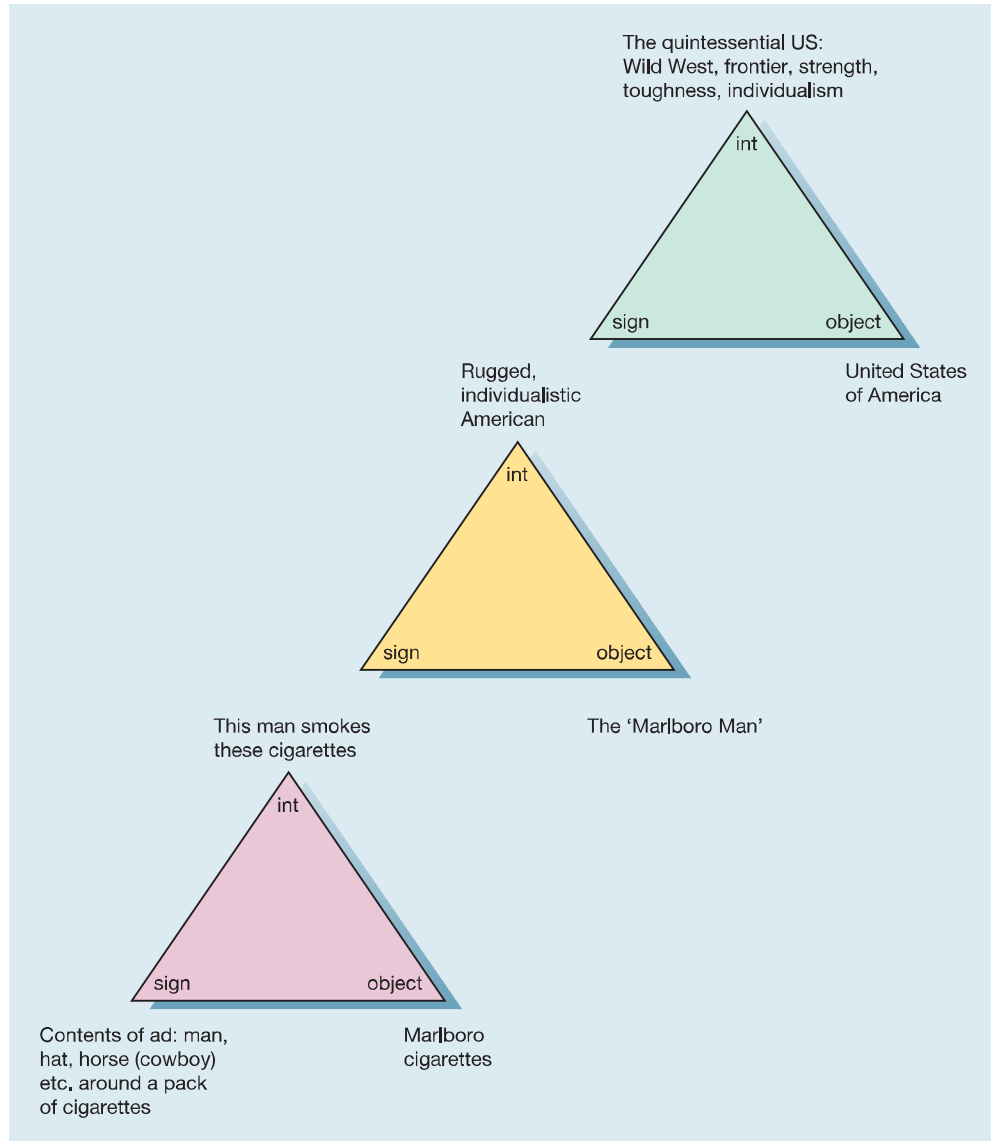
- According to the semiotician Charles Sanders Peirce, every message has three basic components: an object, a sign and an interpretant. A marketing message such as a
- ▶ Marlboro ad can be read on different levels. On the lowest level of reading, the **object**
 - ▶ would be the product that is the focus of the message (Marlboro cigarettes). The **sign** is the sensory imagery that represents the intended meanings of the object (the contents of
 - ▶ the ad, in this case, the cowboy). The **interpretant** is the meaning derived (this man smokes these cigarettes). But this man is not any man. He is a cowboy – and not just any cowboy. The interpretant 'man (cowboy) smoking these cigarettes' in itself becomes a sign, especially since we have already seen many examples of these ads from this company. So, on the second, connotative level, this sign refers to the fictive personality of 'the Marlboro Man', and its interpretant consists of all the connotations attached to the Marlboro Man, for example his being a 'rugged, individualistic American'. On the third level, called the ideological level, the interpretant of the 'rugged, individualistic American' becomes a sign for what is stereotypically American. So its object is 'America', and the interpretant all the ideas and characteristics that we might consider as typically and quintessentially American. This semiotic relationship is shown in Figure 2.4. By means of such a chain of meanings, the Marlboro ad both borrows from and contributes to reinforcing a fundamental 'myth of America'. We will return to the discussion of myths and consumption in Chapter 14.

- From the semiotic perspective of Peirce, signs are related to objects in one of three ways. They can resemble objects, be connected to them with some kind of causal or other
- ▶ relation, or be conventionally tied to them.⁴⁶ An **icon** is a sign that resembles the product in some way (e.g. Apple Computers uses the image of an apple to represent itself). An index is a sign that is connected to a product because they share some property (e.g. the pine tree on certain cleaning products conveys the shared property of fresh, natural scent). A symbol is a sign that is related to a product through purely conventional associations (e.g. the Mercedes star which in addition to the Mercedes-Benz company provides associations with German industrial quality and ingenuity).

The Glenfiddich ad on page 55 illustrates some of the subtle semiotic processes that convey meaning in advertising. The product, cognac, is a luxury alcoholic beverage associated with a soft, smooth taste, luxurious surroundings and a large price tag. The label is an icon – it literally represents the product.

