

soared.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, Ronald Biggs, whose claim to fame was his 1963 role in 'The Great Train Robbery' in the UK, successfully served as a spokesman in Brazil for a company that makes door locks – a topic about which he is presumably knowledgeable!<sup>28</sup> Tommy Hilfiger cultivated a rebellious, street-smart image by using rapper Snoop Doggy Dogg (who was acquitted of murder charges) to help launch his line and Coolio, a former crack addict and thief, as a runway model.<sup>29</sup> Parents may not be thrilled by these message sources – but isn't that the point?

### Source biases

A consumer's beliefs about a product's attributes can be weakened if the source is perceived to be the victim of bias in presenting information.<sup>30</sup> *Knowledge bias* implies that a source's knowledge about a topic is not accurate. *Reporting bias* occurs when a source has the required knowledge, but his or her willingness to convey it accurately is compromised – as, for instance, when an expert endorses a product. While his or her credentials might be appropriate, the fact that the expert is perceived as a 'hired gun' compromises credibility.

Companies appreciate the value of having experts validate their products and sometimes their efforts to acquire these testimonials can get them into trouble. For example, Microsoft was criticized when the software company offered to pay 'travel costs' for academics if they presented papers at conferences and mentioned how Microsoft programs helped them in their work.<sup>31</sup>

Concerns are growing in the advertising world about the public's scepticism regarding celebrities who endorse products for money. It doesn't help matters when Britney Spears appears in lavish commercials for Pepsi-Cola but is caught on camera drinking Coca-Cola. Tiger Woods promoted Rolex's Tudor watches for five years, but then he abruptly switched to Swiss rival TAGHeuer. Although Tiger explained the defection simply by noting that 'My tastes have changed', it's possible that the estimated \$2 million he's now getting for this new endorsement may have been a factor.<sup>32</sup>

What is a marketer to do? One increasingly popular solution is to involve celebrities in the actual design of the products they're pitching. Michael Jordan oversees the design of Nike's Jordan line of apparel and footwear, and actresses like Victoria Principal create skin-care products for home-shopping networks. Jennifer Lopez even had veto power over the design of the bottle for her new fragrance, Glow by J-Lo.<sup>33</sup>



### marketing pitfall

For celebrity campaigns to be effective, the endorser must have a clear and popular image. In addition, the celebrity's image and that of the product he or she endorses should be similar – this effect is known as the **match-up hypothesis**.<sup>34</sup> Many promotional strategies employing stars fail because the endorser has not been selected very carefully – some marketers just assume that because a person is 'famous' he or she will serve as a successful spokesperson.

The images of celebrities can, however, be pre-tested to increase the probability of consumer acceptance. One widely used technique is the so-called '*Q*' rating (*Q* stands for quality) developed by a market research company. This rating considers two factors in surveys: consumers' level of familiarity with a name and the number of respondents who indicate that a person, programme or character is a favourite. While not the most sophisticated research technique, the *Q* rating acknowledges that familiarity with a celebrity's name in itself is not sufficient to gauge popularity since some widely known people are also widely disliked. Celebrities with a low *Q* rating include Michael Jackson, Madonna and Cyndi Lauper. Those with high ratings include Stevie Wonder, Billy Joel, Phil Collins, Whitney Houston, Cher and Dolly Parton.<sup>35</sup> In 2003 Michael Jordan had the highest Sports*Q* rating with 51 (in 2002 he had received 58); while Tiger Woods was the second placed athlete in the *Q* ratings with 44.<sup>36</sup> However, even a high *Q* rating does not guarantee success if the celebrity's specific image doesn't match up with the featured product.

Another potential problem is what to do about celebrity endorsers who 'misbehave'. Pepsi had to abandon its sponsorship of Michael Jackson after the singer was accused of child abuse. Madonna met a similar fate following the release of her controversial *Like a Prayer* music video. Then, of course, there's always O.J. Simpson . . . To avoid some of these problems, most endorsement contracts now contain a morality clause which allows the company to release the celebrity if so warranted.<sup>37</sup> Other advertisers are looking a lot more favourably at characters like Bugs Bunny, who tend to stay out of trouble!

However, some advertisers want something different. They often deliberately go for athletes with negative public reputations in order to attract attention, especially of those consumers who see themselves as rebels, and therefore who would be likely to identify with this aspect of the company's image. The best example of this is probably Allan Iverson who 'has been repeatedly in trouble with the law and the NBA, and he makes inappropriate public statements. In spite of this behaviour, the amount of money he gets paid in endorsement contracts is almost comparable to the figures Michael Jordan earned in his prime.'<sup>38</sup>

### Hype vs. buzz: the corporate paradox

Obviously many marketers spend lavishly to create marketing messages that they hope will convince hordes of customers that they are the best. There's the rub – in many cases

- ▶ they may be trying too hard! We can think of this as the **corporate paradox** – the more involved a company appears to be in the dissemination of news about its products, the less credible it becomes.<sup>39</sup> As we'll see in Chapter 10, consumer word-of-mouth typically
- ▶ is the most convincing kind of message. As Table 6.1 shows, **buzz** is word-of-mouth that
- ▶ is viewed as authentic and generated by customers. In contrast, **hype** is dismissed as inauthentic – corporate propaganda planted by a company with an axe to grind. So, the challenge to marketers is to get the word out and about without it looking like they are trying too hard.

The now-famous *Blair Witch Project* that led many viewers to believe the fictional treatment was in fact a real documentary demonstrated the power of a brand that seems as if it's not one. Some marketers are trying to borrow the veneer of buzz by mounting 'stealth' campaigns that seem as if they are untouched by the corporate world. *Buzz building* has become the new mantra for many companies that recognize the power of underground word-of-mouth.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, a small cottage industry has sprung up as some firms begin to specialize in the corporate promotion business by planting comments on websites which are made to look as if they originated from actual consumers. Consider one example:

- When RCA records wanted to create a buzz around teen pop singer Christina Aguilera, they hired a team of young people to swarm the Web and chat about her on popular teen sites like **alloy.com**, **bolt.com** and **gurl.com**. Posing as fans, they posted entries raving about her new material. Just before one of her albums was launched,

**Table 6.1** Hype versus buzz

Hype	Buzz
Advertising	Word-of-Mouth
Overt	Covert
Corporate	Grass-roots
Fake	Authentic
Skepticism	Credibility

RCA also hired a direct marketing company to email electronic postcards filled with song snippets and biographical information to 50,000 web addresses.<sup>41</sup> The album quickly went to No. 1 in the charts.

As powerful as these tactics are, they have the potential to poison the well in a big way. Web surfers, already sceptical about what they see and hear, may get to the point where they assume every 'authentic' site they find is really a corporate front. Until then, however, buzz building online is growing strongly. Still, there's no beating the impact of a marketing message that really does originate with product users.

## Source attractiveness

- **Source attractiveness** refers to the source's perceived social value. This quality can emanate from the person's physical appearance, personality, social status, or his or her similarity to the receiver (we like to listen to people who are like us). A compelling source has great value and endorsement deals are constantly in the works. Even dead sources can be attractive: the great-grandson of the artist Renoir is putting his famous ancestor's name on bottled water, and the Picasso family licensed their name to the French car maker Citroën.<sup>42</sup>

## Star power: celebrities as communications sources

The use of celebrity endorsers is an expensive but commonly used strategy. While a celebrity endorsement strategy is expensive, it can pay off handsomely.<sup>43</sup> Oasis soft drinks is a case in point. Oasis had a very successful soft drinks launch in 1995 and became market leader in the adult soft drinks sector of the UK. The drink capitalized on the vibrant nature of the TV personality and transvestite Lily Savage, who provided the voice-over for the ads. Ms Savage was seen as ideal for launching the Oasis brand because of her 'larger than life persona, memorable personality and appeal to young people. She is seen as very down-to-earth, very British and with a witty sense of humour – exactly the kind of attitude the brand wanted to own.'<sup>44</sup> There is a growing move to use openly gay and lesbian celebrities in advertising. 'The mainstreaming of gay and lesbian endorsers . . . comes after major advertisers like Ford and Procter and Gamble sponsored campaigns aimed at the gay and lesbian market.'<sup>45</sup> American Express, Audi, Cartier, Volkswagen and Wrigley are other companies who have followed this new advertising trend.

Celebrities increase awareness of a firm's advertising and enhance both company image and brand attitudes.<sup>46</sup> Tiger Woods is now the richest endorser in sports history, with an estimated income of \$62 million per year (not counting the money he makes actually winning golf tournaments!).<sup>47</sup> Why do stars command this kind of money? One study found that famous faces capture attention and are processed more efficiently by the brain than are 'ordinary' faces.<sup>48</sup> When used properly, famous or expert spokespeople can be of great value in improving the fortunes of a product. A celebrity endorsement strategy can be an effective way to differentiate among similar products. One reason for this effectiveness is that consumers are better able to identify products that are associated with a spokesperson.<sup>49</sup> This is especially important when consumers do not perceive many actual differences among competitors, as often occurs when brands are in the mature stage of the product life cycle.

More generally, star power works because celebrities represent *cultural meanings* – they symbolize important categories such as status and social class (a 'working-class heroine' like Roseanne), gender (a 'manly man' like Sylvester Stallone or Paul Hogan, or a strong feminine character, such as Reebok's endorser, Venus Williams<sup>50</sup>), age (the boyish Michael J. Fox) and even personality types (the eccentric Kramer from *Seinfeld*). Ideally, the advertiser decides what meanings the product should convey (that is, how it

should be positioned in the marketplace), and then chooses a celebrity who has come to evoke that meaning. The product's meaning thus moves from the manufacturer to the consumer, using the star as a vehicle.<sup>51</sup>

Famous people can be effective because they are credible, attractive, or both, depending on the reasons for their fame. The computer guru Bill Gates is unlikely to be a 'fashion symbol' to most Europeans, but he may be quite effective at influencing people's attitudes towards unrestricted access to the internet (and he's apparently a fashion symbol to the Koreans – see the 'Multicultural dimension'!). On the other hand, Elizabeth Hurley may not be perceived as an expert in cosmetics, but Estée Lauder expected her to be a persuasive source for a message about perfumes and cosmetics.

The effectiveness of celebrities as communications sources often depends upon their perceived credibility. Consumers may not trust a celebrity's motives for endorsing a product, or they may question the star's competence to evaluate the product's claims. This 'credibility gap' appears to be widening. In a recent one-year period, for example, the number of consumers who found celebrity advertising 'less than credible' jumped to 52 per cent. The greatest erosion of confidence was found in younger consumers, 64 per cent of whom thought that celebrities appeared in ads just for the money.<sup>52</sup> The lack of credibility is aggravated by incidences where celebrities endorse products that they do not really believe in, or in some cases do not use. After Pepsi paid over \$5 million to singer Michael Jackson in an endorsement deal, the company was not pleased by his later confession that he doesn't drink cola – and cola fans weren't too impressed either.<sup>53</sup>

In spite of this 'credibility gap', there are some celebrities who endorse so many products that they can be seen as 'serial advertisers'. John Cleese, for example, endorses nine different organizations, promoting everything from soft drinks to telecommunications to anti-smoking campaigns (Schweppes, Sainsbury's, Talking Pages, American Express, Sony, Compaq, Cellnet, Norwich Union Direct and anti-smoking!). Here, the concept of interactive communications discussed earlier in the chapter comes into play: 'There is a complicity between the audience and someone like Cleese. He knows that we know that he knows he is selling something, but if he entertains, engages, or surprises us, then we'll forgive him.'<sup>54</sup>



### multicultural dimensions

#### Does this work for you?

Park Jin Sung combs through a rack of button-down shirts at a clothes shop in Seoul. After close examination, he picks out one in light blue that has a stiff, narrow collar and buttons spaced just right, so that the top two can be left open without exposing too much chest. 'Bill would wear this. The collar on this other one is too floppy. Definitely not Bill's style,' Mr Park says. William H. Gates, Chairman of Microsoft Corp., may not be considered the epitome of chic in Europe, but in Seoul, Korea, he is a serious style icon. Young South Koreans believe that 'dressing for success' means copying Mr Gates's wardrobe, down to his round, tortoise-shell glasses, unpolished shoes and wrinkle-free trousers.<sup>55</sup> While Bill Gates doesn't even try to be an endorser of style in Korea, or elsewhere, some celebrities choose to maintain their credibility by endorsing products only in other countries. Many celebrities who do not do many American advertisements appear frequently in Japan. Mel Gibson endorses Asahi beer, Sly Stallone appears for Kirin beer, Sean Connery plugs Ito hams and the singer Sheena was featured in ads for Shochu liquor – dressed in a kimono and wig. Even the normally reclusive comedian and film director Woody Allen featured in a campaign for a large Tokyo department store.<sup>56</sup> **Japander.com** is a website where consumers can see Hollywood stars in Japanese commercials: George Clooney advertising Toyota cars (2001); Harrison Ford promoting Kirin beer (mid 1990s); and Brad Pitt selling blue jeans (late 1990s).<sup>57</sup>



Celebrity endorsement in advertising.