The use of symbols provides a powerful means for marketers to convey product attributes to consumers. For example, expensive cars, designer fashions and diamond jewellery – all widely recognized symbols of success – frequently appear in ads to associate products with affluence or sophistication. The rhetoric of advertising is an additional field of analysis which has been useful for the discussion of how advertising communicates its messages.⁴⁷ Semiotic analysis of ads has been connected to product and brand life cycles in order to establish some guidelines about when to use the most complex advertising forms.⁴⁸

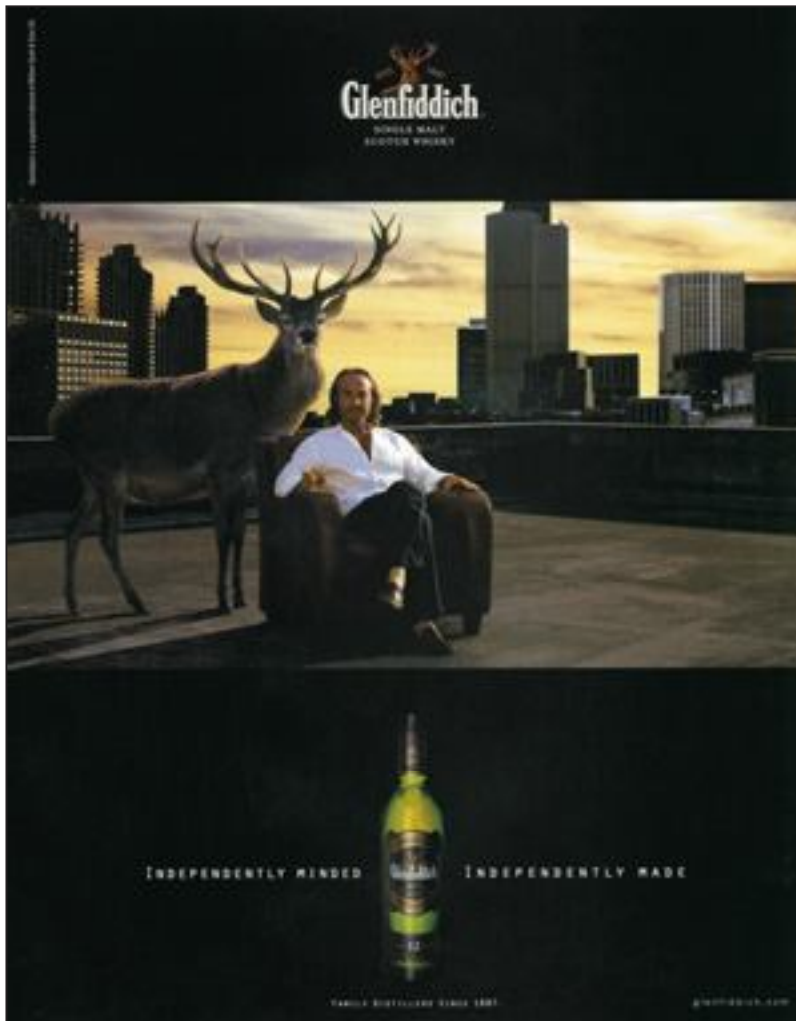
One aspect of the semiotics of consumption, which used to be relatively neglected compared to the semiotics of advertising, is the semiotics of goods as such. In recent years, instead of studying messages about commodities there has been an increased number of studies of commodities as messages.⁴⁹ Semiotics of consumer goods, then, focus on the ability of goods to communicate either by themselves or in connection with other goods. A related field of study is symbolic consumption,⁵⁰ which focuses not so much on the good as sign per se, but rather on the meanings attached to the act of consuming the good. Here, in many cases, the good becomes an indexical sign for some

Figure 2.4 Relationship of components in semiotic analysis of meaning

attributes that characterize the consumer, such as trendiness, wealth, femininity or others that place the consumer in some subcultural context.

Other uses of semiotics include industrial design⁵¹ and design of distribution outlets. For example, in a semiotic study of the meanings and expectations consumers would attach to a new hypermarket, the researchers generated four different value profiles among potential customers. These profiles were linked to preferences for different designs of the hypermarket and its interior, thus helping the planners to conceive a type of hypermarket that was pleasing to most consumers.⁵²

Semiotics plays a central role in much of the recent challenging consumer behaviour theory. The fact that consumers have become increasingly aware of how they communicate through their consumption as well as what they communicate has led to the designation of the present world as a 'semiotic world'.⁵³ Furthermore, it has been argued that we feel more confident in creating our own messages rather than just following what is proposed by marketing or fashion statements. This tendency to eclecticism means that we are increasingly likely to match things, such as articles of clothing, furniture or even lifestyles that traditionally have not been perceived as fitting together.



An illustration of how to read an advertisement semiotically. Note again the reference to smoothness, also found in some of the other beverage ads in this chapter.

The Advertising Archives

- As we have already argued, one of the hallmarks of modern advertising is that it creates a condition where advertising is becoming self-referential. An increasing number of ads and commercials are referring, often ironically or tongue-in-cheek, to other advertisements, and thus creating a universe of their own, which in many ways is independent from the goods actually advertised. Advertising thus becomes an art in itself and is
- appreciated as such rather than as deceptive information about products.⁵⁴ **Hyperreality** refers to the becoming real of what is initially simulation or 'hype'.⁵⁵ Advertisers create new relationships between objects and interpretants by inventing new connections between products and benefits, such as equating Marlboro cigarettes with the American frontier spirit.⁵⁶ To a large extent, over time the relationship between the symbol and reality is increasingly difficult to discern, and the 'artificial' associations between advertisement symbols, product symbols and the real world may take on a life of their own.

For example, Tasters' Choice coffee perfected the concept of an ongoing series of 'soap opera' commercials where a romantic relationship is slowly cultivated between two actors, a commercial form later adopted by other coffee brands such as Nestlé's Gold Blend.

Hyperreality will be discussed again in the final chapter of the book, because it has been linked to the concept of postmodernism, the idea that we are living in a period of radical cultural change where certain hitherto dominant features and assumptions of modern societies are challenged.

■ CHAPTER SUMMARY

- Perception is the process by which physical sensations such as sights, sounds and smells are selected, organized and interpreted. The eventual interpretation of a stimulus allows it to be assigned meaning. A perceptual map is a widely used marketing tool which evaluates the relative standing of competing brands along relevant dimensions.
- Marketing stimuli have important sensory qualities. We rely on colours, odours, sounds, tastes and even the 'feel' of products when forming evaluations of them.
- Not all sensations successfully make their way through the perceptual process. Many stimuli compete for our attention, and the majority are not noticed or comprehended.
- People have different thresholds of perception. A stimulus must be presented at a certain level of intensity before it can be detected by sensory receptors. In addition, a consumer's ability to detect whether two stimuli are different (the differential threshold) is an important issue in many marketing contexts, such as changing a package design, altering the size of a product or reducing its price.
- Some of the factors that determine which stimuli (above the threshold level) do get perceived are the amount of exposure to the stimulus, how much attention it generates and how it is interpreted. In an increasingly crowded stimulus environment, advertising clutter occurs when too many marketing-related messages compete for attention.
- A stimulus that is attended to is not perceived in isolation. It is classified and organized according to principles of perceptual organization. These principles are guided by a gestalt, or overall, pattern. Specific grouping principles include closure, similarity and figure-ground relationships.
- The final step in the process of perception is interpretation. We make sense of the world through the interpretation of signs: icons, indexes and symbols. This interpretation is often shared by others, thus forming common languages and cultures. The degree to which the symbolism is consistent with our previous experience affects the meaning we assign to related objects. Every marketing message contains a relationship between the product, the sign or symbol, and the interpretation of meaning. A semiotic analysis involves the correspondence between message elements and the meaning of signs.
- Signs function on several levels. The intended meaning may be literal (e.g. an icon like a street sign with a picture of children playing). The meaning may be indexical; it relies on shared characteristics (e.g. the horizontal stripe in a stop sign means do not pass beyond this). Finally, meaning can be conveyed by a symbol, where an image is given meaning by convention or by agreement by members of a society (e.g. stop signs are octagonal, while yield signs are triangular).