The Advertising Archives

### 'What is beautiful is good'

Almost everywhere we turn, beautiful people are trying to persuade us to buy or do something. Our society places a very high premium on physical attractiveness, and we tend to assume that people who are good-looking are cleverer, more fashionable and so on. Such an assumption is called a *halo effect*, which occurs when persons who rank high on one dimension are assumed to excel on others as well. This effect can be explained in terms of the consistency principle discussed in Chapter 5, which states that people are more comfortable when all of their judgements about a person go together. This notion has been termed the 'what is beautiful is good' stereotype.<sup>58</sup> A physically attractive source tends to facilitate attitude change. His or her degree of attractiveness exerts at least modest effects on consumers' purchase intentions or product evaluation.<sup>59</sup> How does this happen?

One explanation is that physical attractiveness functions as a cue that facilitates or modifies information processing by directing consumers' attention to relevant marketing stimuli. Some evidence indicates that consumers pay more attention to ads that contain attractive models, though not necessarily to the ad copy.<sup>60</sup> In other words, an ad with a beautiful person may stand a better chance of getting noticed, but not necessarily read. While we may enjoy looking at a beautiful or handsome person, these positive feelings do not necessarily affect product attitudes or purchase intentions.<sup>61</sup>

Beauty can also function as a source of information. The effectiveness of highly attractive spokespeople in ads appears to be largely limited to those situations where the



advertised product is overtly related to attractiveness or sexuality.<sup>62</sup> 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.<sup>63</sup> 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 is 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 30 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.<sup>64</sup>

#### Non-human endorsers

Celebrities can be effective endorsers, 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



A German firm called NoDNA offers its own stable of cybermodels such as Tyra, who is shown here.

noDNA GmbH

1960s, but then came to be seen as dated and frivolous. However, there is evidence that advertising mascots such as E.B. the bunny (for Energizer batteries) are increasing in popularity again.<sup>65</sup> Mars M&M's characters beat Tony the Tiger, Mr Peanut and the Pillsbury Doughboy in a contest to find America's favourite advertising icon.<sup>66</sup>

- ▶ Increasingly popular these days is the use of virtual models. An **avatar** is the manifestation of a Hindu deity in superhuman or animal form. In the computing world it has come to mean a cyberspace presence represented by a character that you can move around inside a visual, graphical world. Many consumers became more aware of these cybermodels following the film *Simone*, which starred Al Pacino as a washed-up director who creates a virtual actress that the public believes is real. Although a flesh-and-blood woman named Rachel Roberts played the title role, New Line Cinema kept her existence a secret for almost two years as it tried to create a buzz that Simone really was a computer concoction.<sup>67</sup>

Avatars like Simone originated in computer games like *The Sims*, but now they are starting to appear in online advertising and on e-commerce sites as a mechanism for enhancing the online experience. Now, rock bands, soft drinks makers and other big-time marketers are using avatars. Coca-Cola Co. launched an avatar-populated site for the Hong Kong market where avatars mill around and chat in a Coke-sponsored world. British Telecom also tested such products as avatar email, software that makes the sender's face appear and speak the message aloud.<sup>68</sup>

The creation of avatars for commercial formats is evolving into a cottage industry as demand for compelling figures begins to grow. For example, the German firm No DNA GmbH ([www.nodna.com](http://www.nodna.com)) offers a variety of 'virtualstars'. These are computer-generated figures that appear as caricatures, 'vuppets' (cartoon-type mascots and animals) and 'replicants' that are doubles of real people. Its models receive hundreds of love letters and even a few marriage proposals.<sup>69</sup>

The advantages of virtual avatars compared to flesh-and-blood models include the ability to change the avatar in real time to suit the needs of the target audience

or individual consumer. From an advertising perspective they are likely to be more cost-effective than hiring a real person. From a personal selling and customer service perspective they have the ability to handle multiple customers at any one time, they are not geographically limited, and they are operational 24/7, thus freeing up company employees and sales personnel to perform other activities.

### Countries as product endorsers?

Do you take care to distinguish between Australian and Chilean wines, take pride in eating original Greek feta cheese, or go to some lengths to convince guests that they will like authentic Italian grappa? If so, then you're like most consumers, who *sometimes* pay real attention to the influence that country-of-origin information has on the process of evaluating and choosing products. The crucial word here is *sometimes*, since the effects of country-of-origin information can range from strong to weak to non-existent. At the cognitive level, there are many products for which the additional information of country of origin plays little or no role in our decision-making process. For example, most consumers would have no doubts about buying a pocket calculator made in China or the Philippines, because we believe that this 'simple' technology has diffused across borders, and that these less industrialized countries can make calculators as well as any other country.

Fashion and clothing manufacturing technology has also diffused around the world, but would you prefer to buy an Armani suit made in Italy or in the Philippines? Research has shown that a strong brand name can compensate for a product manufactured in a country with an unknown or weak image. Sony consumer electronics may be assembled in less industrialized countries, but as consumers we have beliefs about the quality that underlies Sony's name. A shirt with the sound-alike name Ralph Loren or LaCost may be made in the Maldives or Sri Lanka, but consumers believe that the fashion designing and quality controls will be consistent with their image of the brand name. Honda has even shipped cars produced in the USA back to Japan, as a statement of their belief in the quality of the 'American-made' Hondas!

Like brand names, country-of-origin information provides consumers with cognitive-based information, as well as prompting affective-based reactions. Although the research results on country-of-origin effects are mixed, it is clear that the 'made in' label can be important to us, depending on the consumption situation (Russian caviar might make a good impression on your boss, but how about picking her up in a Russian car?) and the level of involvement we feel towards the product or service. With the rise in patriotism, regionalism and ethnic identity around the world, multinational and regional countries, as well as country-sponsored export agencies, will continue to promote their country and its positive associations.<sup>70</sup> However, promoting products on the basis of country of origin can be problematic where these claims could be construed as 'racist',<sup>71</sup> or where there are laws against marketing campaigns based on country of origin which might discriminate against other imports, e.g. the EU.<sup>72</sup>

## ■ THE MESSAGE

A major study of more than 1,000 commercials identified factors that determine whether or not a commercial message will be persuasive. The single most important feature was whether the communications contained a brand-differentiating message. In other words, did the communication stress a unique attribute or benefit of the product?<sup>73</sup> Table 6.2 lists some other good and bad elements.

Recent research has also shown that heavy and light users of a brand respond differently to various types of messages, suggesting different communications strategy options for heavy and light users. In the case of heavy users cognitions, evaluations and intention



**Table 6.2** Positive and negative effects of elements in television commercials

Positive effects	Negative effects
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Showing convenience of use</li> <li>• Showing new product or improved features</li> <li>• Casting background (i.e. people are incidental to message)</li> <li>• Indirect comparison to other products</li> <li>• Demonstration of the product in use</li> <li>• Demonstration of tangible results (e.g. bouncy hair)</li> <li>• An actor playing the role of an ordinary person</li> <li>• No principal character (i.e. more time is devoted to the product)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extensive information on components, ingredients or nutrition</li> <li>• Outdoor setting (message gets lost)</li> <li>• Large number of on-screen characters</li> <li>• Graphic displays</li> </ul>

Source: Adapted from David W. Stewart and David H. Furse, 'The effects of television advertising execution on recall, comprehension, and persuasion', *Psychology & Marketing* 2 (Fall 1985): 135-60. Copyright © 1985, John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

to buy a brand all interact closely with each other; whereas for light users, cognitions, affect and evaluative attitude interact closely, but intention to buy the brand is less closely linked.<sup>74</sup>

Characteristics of the message itself help to determine its impact on attitudes. These variables include *how* the message is said as well as *what* is said. Some of the issues facing marketers include the following:

- Should the message be conveyed in words or pictures?
- How often should the message be repeated?
- Should a conclusion be drawn, or should this be left up to the listener?
- Should both sides of an argument be presented?
- Is it effective to make an explicit comparison with competitors' products?
- Should blatant sexual appeal be used?
- Should negative emotions, such as fear, ever be aroused?
- How concrete or vivid should the arguments and imagery be?
- Should the ad be funny?

## Sending the message

The saying 'one picture is worth ten thousand words' captures the idea that visual stimuli can economically deliver big impact, especially when the communicator wants to influence receivers' emotional responses. For this reason, advertisers often place great emphasis on vivid and creative illustrations or photography.<sup>75</sup>

On the other hand, a picture is not always as effective at communicating factual information. Ads that contain the same information, presented in either visual or verbal form, have been found to elicit different reactions. The verbal version affects ratings on the utilitarian aspects of a product, whereas the visual version affects aesthetic evaluations. Verbal elements are more effective when reinforced by an accompanying picture, especially if the illustration is *framed* (the message in the picture is strongly related to the copy).<sup>76</sup>

Because it requires more effort to process, a verbal message is most appropriate for high-involvement situations, such as in print contexts in which the reader is motivated to pay real attention to the advertising. Because verbal material decays more rapidly in



The use of humour in advertising.

The Advertising Archives

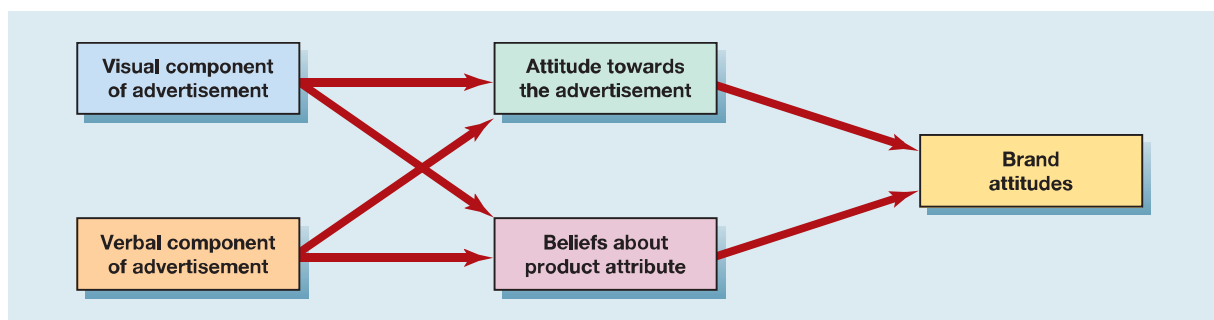
memory, more frequent exposures are needed to obtain the desired effect. Visual images, in contrast, allow the receiver to *chunk* information at the time of encoding (see Chapter 3). Chunking results in a stronger memory trace that aids retrieval over time.<sup>77</sup>

Visual elements may affect brand attitudes in one of two ways. First, the consumer may form inferences about the brand and change his or her beliefs because of an illustration's imagery. For example, people in a study who saw an ad for a box of tissues accompanied by a photo of a sunset were more likely to believe that the brand came in attractive colours. Second, brand attitudes may be affected more directly; for example, a strong positive or negative reaction elicited by the visual elements will influence the consumer's attitude toward the ad ( $A_{ad}$ ), which will then affect brand attitudes ( $A_b$ ). Figure 6.3 illustrates this *dual component model* of brand attitudes.<sup>78</sup>

### Vividness

Pictures and words may both differ in *vividness*. Powerful descriptions or graphics command attention and are more strongly embedded in memory. The reason may be because they tend to activate mental imagery, while abstract stimuli inhibit this process.<sup>79</sup> Two studies recently showed 'that stylistic properties of ad pictures can communicate descriptive concepts that affect perceptions. However, this appears to occur only when viewers engage in ample processing of the ad and the accessibility of an appropriate descriptive

**Figure 6.3** Effects of visual and verbal components of advertisements on brand attitude



Source: Andrew A. Mitchell, 'The effect of verbal and visual components of advertisements on brand attitudes and attitude toward the advertisement', *Journal of Consumer Research* 13 (June 1986): 21. Reprinted by permission of The University of Chicago Press.

concept is heightened, independent of the stylistic property.<sup>80</sup> This vividness effect can, of course, cut both ways: negative information presented in a vivid manner may result in more negative evaluations at a later time.<sup>81</sup>