► KEY TERMS

Absolute threshold (p. 46)

Adaptation (p. 48)

Attention (p. 48)

Differential threshold (p. 46)

Exposure (p. 47)

Figure-ground principle (p. 52)

Gestalt psychology (p. 51)

Hedonic consumption (p. 39)

Hyperreality (p. 55)

Icon (p. 53)

Interpretant (p. 53)

Interpretation (p. 50)

JND (p. 46)

Object (p. 53)

Perception (p. 36)

Perceptual map (p. 38)

Perceptual selectivity (p. 47)

Priming (p. 50)

Principle of closure (p. 51)

Principle of similarity (p. 52)

Psychophysics (p. 46)

Schema (p. 37)

Semiotics (p. 52)

Sensation (p. 36)

Sign (p. 53)

Stimulus ambiguity (p. 50)

Weber's Law (p. 47)



CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR CHALLENGE

- 1 Many studies have shown that our sensory detection abilities decline as we grow older. Discuss the implications of the absolute threshold for marketers attempting to appeal to the elderly.
- 2 Interview 3-5 male and 3-5 female friends regarding their perceptions of both men's and women's fragrances. Construct a perceptual map for each set of products. Based on your map of perfumes, do you see any areas that are not adequately served by current offerings? What (if any) gender differences did you obtain regarding both the relevant dimensions used by raters and the placement of specific brands along these dimensions?
- 3 Assume that you are a consultant for a marketer who wants to design a package for a new premium chocolate bar targeted to an affluent market. What recommendations would you provide in terms of such package elements as colour, symbolism and graphic design? Give the reasons for your suggestions.
- 4 Do you believe that marketers have the right to use any or all public spaces to deliver product messages? Where would you draw the line in terms of places and products that should be restricted?
- 5 Find one ad that is rich in symbolism and perform a semiotic analysis of it. Identify each type of sign used in the ad and the product qualities being communicated by each. Comment on the effectiveness of the signs that are used to communicate the intended message.
- 6 Using magazines archived in the library, track the packaging of a specific brand over time. Find an example of gradual changes in package design that may have been below the JND.

- 7 Collect a set of current ads for one type of product (e.g. personal computers, perfumes, laundry detergents or athletic shoes) from magazines, and analyse the colours employed. Describe the images conveyed by different colours, and try to identify any consistency across brands in terms of the colours used in product packaging or other aspects of the ads.
- 8 Look through a current magazine and select one ad that captures your attention over the others. Give the reasons why.
- 9 Find ads that utilize the techniques of contrast and novelty. Give your opinion of the effectiveness of each ad and whether the technique is likely to be appropriate for the consumers targeted by the ad.

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LEARNING AND MEMORY



Mario Rossi is a 60-year-old Italian insurance man, and still very active in his field. He is a pleasant, sociable and easygoing fellow, and has made a very good career for himself. Together with his wife and four children, he lives in a comfortable flat in the suburbs of Rome. Although Rome is full of historical sites to visit, Mario is a staunch nature-lover, and he prefers to 'get back to nature' in his free time.

Mario's dog, Raphael, recognizes the sound of his master's old Fiat drawing up outside as he arrives home late after work, and Raphael begins to get excited at the prospect of having his master back home. Mario's 'first love' was a Fiat 126, and in spite of his good income he keeps the old car running. Relaxing and sipping a glass of Chianti is just what he needs after a hard day's work. The pieces of furniture in his sitting room, and even his television set, are not the latest models, but he likes it that way - the old objects give him a sense of security. Slowly unwinding, he looks forward to spending the weekend with his family and friends at his house in the countryside. He grew up there, and is very attached to the old villa and everything in it.

He often imagines what it will be like when he retires, when he will be able to live there permanently, surrounded by his family. It will be like the good old days, when he was a boy and life was uncomplicated, less chaotic. He pictures them all sitting around the table enjoying a leisurely meal (with pasta, of course!) made from home-grown produce, and afterwards sitting together.

This peaceful fantasy is in stark contrast to the reality of last weekend! His two eldest sons had gone off to a football match. The youngest ones restlessly complained about the fact that there was still no internet connection in the house, and then went into another room to settle down in front of the television for what they called an afternoon's entertainment!

GABRIELE MORELLO, ISIDA, Palermo, Italy

■ INTRODUCTION

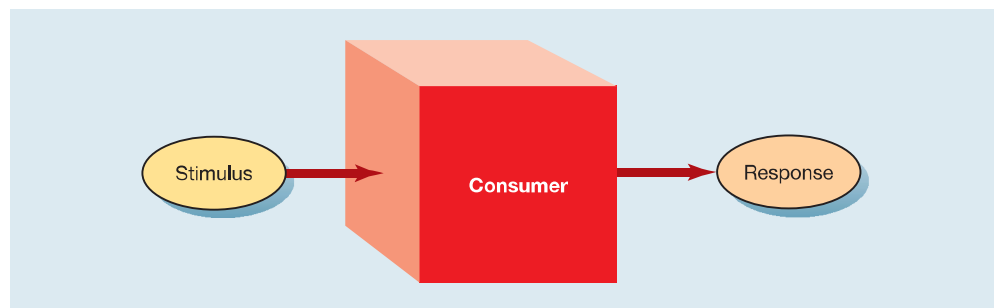
► **Learning** refers to a relatively permanent change in behaviour which comes with experience. This experience does not have to affect the learner directly: we can learn vicariously by observing events that affect others.¹ We also learn even when we are not trying to do so. Consumers, for example, recognize many brand names and can hum many product jingles, even for those product categories they themselves do not use. This casual, unintentional acquisition of knowledge is known as *incidental learning*. Like the concept of perception discussed in the last chapter, learning is an ongoing process. Our knowledge about the world is constantly being revised as we are exposed to new stimuli and receive feedback that allows us to modify behaviour in other, similar situations. The concept of learning covers a lot of ground, ranging from a consumer's simple association between a stimulus such as a product logo (such as Coca-Cola) and a response (e.g. 'refreshing soft drink') to a complex series of cognitive activities (like writing an essay on learning for a consumer behaviour exam). Psychologists who study learning have advanced several theories to explain the learning process. These range from those focusing on simple stimulus–response associations to perspectives that regard consumers as complex problem-solvers who learn abstract rules and concepts by observing others. Understanding these theories is important to marketers as well, because basic learning principles are at the heart of many consumer purchase decisions. In this chapter we'll explore how learned associations among feelings, events and products – and the memories they evoke – are an important aspect of consumer behaviour.

■ BEHAVIOURAL LEARNING THEORIES

► **Behavioural learning theories** assume that learning takes place as the result of responses to external events. Psychologists who subscribe to this viewpoint do not focus on internal thought processes. Instead, they approach the mind as a 'black box' and emphasize the observable aspects of behaviour, as depicted in Figure 3.1. The observable aspects consist of things that go into the box (the stimuli, or events perceived from the outside world) and things that come out of the box (the responses, or reactions to these stimuli).

This view is represented by two major approaches to learning: classical conditioning and instrumental conditioning. People's experiences are shaped by the feedback they receive as they go through life. Similarly, consumers respond to brand names, scents, jingles and other marketing stimuli based on the learned connections they have formed over time. People also learn that actions they take result in rewards and punishments, and this feedback influences the way they respond in similar situations in the future.

Figure 3.1 The consumer as a 'black box': a behaviourist perspective on learning



Consumers who are complimented on a product choice will be more likely to buy that brand again, while those who get food poisoning at a new restaurant will not be likely to patronize it in the future.

Classical conditioning

- **Classical conditioning** occurs when a stimulus that elicits a response is paired with another stimulus that initially does not elicit a response on its own. Over time, this second stimulus causes a similar response because it is associated with the first stimulus. This phenomenon was first demonstrated in dogs by Ivan Pavlov, a Russian physiologist doing research on digestion in animals.

Pavlov induced classically conditioned learning by pairing a neutral stimulus (a bell) with a stimulus known to cause a salivation response in dogs (he squirted dried meat powder into their mouths). The powder was an unconditioned stimulus (UCS) because it was naturally capable of causing the response. Over time, the bell became a conditioned stimulus (CS): it did not initially cause salivation, but the dogs learned to associate the bell with the meat powder and began to salivate at the sound of the bell only. The drooling of these canine consumers over a sound, now linked to feeding time, was a conditioned response (CR), just as Mario's dog Raphael begins to get excited hearing his master's Fiat 126 coming close to home.

This basic form of classical conditioning primarily applies to responses controlled by the autonomic (e.g. salivation) and nervous (e.g. eye blink) systems. That is, it focuses on visual and olfactory cues that induce hunger, thirst or sexual arousal. When these cues are consistently paired with conditioned stimuli, such as brand names, consumers may learn to feel hungry, thirsty or aroused when later exposed to the brand cues.

Classical conditioning can have similar effects for more complex reactions, too. Even a credit card becomes a conditioned cue that triggers greater spending, especially since it is a stimulus that is present only in situations where consumers are spending money. People learn that they can make larger purchases when using credit cards, and they also have been found to leave larger tips than they do when using cash.² Small wonder that American Express reminds us, 'Don't leave home without it.' Conditioning effects are more likely to occur after the conditioned and unconditioned stimuli have been paired a number of times.³ Repeated exposures increase the strength of stimulus-response associations and prevent the decay of these associations in memory.

- Conditioning will not occur or will take longer if the CS is only occasionally presented with the UCS. One result of this lack of association may be **extinction**, which occurs when the effects of prior conditioning are reduced and finally disappear. This can occur, for example, when a product is overexposed in the marketplace so that its original allure is lost. The Lacoste polo shirt, with its distinctive crocodile logo, is a good example of this effect. When the once-exclusive crocodile started to appear on baby clothes and many other items, it lost its cachet and was soon replaced by other contenders, such as the Lauren polo player.⁴
- **Stimulus generalization** refers to the tendency of stimuli similar to a CS to evoke similar, conditioned responses.⁵ Pavlov noticed in subsequent studies that his dogs would sometimes salivate when they heard noises that only resembled a bell (e.g. keys jangling). People react to other, similar stimuli in much the same way that they responded to an original stimulus. A chemist shop's bottle of own-brand mouthwash deliberately packaged to resemble Listerine mouthwash may evoke a similar response among consumers who assume that this 'me-too' product shares other characteristics of the original. These 'lookalikes' tactics work, and companies have targeted well-known brands ranging from Unilever's Blue Band margarine, and Calvé peanut butter, to Hanes scarves. Similar colours, shapes and designs are all stimuli which consumers organize and interpret, and up to a point, these tactics are perfectly legal!⁶

- ▶ **Stimulus discrimination** occurs when a stimulus similar to a CS is not followed by a UCS. In these situations, reactions are weakened and will soon disappear. Part of the learning process involves making a response to some stimuli but not to other, similar stimuli. Manufacturers of well-established brands commonly urge consumers not to buy 'cheap imitations' because the results will not be what they expect.

Operant conditioning

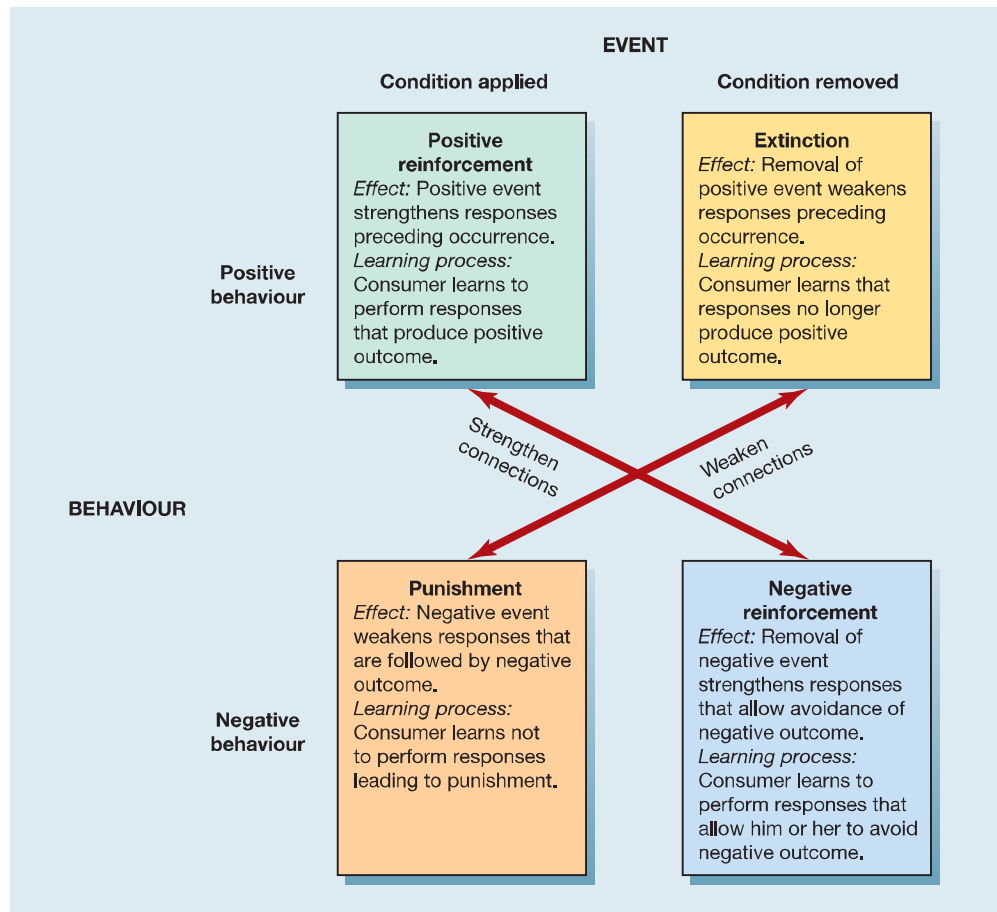
- ▶ **Operant conditioning**, also known as instrumental conditioning, occurs as the individual learns to perform behaviours that produce positive outcomes and to avoid those that yield negative outcomes. This learning process is most closely associated with the psychologist B.F. Skinner, who demonstrated the effects of instrumental conditioning by teaching animals to dance, pigeons to play ping-pong, and so on, by systematically rewarding them for desired behaviours.⁷