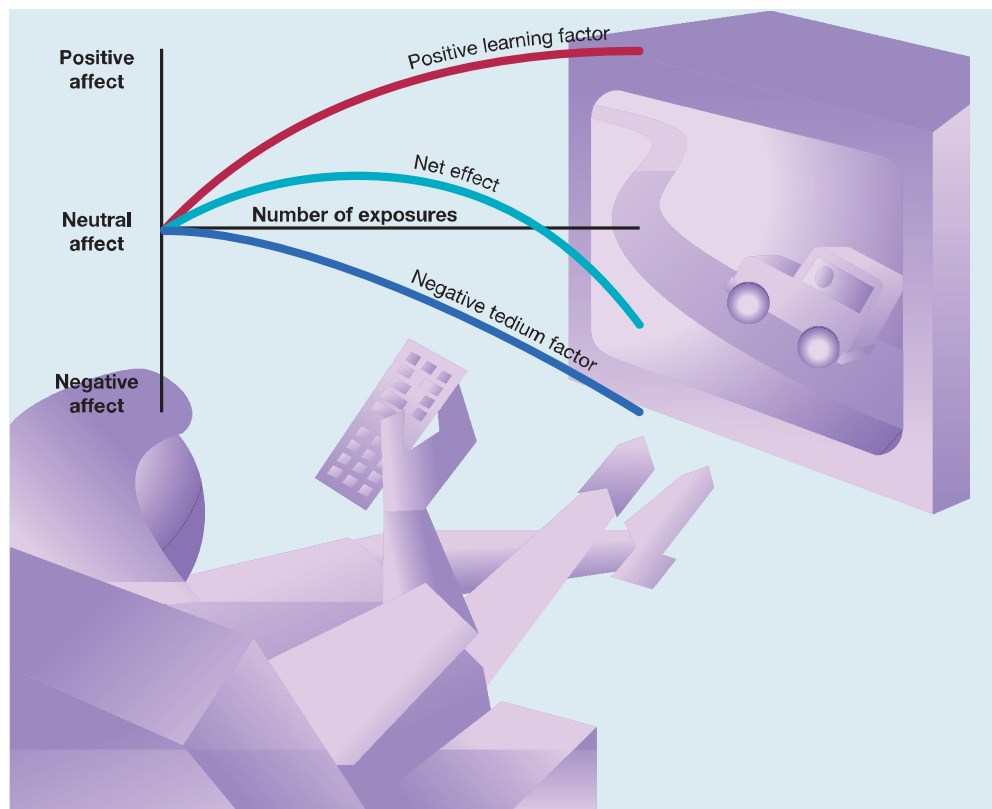
The concrete discussion of a product attribute in ad copy also influences the importance of that attribute, because more attention is drawn to it. For example, the copy for a watch that read 'According to industry sources, three out of every four watch breakdowns are due to water getting into the case' was more effective than this version: 'According to industry sources, many watch breakdowns are due to water getting into the case.'<sup>82</sup>

### Repetition

Repetition can be a two-edged sword for marketers. As noted in Chapter 3, multiple exposures to a stimulus are usually required for learning (especially conditioning) to occur. Contrary to the saying 'familiarity breeds contempt', people tend to like things that are more familiar to them, even if they were not that keen on them initially.<sup>83</sup> This is known as the *mere exposure* phenomenon. Positive effects for advertising repetition are found even in mature product categories – repeating product information has been shown to boost consumers' awareness of the brand, even though nothing new has been said.<sup>84</sup> On the other hand, as we saw in Chapter 2, too much repetition creates *habituation*, whereby the consumer no longer pays attention to the stimulus because of fatigue or boredom. Excessive exposure can cause *advertising wear-out*, which can result in negative reactions to an ad after seeing it too much.<sup>85</sup>

- ▶ The **two-factor theory** explains the fine line between familiarity and boredom by proposing that two separate psychological processes are operating when a person is repeatedly exposed to an ad. The positive side of repetition is that it increases familiarity

**Figure 6.4** Two-factor theory and advertising wear-out



Source: Adapted from Arno J. Rethans, John L. Swasy and Lawrence Marks, 'Effects of television commercial repetition: receiver knowledge', *Journal of Marketing Research* 23 (February 1986): 50-61, Figure 1.



As this Dutch ad illustrates, the way something is said can be as significant as what is said.

Kessels Kramer

and thus reduces uncertainty about the product. The negative side is that over time boredom increases with each exposure. At some point the amount of boredom incurred begins to exceed the amount of uncertainty reduced, resulting in wear-out. Figure 6.4 depicts this pattern. Its effect is especially pronounced in cases where each exposure is of a fairly long duration (such as a 60-second commercial).<sup>86</sup>

The theory implies that advertisers can overcome this problem by limiting the amount of exposure per repetition (such as using 15-second spots). They can also maintain familiarity but alleviate boredom by slightly varying the content of ads over time through campaigns that revolve around a common theme, although each spot may be different. Recipients who are exposed to varied ads about the product absorb more information about product attributes and experience more positive thoughts about the brand than do those exposed to the same information repeatedly. This additional information allows the person to resist attempts to change his or her attitude in the face of a counter-attack by a competing brand.<sup>87</sup>

## Constructing the argument

Many marketing messages are similar to debates or trials, where someone presents arguments and tries to convince the receiver to shift his or her opinion accordingly. The way the argument is presented may be as important as what is said.

### One vs. two-sided arguments

Most messages merely present one or more positive attributes about the product or reasons to buy it. These are known as *supportive arguments*. An alternative is to use a *two-sided message*, where both positive and negative information is presented. Research has indicated that two-sided ads can be quite effective, yet they are not widely used.<sup>88</sup>

Why would a marketer want to devote advertising space to publicizing a product's negative attributes? Under the right circumstances, the use of *refutational arguments*, where a negative issue is raised and then dismissed, can be quite effective. This approach

can increase source credibility by reducing reporting bias. Also, people who are sceptical about the product may be more receptive to a balanced argument instead of a 'white-wash'.<sup>89</sup> In one novel application, a Château Potelle winery ad included both positive and negative reviews of a wine by two experts. The ad suggested that consumers develop their own taste rather than relying on reviews in wine magazines.<sup>90</sup>

This is not to say that the marketer should go overboard in presenting major problems with the product. The typical refutational strategy discusses relatively minor attributes that may present a problem or fall short when compared with competitors. These drawbacks are then refuted by emphasizing positive, important attributes. For example, the car-hire firm Avis got a lot of mileage out of claiming to be only 'No. 2', while an ad for Volkswagen woefully described one of its cars as a 'lemon' because there was a scratch on the glove compartment chrome strip.<sup>91</sup> A two-sided strategy appears to be the most effective when the audience is well educated (and presumably more impressed by a balanced argument).<sup>92</sup> It is also best to use when receivers are not already loyal to the product; 'preaching to the choir' about possible drawbacks may raise doubts unnecessarily.