While responses in classical conditioning are involuntary and fairly simple, those in instrumental conditioning are made deliberately to obtain a goal and may be more complex. The desired behaviour may be learned over a period of time, as intermediate actions are rewarded in a process called *shaping*. For example, the owner of a new shop may award prizes to shoppers just for coming in, hoping that over time they will continue to drop in and eventually buy something.

Also, classical conditioning involves the close pairing of two stimuli. Instrumental learning occurs as a result of a reward received following the desired behaviour and takes place over a period in which a variety of other behaviours are attempted and abandoned because they are not reinforced. A good way to remember the difference is to keep in mind that in instrumental learning the response is performed because it is instrumental to gaining a reward or avoiding a punishment. Consumers over time come to associate with people who reward them and to choose products that make them feel good or satisfy some need.

- ▶ Operant conditioning (instrumental learning) occurs in one of three ways. When the environment provides **positive reinforcement** in the form of a reward, the response is strengthened, and appropriate behaviour is learned. For example, a woman who is complimented after wearing Obsession perfume will learn that using this product has the desired effect, and she will be more likely to keep buying the product.
- ▶ **Negative reinforcement** also strengthens responses so that appropriate behaviour is learned. A perfume company, for example, might run an ad showing a woman sitting alone on a Saturday night because she did not use its fragrance. The message to be conveyed is that she could have avoided this negative outcome if only she had used the perfume. In contrast to situations where we learn to do certain things in order to avoid unpleasantness, **punishment** occurs when a response is followed by unpleasant events (such as being ridiculed by friends for wearing an offensive-smelling perfume). We learn not to repeat these behaviours.

When trying to understand the differences between these mechanisms, keep in mind that reactions from a person's environment to behaviour can be either positive or negative and that these outcomes or anticipated outcomes can be applied or removed. That is, under conditions of both positive reinforcement and punishment, the person receives a reaction after doing something. In contrast, negative reinforcement occurs when a negative outcome is avoided: the removal of something negative is pleasurable and hence is rewarding. Finally, when a positive outcome is no longer received, extinction is likely to occur, and the learned stimulus-response connection will not be maintained (as when a woman no longer receives compliments on her perfume). Thus, positive and negative reinforcement strengthen the future linkage between a response and an outcome because of the pleasant experience. This tie is weakened under conditions of both punishment and extinction because of the unpleasant experience. The relationships among these four conditions are easier to understand by referring to Figure 3.2.

Figure 3.2 Four types of learning outcomes

An important factor in operant conditioning is the set of rules by which appropriate reinforcements are given for a behaviour. The issue of what is the most effective reinforcement schedule to use is important to marketers, because it relates to the amount of effort and resources they must devote to rewarding consumers in order to condition desired behaviours.

- *Fixed-interval reinforcement.* After a specified period has passed, the first response that is made brings the reward. Under such conditions, people tend to respond slowly immediately after being reinforced, but their responses speed up as the time for the next reinforcement approaches. For example, consumers may crowd into a store for the last day of its seasonal sale and not reappear again until the next one.
- *Variable-interval reinforcement.* The time that must pass before reinforcement is delivered varies around some average. Since the person does not know exactly when to expect the reinforcement, responses must be performed at a consistent rate. This logic is behind retailers' use of so-called secret shoppers – people who periodically test for service quality by posing as customers at unannounced times. Since store employees never know exactly when to expect a visit, high quality must be constantly maintained.
- *Fixed-ratio reinforcement.* Reinforcement occurs only after a fixed number of responses. This schedule motivates people to continue performing the same behaviour over and over again. For example, a consumer might keep buying groceries at the same store in order to earn a gift after collecting 50 books of trading stamps.

- *Variable-ratio reinforcement.* The person is reinforced after a certain number of responses, but he or she does not know how many responses are required. People in such situations tend to respond at very high and steady rates, and this type of behaviour is very difficult to extinguish. This reinforcement schedule is responsible for consumers' attraction to slot machines. They learn that if they keep feeding money into the machine, they will eventually win something (if they don't go broke first).

Cognitive learning theory

- **Cognitive learning** occurs as a result of mental processes. In contrast to behavioural theories of learning, cognitive learning theory stresses the importance of internal mental processes. This perspective views people as problem-solvers who actively use information from the world around them to master their environment. Supporters of this viewpoint also stress the role of creativity and insight during the learning process.

The issue of consciousness

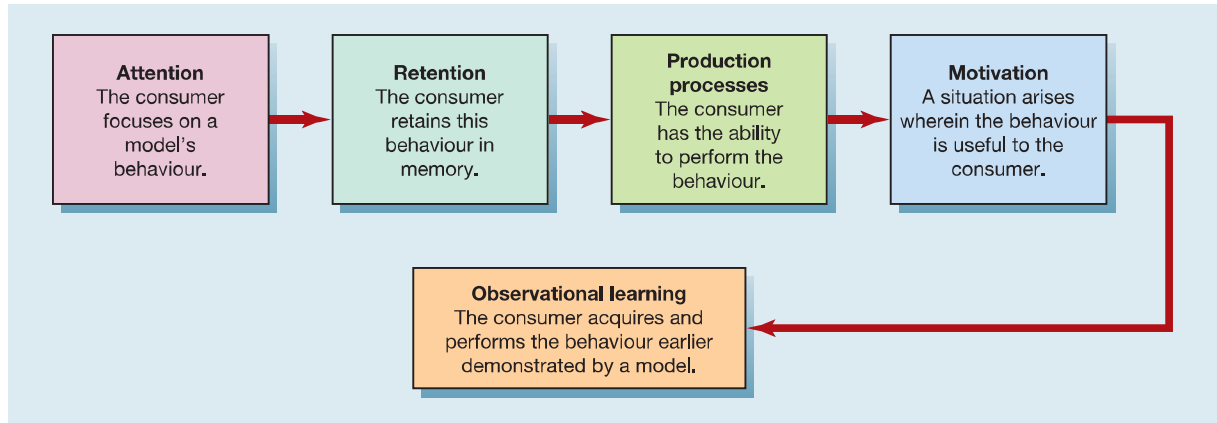
A lot of controversy surrounds the issue of whether or when people are aware of their learning processes. While behavioural learning theorists emphasize the routine, automatic nature of conditioning, proponents of cognitive learning argue that even these simple effects are based on cognitive factors: that is, expectations are created that a stimulus will be followed by a response (the formation of expectations requires mental activity). According to this school of thought, conditioning occurs because subjects develop conscious hypotheses and then act on them.

On the one hand, there is some evidence for the existence of non-conscious procedural knowledge. People apparently do process at least some information in an automatic, passive way, which is a condition that has been termed mindlessness.⁸ When we meet someone new or encounter a new product, for example, we have a tendency to respond to the stimulus in terms of existing categories, rather than taking the trouble to formulate different ones. Our reactions are activated by a trigger feature, some stimulus that cues us towards a particular pattern. For example, men in one study rated a car in an ad as superior on a variety of characteristics if a seductive woman (the trigger feature) was present in the ad, despite the fact that the men did not believe the woman's presence actually had an influence.⁹

Nonetheless, many modern theorists are beginning to regard some instances of conditioning as cognitive processes, especially where expectations are formed about the linkages between stimuli and responses. Indeed, studies using masking effects, in which it is difficult for subjects to learn CS/UCS associations, show substantial reductions in conditioning.¹⁰ For example, an adolescent girl may observe that women on television and in real life seem to be rewarded with compliments and attention when they smell nice and wear alluring clothing. She works out that the probability of these rewards occurring is greater when she wears perfume and deliberately wears a popular scent to obtain the pay-off of social acceptance.

Observational learning

- **Observational learning** occurs when people watch the actions of others and note the reinforcements they receive for their behaviours. This type of learning is a complex process: people store these observations in memory as they accumulate knowledge, perhaps using this information at a later point to guide their own behaviours. This process of imitating the behaviour of others is called modelling. For example, a woman shopping for a new kind of perfume may remember the reactions a friend received when wearing a certain brand several months earlier, and she will base her behaviour on her friend's actions. In order for observational learning in the form of modelling to occur, four conditions must be met.¹¹ (These factors are summarized in Figure 3.3.)

Figure 3.3 Components of observational learning

- 1 The consumer's attention must be directed to the appropriate model who, for reasons of attractiveness, competence, status or similarity, it is desirable to emulate.
- 2 The consumer must remember what is said or done by the model.
- 3 The consumer must convert this information into actions.
- 4 The consumer must be motivated to perform these actions.

■ MARKETING APPLICATIONS OF LEARNING PRINCIPLES

Understanding how consumers learn is very important to marketers. After all, many strategic decisions are based on the assumption that consumers are continually accumulating information about products and that people can be 'taught' to prefer some alternatives over others.

Behavioural learning applications

Many marketing strategies focus on the establishment of associations between stimuli and responses. Behavioural learning principles apply to many consumer phenomena, ranging from the creation of a distinctive brand image to the perceived linkage between a product and an underlying need.

How marketers take advantage of classical conditioning principles

The transfer of meaning from an unconditioned stimulus to a conditioned stimulus explains why 'made-up' brand names like Marlboro, Coca-Cola or IBM can exert such powerful effects on consumers. The association between the Marlboro Man and the cigarette is so strong that in some cases the company no longer even includes the brand name in its ad. When nonsense syllables (meaningless sets of letters) are paired with such evaluative words as beauty or success, the meaning is transferred to the nonsense syllables. This change in the symbolic significance of initially meaningless words shows that complex meanings can be conditioned. Recent studies have shown that attitudes formed through classical conditioning are enduring.¹²

- These conditioned associations are crucial to many marketing strategies that rely on the creation and perpetuation of positive **brand equity**, in which a brand has strong positive associations in a consumer's memory and commands a lot of loyalty as a result.¹³ As we will see in the next chapter, a product with brand equity holds a tremendous advantage in the marketplace.



Advertising often pairs a product with a positive stimulus (the attractive male model), or to a positive outcome (kind to his skin).

The Advertising Archives

Repetition One advertising researcher argues that more than three exposures are wasted. The first creates awareness of the product, the second demonstrates its relevance to the consumer, and the third serves as a reminder of the product's benefits.¹⁴ However, even this bare-bones approach implies that repetition is needed to ensure that the consumer is actually exposed to (and processes) the ad at least three times. Marketers attempting to condition an association must ensure that the consumers they have targeted will be exposed to the stimulus a sufficient number of times.

On the other hand, it is possible to have too much of a good thing. Consumers can become so used to hearing or seeing a marketing stimulus that they cease to pay attention to it (see Chapter 2). This problem, known as advertising wear-out, can be reduced by varying the way in which the basic message is presented.

Conditioning product associations Advertisements often pair a product with a positive stimulus to create a desirable association. Various aspects of a marketing message, such as music, humour or imagery, can affect conditioning. In one study, subjects who viewed a slide of pens paired with either pleasant or unpleasant music were more likely later to select the pen that appeared with pleasant music.¹⁵

The order in which the conditioned stimulus and the unconditioned stimulus is presented can affect the likelihood that learning will occur. Generally speaking, the unconditioned stimulus should be presented prior to the conditioned stimulus. The technique of backward conditioning, such as showing a soft drink (the CS) and then playing a jingle (the UCS), is generally not effective.¹⁶ Because sequential presentation is desirable for conditioning to occur, classical conditioning is not very effective in static situations, such as in magazine ads, where (in contrast to TV or radio) the marketer cannot control the order in which the CS and the UCS are perceived.

Just as product associations can be formed, so they can be extinguished. Because of the danger of extinction, a classical conditioning strategy may not be as effective for products that are frequently encountered, since there is no guarantee they will be accompanied by the CS. A bottle of Pepsi paired with the refreshing sound of a carbonated beverage being poured over ice may seem like a good example of conditioning. Unfortunately, the product would also be seen in many other contexts where this sound was absent, reducing the effectiveness of the conditioning.