### Drawing conclusions

A related factor is whether the argument should draw conclusions, or whether the points should merely be presented, permitting the consumer to arrive at his or her own conclusion. Should the message say 'Our brand is superior', or should it add 'You should buy our brand'? On the one hand, consumers who make their own inferences instead of having them spoon-fed to them will form stronger, more accessible attitudes. On the other, leaving the conclusion ambiguous increases the chance that the desired attitude will not be formed.

The response to this issue depends on the consumers' motivation to process the ad and the complexity of the arguments. If the message is personally relevant, people will pay attention to it and spontaneously form inferences. However, if the arguments are hard to follow or consumers' motivation to follow them is absent, it is safer for the ad to draw conclusions.<sup>93</sup>

### Types of message appeals

The *way* something is said can be as significant as *what* is said. A persuasive message can tug at the heartstrings or scare you, make you laugh, make you cry or leave you yearning to learn more. In this section, we'll review the major alternatives available to communicators who wish to *appeal* to a message recipient.

#### Emotional vs. rational appeals

The French firm L'Oréal persuades millions of women around the world to buy its personal care products by promising them Parisian chic, associating them with its sexy spokeswomen, and using the self-assured slogan, 'Because I'm worth it.' Now the company is feeling pressure from an unlikely rival. Procter & Gamble is applying the no-nonsense

► **comparative advertising** strategy it's long used to sell soap and nappies to cosmetics as well. After P&G acquired Clairol in 2001, the company better known for Tide detergent and many other household products suddenly became the largest seller of cosmetics in supermarkets and club stores. A current P&G promotion for Pantene hair conditioner offers a '10-day challenge', promising hair that is 60 per cent healthier, 85 per cent shinier, 80 per cent less prone to breakage and 70 per cent less frizzy. In another case, after using 60 different methods to measure the size of pores, length of wrinkles and the colour and size of age spots, P&G researchers used results from one of the tests to proclaim that Olay Total Effects Night Firming Cream worked better than leading department-store brands (including those made by L'Oréal). Now P&G is trying to penetrate the high-end market,



where L'Oréal rules. The head of L'Oréal discounts this factual approach by arguing that, when it comes to selling cosmetics, '... you have to both inform, convince but also seduce consumers ... and not just ram facts down their throats'.<sup>94</sup>

So, which is better: to appeal to the head or to the heart? The answer often depends upon the nature of the product and the type of relationship consumers have with it.

Some years ago, both Toyota and Nissan introduced a large luxury car that sold for over £30,000. The two companies chose very different ways to communicate their product's attributes. Toyota's advertising for its Lexus model used a rational appeal, with ads concentrating on the large number of technical advancements incorporated in the car's design. Print ads were dominated by copy describing these engineering features.

In sharp contrast, Nissan's controversial campaign for its Infiniti used an emotional appeal, with a series of print and television ads that did not discuss the car at all. Instead the ads focused on the Zen-like experience of driving and featured long shots of serene landscapes. As one executive involved with the campaign explained, 'We're not selling the skin of the car; we're selling the spirit.'<sup>95</sup> While these ads were innovative, most American consumers had trouble grasping the Japanese conception of luxury. Later ads for the Infiniti emphasized functional features of the car to compensate for this initial confusion.

The goal of an emotional appeal is to establish a connection between the product and the consumer, a strategy known as *bonding*.<sup>96</sup> Emotional appeals have the potential to increase the chance that the message will be perceived, they may be more likely to be retained in memory and they can also increase the consumer's involvement with the product. Although Nissan's gamble on emphasizing the aesthetic aspects of its product did not pay off in this case, other emotional appeals are quite effective. Many companies turned to this strategy after realizing that consumers do not find many differences between brands, especially those in well-established, mature categories. Ads for products ranging from cars (Nissan) to cards (Hallmark) focus instead on emotional aspects. Mercury Vehicles' capitalization on emotional attachments to old rock songs succeeded in lowering the median age of their consumers for some models by ten years.<sup>97</sup>



This ad makes an emotional appeal (based on the softness of the bathroom tissue) rather than a rational appeal based on other performance criteria (for example, strength of the tissue paper; or value for money, such as unit cost)

The Advertising Archives

The precise effects of rational vs. emotional appeals are hard to gauge. Though recall of ad contents tends to be better for 'thinking' ads than for 'feeling' ads, conventional measures of advertising effectiveness (e.g. day-after recall) may not be adequate to assess cumulative effects of emotional ads. These open-ended measures are oriented towards cognitive responses, and feeling ads may be penalized because the reactions are not as easy to articulate.<sup>98</sup>



### marketing pitfall

As the foot soldiers of Nike Inc. first set out to conquer foreign lands and win World War Shoe, they marched forth under this doctrine: *Speak loudly and carry a big stick*. 'Europe, Asia, and Latin America: Barricade your stadiums. Hide your trophies. Invest in some deodorant', blared a Nike ad in *Soccer America* magazine. At least on Europe's hallowed football (or 'soccer') fields, the early results are not nearly as victorious as Nike would have liked. Their television ads throughout Europe have inspired controversy, frenzy and outrage – just the way that Nike typically likes it. A British TV ad featuring a French soccer player saying how his spitting at a fan and insulting his coach won him a Nike contract resulted in a scathing editorial against Nike in the sport's international federation newsletter. Nike has a tough task ahead of it: to win over European soccer fans where rival Adidas is king – in a game that traditionally doesn't have the glitz and packaging of basketball. Now a bit chastised, Nike is modifying its 'question authority' approach as it tries to win over the sports organizations in countries that don't appreciate its violent messages and antiestablishment themes.<sup>99</sup>

Nike is discovering that its iconoclastic culture is not as universal as it thought. With annual sales approaching \$9 billion, Nike is pinning its future on the international sneaker (trainers) and sportswear markets. The company believes its domestic sales in America, which average an astounding \$20 per person, may be peaking. By contrast, per capita Nike sales in Japan are \$4, in Germany \$3, and in China just over 2 cents. The trick will be for Nike to keep the cool edge that has appealed to America's sneaker-buying culture while recognizing that sometimes subtlety is better than shock tactics, and homage better than outrage, when dealing with tradition-bound European and Asian cultures.<sup>100</sup>

### Sex appeals

Echoing the widely held belief that 'sex sells', many marketing communications – for everything from perfumes to cars – feature heavy doses of erotic suggestions that range from subtle hints to blatant displays of flesh. Of course, the prevalence of sex appeals varies from country to country. American firms run ads abroad that would not go down well in the United States. For example, a recent 'cheeky' ad campaign designed to boost the appeal of American-made Lee Jeans among Europeans features a series of bare buttocks. The messages are based on the concept that if bottoms could choose jeans, they would opt for Lee: 'Bottoms feel better in Lee Jeans'.<sup>101</sup>