By the same reasoning, a novel tune should be chosen over a popular one to pair with a product, since the popular song might also be heard in many situations in which the product is not present.¹⁷ Music videos in particular may serve as effective UCSs because they often have an emotional impact on viewers and this effect may transfer to ads accompanying the video.¹⁸

Applications of stimulus generalization The process of stimulus generalization is often central to branding and packaging decisions that attempt to capitalize on consumers' positive associations with an existing brand or company name, as exemplified by a hairdressing establishment called United Hairlines.¹⁹ In one 20-month period, Procter & Gamble introduced almost 90 new products. Not a single product carried a new brand name. In fact, roughly 80 per cent of all new products are actually extensions of existing brands or product lines.²⁰ Strategies based on stimulus generalization include the following:

- *Family branding*, in which a variety of products capitalize on the reputation of a company name. Companies such as Campbell's, Heinz, Philips and Sony rely on their positive corporate images to sell different product lines.
- *Product line extensions*, in which related products are added to an established brand. Dole, which is associated with fruit, was able to introduce refrigerated juices and juice bars, while Sun Maid went from raisins to raisin bread. Other recent extensions include Woolite rug cleaner, and the various models of Nike Air shoes.²¹
- *Licensing*, in which well-known names are 'rented' by others. This strategy is increasing in popularity as marketers try to link their products and services with well-established figures. Companies as diverse as McDonald's and Harley-Davidson have authorized the use of their names on products. Japan Airlines recently licensed the rights to use Disney characters, and, in addition to painting Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck on several of its planes, the carrier is requiring its flight attendants to wear mouse ears on some domestic flights!²²
- Marketers are increasingly capitalizing on the public's enthusiasm for films and popular TV programmes by developing numerous *product tie-ins*.
- *Lookalike packaging*, in which distinctive packaging designs create strong associations with a particular brand. This linkage is often exploited by makers of generic or



Many marketing strategies focus on the establishment of associations between stimuli and responses. Associating products with the imagery of riding in a Toyota with one's comfortable, modern living room is one example of this stimulus-response application.

Used with permission of Toyota Singapore and Saatchi & Saatchi Ltd.

private-label brands who wish to communicate a quality image by putting their products in very similar packages. As one chemist chain store executive commented, 'You want to tell the consumer that it's close to the national brand. You've got to make it look like, within the law, close to the national brand. They're at least attracted to the package.'²³

Applications of stimulus discrimination An emphasis on communicating a product's distinctive attributes vis-à-vis its competitors is an important aspect of positioning, in which consumers learn to differentiate a brand from its competitors (see Chapter 2). This is not always an easy task, especially in product categories where the brand names of many of the alternatives look and sound alike. For example, one survey showed that many consumers have a great deal of trouble distinguishing between products sold by the top computer manufacturers. With a blur of names like OmniPlex, OptiPlex, Premmia, Premium, ProLinea, ProLiant, etc., this confusion is not surprising.²⁴

Companies with a well-established brand image try to encourage stimulus discrimination by promoting the unique attributes of their brands: the constant reminders for American Express traveller's cheques: 'Ask for them by name . . .' On the other hand, a brand name that is used so widely that it is no longer distinctive becomes part of the public domain and can be used by competitors, as has been the case for such products as aspirin, cellophane, yo-yos and escalators.

How marketers take advantage of instrumental conditioning principles

Principles of instrumental conditioning are at work when a consumer is rewarded or punished for a purchase decision. Business people shape behaviour by gradually reinforcing consumers for taking appropriate actions. For example, a car dealer might encourage a reluctant buyer to try sitting in a showroom model, then suggest a test drive, and so on.

Marketers have many ways of reinforcing consumers, ranging from a simple thank you after a purchase to substantial rebates and follow-up phone calls. For example, a life insurance company obtained a much higher rate of policy renewal among a group of new customers who received a thank you letter after each payment compared to a control group that did not receive any reinforcement.²⁵

- ▶ A popular technique known as **frequency marketing** reinforces regular purchasers by giving them prizes with values that increase along with the amount purchased. This operant learning strategy was pioneered by the airline industry, which introduced 'frequent-flyer' programmes in the early 1980s to reward loyal customers. Well over 20 per cent of food stores now offer trading stamps or some other frequent-buyer promotion. Manufacturers in the fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) category also make use of this technique in food stores. For example, Douwe Egberts, the coffee manufacturer owned by Sara Lee, offers stamps which can be saved and redeemed for a whole range of coffee-related products such as espresso makers, service sets and coffee grinders, including their classic (and nostalgic) hand coffee grinder.

In some industries, these reinforcers take the form of clubs, including a Hilton Hotel Club. Club members usually earn bonus points to set against future purchases, and some get privileges such as magazines and free telephone numbers and sometimes even invitations to exclusive outings.

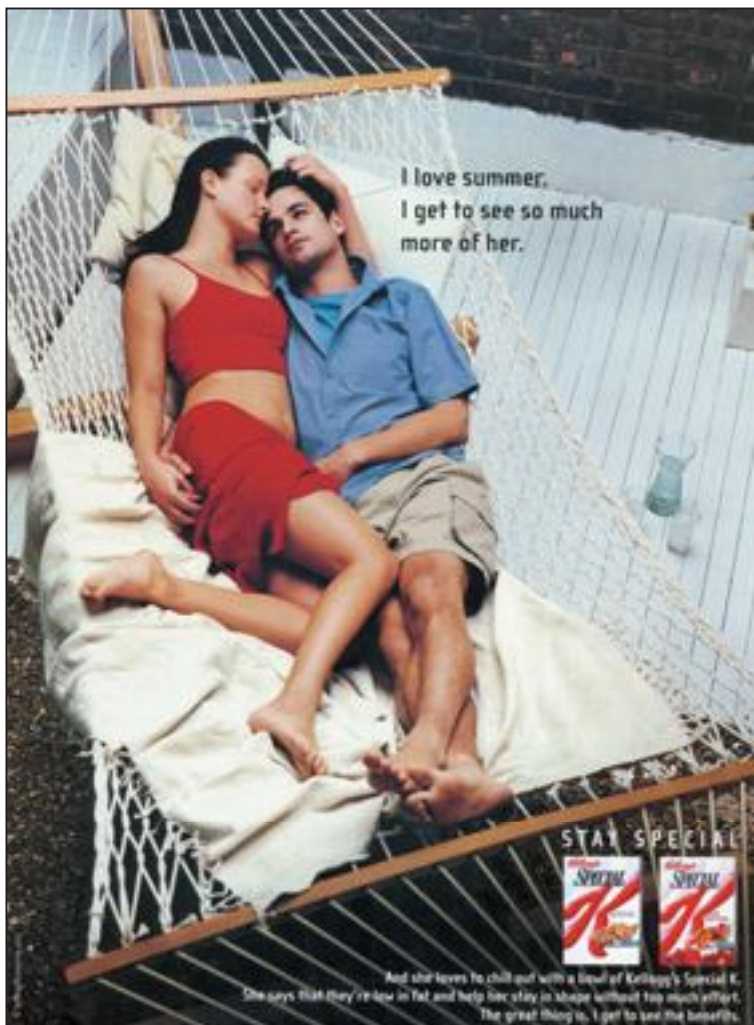
How marketers take advantage of cognitive learning principles

Consumers' ability to learn vicariously by observing how the behaviour of others is reinforced makes the lives of marketers much easier. Because people do not have to be directly reinforced for their actions, marketers do not necessarily have to reward or punish them for purchase behaviours. Instead, they can show what happens to desirable

models who use or do not use their products and know that consumers will often be motivated to imitate these actions at a later time. For example, a perfume commercial may depict a woman surrounded by a throng of admirers who are providing her with positive reinforcement for using the product. Needless to say, this learning process is more practical than providing the same personal attention to each woman who actually buys the perfume!

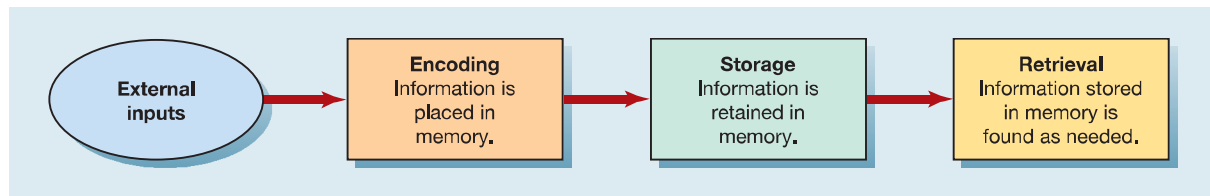
Consumers' evaluations of models go beyond simple stimulus-response connections. For example, a celebrity's image is often more than a simple reflexive response of good or bad: it is a complex combination of many attributes.²⁶ In general, the degree to which a model will be emulated depends upon his or her social attractiveness. Attractiveness can be based upon several components, including physical appearance, expertise or similarity to the evaluator.

These factors will be addressed further in Chapter 6, which discusses personal characteristics that make a communication's source more or less effective in changing consumers' attitudes. In addition, many applications of consumer problem-solving are related to ways in which information is represented in memory and recalled at a later date. This aspect of cognitive learning is the focus of the next section.



This cereal ad illustrates the principle of vicarious reinforcement. The model uses the product and is shown reaping the reward - the approval of her boyfriend.

The Advertising Archives

Figure 3.4 The memory process

■ THE ROLE OF LEARNING IN MEMORY

- ▶ **Memory** involves a process of acquiring information and storing it over time so that it will be available when needed. Contemporary approaches to the study of memory employ an information-processing approach. They assume that the mind is in some ways like a computer: data are input, processed and output for later use in revised form. In the **encoding** stage, information is entered in a way the system will recognize. In the **storage** stage, this knowledge is integrated with what is already in memory and 'warehoused' until needed. During **retrieval**, the person accesses the desired information.²⁷ The memory process is summarized in Figure 3.4.

As suggested by Mario's memories and musings at the beginning of the chapter, many of our experiences are locked inside our heads, and we maintain those memories and recall those experiences if prompted by the right cues. Marketers rely on consumers to retain information they have learned about products and services, trusting that it will later be applied in situations where purchase decisions must be made. During the consumer decision-making process, this internal memory is combined with external memory – which includes all the product details on packages in shopping lists, and through other marketing stimuli – to permit brand alternatives to be identified and evaluated.²⁸ Research supports the idea that marketers can distort a consumer's recall of a product experience. What we think we 'know' about products can be influenced by advertising messages to which we are exposed after using them. This *post-experience advertising* is more likely to alter actual memories when it is very similar or activates memories about the actual experience. For example, advertising can make a remembered product experience more favourable than it actually was.²⁹

Encoding of information for later retrieval

The way information is encoded or mentally programmed helps to determine how it will be represented in memory. In general, incoming data that are associated with other information already in memory stand a better chance of being retained. For example, brand names that are linked to physical characteristics of a product category (such as Coffee-mate creamer or Sani-Flush toilet bowl cleaner) or that are easy to visualize (e.g. Tide, or Omo detergent) tend to be more easily retained in memory than more abstract brand names.³⁰

Types of memory

A consumer may process a stimulus simply in terms of its sensory meaning, such as its colour or shape. When this occurs, the meaning may be activated when the person sees a picture of the stimulus. We may experience a sense of familiarity on seeing an ad for a new snack food we recently tasted, for example.

In many cases, though, meanings are encoded at a more abstract level. *Semantic meaning* refers to symbolic associations, such as the idea that rich people drink champagne or that fashionable men wear an earring.

Episodic memories are those that relate to events that are personally relevant, such as Mario's.³¹ As a result, a person's motivation to retain these memories will be strong. Couples often have 'their song' that reminds them of their first date or wedding. The memories that might be triggered upon hearing this song would be quite different and unique for them.

Commercials sometimes attempt to activate episodic memories by focusing on experiences shared by many people. Recall of the past may have an effect on future behaviour. A university fund-raising campaign can get higher donations by evoking pleasant memories. Some especially vivid associations are called *flashbulb* memories. These are usually related to some highly significant event. One method of conveying product information is through a *narrative* or a story. Much of the social information that an individual acquires is represented in memory this way. Therefore, utilizing this method in product advertising can be an effective marketing technique. Narratives persuade people to construct a mental representation of the information they are viewing. Pictures aid in this construction and allow for a more developed and detailed mental representation.³²

Memory systems

According to the information-processing perspective, there are three distinct memory systems: sensory memory, short-term memory (STM) and long-term memory (LTM). Each plays a role in processing brand-related information. The interrelationships of these memory systems are summarized in Figure 3.5.

- **Sensory memory** permits storage of the information we receive from our senses. This storage is very temporary: it lasts a couple of seconds at most. For example, a person might be walking past a bakery and get a brief, but enticing, whiff of bread baking inside. While this sensation would only last for a few seconds, it would be sufficient to allow the person to determine if he or she should investigate further. If the information is retained for further processing, it passes through an attentional gate and is transferred to short-term memory.
- **Short-term memory** also stores information for a limited period of time, and its capacity is limited. Similar to a computer, this system can be regarded as working memory: it holds the information we are currently processing. Verbal input may be stored acoustically (in terms of how it sounds) or semantically (in terms of its meaning).³³

Figure 3.5 Relationships among memory systems