Bare flesh is so much a part of French advertising that a minor backlash is brewing as some critics complain that the advertising industry is making sex boring!<sup>102</sup> Perhaps not surprisingly, female nudity in print ads generates negative feelings and tension among female consumers, whereas men's reactions are more positive.<sup>103</sup> Another study found that males dislike nude males in ads, whereas females responded well to undressed males – but not totally nude ones.<sup>104</sup>

Does sex work? Although the use of sex does appear to draw attention to an ad, it may actually be counter-productive to the marketer. In one survey, an overwhelming 61 per cent of the respondents said that sexual imagery in a product's ad made them less likely to buy it.<sup>105</sup> There is some evidence that sexually suggestive subliminal advertising might influence consumers' feelings, rather than their cognitive responses, towards advertisements.<sup>106</sup> Ironically, a provocative picture can be *too* effective; it attracts so much attention that it hinders processing and recall of the ad's contents. Sexual appeals appear to be ineffective when used merely as an attention-grabber. They do, however, appear to work when the product is *itself* related to sex (e.g. lingerie or condoms). Overall, though, use of a strong sexual appeal is not very well received.<sup>107</sup>



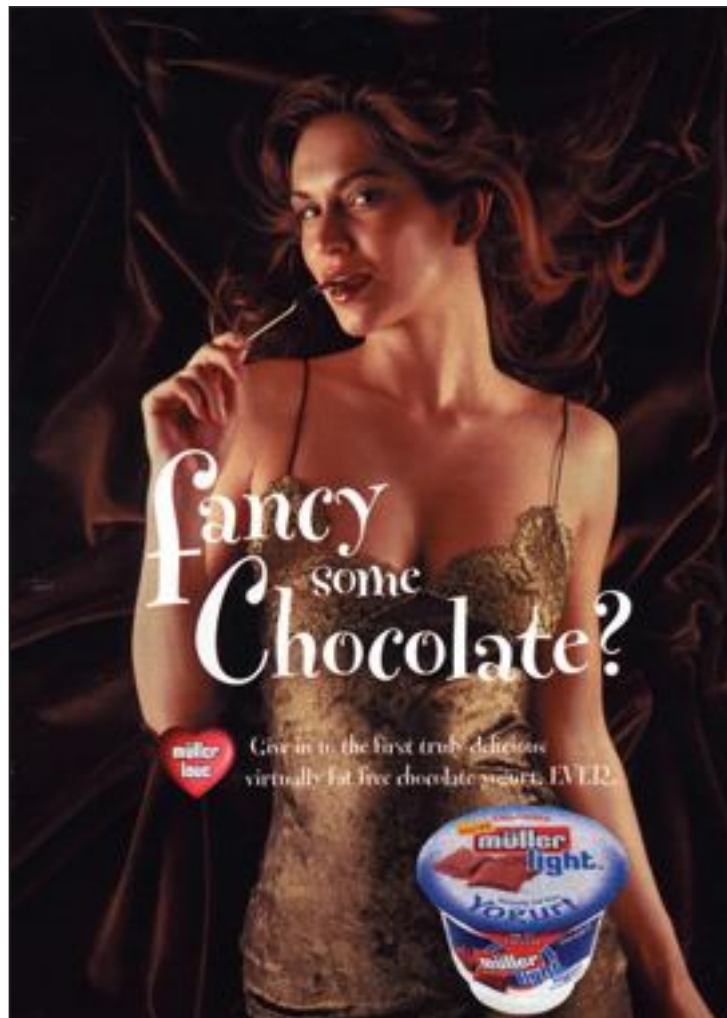
marketing  
opportunity

## Marketing with double entendres - marketing opportunity or marketing pitfall?

'Virgin Atlantic Airways is hoping business travelers will say, 'Oh, behave!' after seeing a cheeky new commercial, which uses bawdy British humour to spoof soft-core pornography.

The jest even extends to the choice of media for the parody, which will appear where the intended audience watches actual soft-core pornography, on the sex-oriented entertainment channels of the closed-circuit television systems in hotel rooms. The spoof, almost 10 minutes long, promotes Virgin Atlantic's 'Upper Class Suite' service on flights between London and New York. Though there is no nudity or profanity, there is enough wink-wink, nudge-nudge japery to fill a fourth Austin Powers film. First, there is the title, 'Suite & Innocent', then come woodenly acted characters with names like Miles High, Big Ben and Summer Turbulence, who deliver dialogue replete with double entendres about 'your first time' on board and enjoying 'several inches more' of legroom.

The plot, such as it is, is centered on a buxom blonde, the chief executive of a lingerie company, who enjoys a business trip from New York to London in a Virgin Atlantic Upper Class Suite. In one scene, a venture capitalist she meets on board offers to invest in her company, and as he writes a cheque for \$100 million, she recites aloud each zero by moaning, 'Oh, oh, oh, oh.'"<sup>108</sup>



An ad employing a sexual appeal.

The Advertising Archives

### Humorous appeals

The use of humour can be problematic, particularly because what is funny to one person may be offensive or incomprehensible to another. Views about the effectiveness of humour in advertising as part of a marketing communications strategy can vary even within companies. Within Coca-Cola, the 'Buddies' advertisement had a mixed reception. "Buddies" features two friends taking a break from a game of hoops. The first guy to the fridge gulps his Coke, then uses his friend's can to cool off, pressing it to his forehead, neck and stomach before sticking it sideways in his armpit. When the friend arrives, he is handed the second Coke and starts swigging it with no clue where it had been.<sup>109</sup> Senior executives (such as the former president Donald Keough) preferred the 1970s' hit ad 'I'd Like to Buy the World a Coke' and exerted their influence to achieve the withdrawal of this humorous ad, although the Buddies ad was seen to have a cooler image and to be more popular with younger consumers. Different cultures may have different senses of humour and use funny material in diverse ways. For example, commercials in the United Kingdom are more likely to use puns and satire than those in the United States.<sup>110</sup>

Does humour work? Overall, humorous advertisements do get attention. One study found that recognition scores for humorous alcohol ads were better than average. However, the verdict is mixed as to whether humour affects recall or product attitudes in a significant way.<sup>111</sup> One function it may play is to provide a source of *distraction*. A funny ad inhibits the consumer from *counter-arguing* (thinking of reasons why he or she doesn't agree with the message), thereby increasing the likelihood of message acceptance.<sup>112</sup>

Humour is more likely to be effective when the brand is clearly identified and the funny material does not 'swamp' the message. This danger is similar to that of beautiful models diverting attention from copy points. Subtle humour is usually better, as is humour that does not make fun of the potential consumer. Finally, humour should be appropriate to the product's image. An undertaker or a bank might want to avoid humour, while other products adapt to it quite well. Sales of Sunsweet pitted prunes improved dramatically based on the claim, 'Today the pits, tomorrow the wrinkles.'<sup>113</sup>



Humorous ads like this one from Budapest grab our attention.

McCann-Erickson, New York



**marketing  
opportunity**

## Advertiser's funny business

'Legendary Adman David Ogilvy used to encourage aspiring copywriters with the words: 'The best ideas come from jokes. Make your thinking as funny as possible.' But he also famously observed that 'nobody buys from a clown'...

If you look at any commercial break it soon becomes apparent that humour has become the dominant mode of commercial discourse... Some were brilliantly funny, such as the new campaign for Hellmann's mayonnaise... Others were toe-curlingly awful... Why should this be so?... Brands as well established as Audi, Nike, L'Oréal and Calvin Klein have spurned attempts to make us laugh.

One of the reasons the use of humour is so widespread is that it is such a versatile tool... Humour remains a legitimate marketing tool so powerful that our physiological response to it can be measured, says advertising psychologist David Lewis, who has researched the effects of humorous advertising using encephalograph equipment to measure how the brain responds to ads.

There are three main reasons why it is so powerful, he says. 'When we laugh or smile we compress the blood vessels and squeeze more blood to the brain which releases endorphins and makes us feel good.' These good feelings then have a halo effect. 'They put us in a good mood, which makes us see the product in a more positive light.'

His research also revealed that comic narratives have a very similar effect on the brain to hypnosis. 'Even very short stories put us into a trance-like state in which your attention becomes quite precise and intense. It switches off the critical analytical mind, which is why it is much easier to instil your brand message while people are in this state,' he says.

Well-judged humour can also have an important social function, argues writer and communications consultant Paul Twivy. 'It can be a source of social cohesion. Groups of people who laugh together are sharing the same values. It also says a lot about the advertiser. To be funny, you have to be observant and outwardly focused. The subtext of a good joke or genuinely funny ad is that the teller is responsive to and aware of his audience.'

Paradoxically, this may explain why when humour goes wrong it can be spectacularly damaging to brands. In 1998, the supermarket chain Sainsbury's aired a campaign starring John Cleese in which he abused the firm's staff through a megaphone, trumpeting the slogan 'Value to shout about'. The campaign did attract new customers - mostly value shoppers looking for special offers. But it also alienated existing customers and staff... This highlights one of the great dangers for advertisers: it is almost impossible to predict whether a comic idea will work as intended... Even if your ad is funny, there is still a danger that the campaign's humour is not sufficiently branded says Twivy. The result is that audiences often remember the joke in the slot, rather than the brand.

'Too often humour is used generically, using a celebrity, funny technique or twist in the tale, with the brand just tacked on. It is much harder to integrate the brand values and product features into the script. This actually turns the ad into a sophisticated version of the hard sell,' says Twivy.

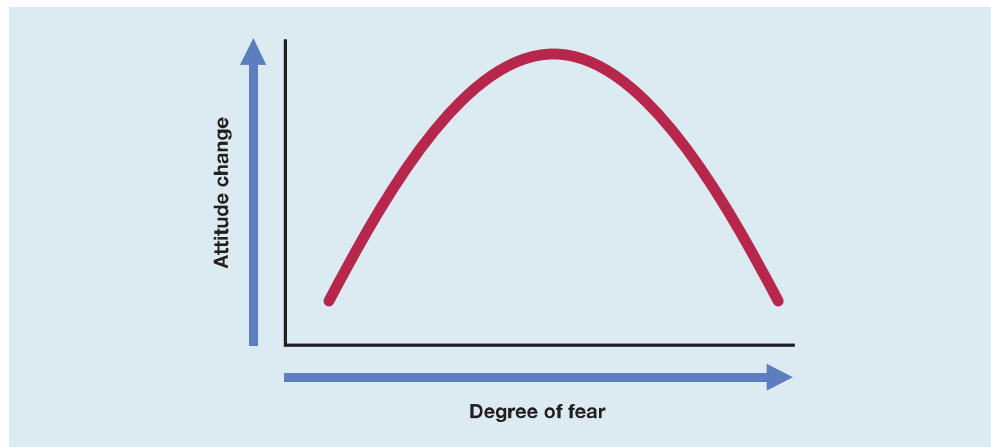
Examples of this include the Walkers Crisps campaign with Gary Lineker, which is actually a vehicle for announcing promotions and line extensions, as well as promoting core brand values; Stella Artois, which uses wit and big production budgets to communicate the brand positioning as 'reassuringly expensive'; and Tesco's Dotty campaign, which uses the annoying biddy to express Tesco's pernickety attention to detail.

Clearly humour is more applicable in some sectors than others. 'By and large, humour works best for trivial low impact buys such as sweets, beer, children's products,' says Lewis.<sup>114</sup>

### Fear appeals

- **Fear appeals** highlight the negative consequences that can occur unless the consumer changes a behaviour or an attitude. This strategy is widespread: fear appeals are used in



**Figure 6.5** The relationship between fear and attitude change

over 15 per cent of all television ads.<sup>115</sup> The arousal of fear is a common tactic for social policy issues, such as encouraging consumers to change to a healthier lifestyle by stopping smoking, using contraception, taking more exercise, eating a more balanced diet, drinking without driving (by relying on a designated driver in order to reduce physical risk to themselves or others). It can also be applied to social risk issues by threatening one's success with the opposite sex, career and so on. This tactic has been half-jokingly called 'slice of death'.

Does fear work? Fear appeals are usually most effective when only a moderate amount of fear is induced and when a solution to the problem is presented.<sup>116</sup> As shown in Figure 6.5, increasing levels of fear do not result in increased change: the relationship instead resembles an inverted U-shaped curve. If the threat is too great, the audience tends to deny that it exists as a way to rationalize the danger. Consumers will tune out of the ad because they can do nothing to solve the problem.<sup>117</sup> This approach also works better when source credibility is high.<sup>118</sup>

When a weak threat is ineffective, this may be because there is insufficient elaboration of the harmful consequences of engaging in the behaviour. When a strong threat doesn't work, it may be because *too much* elaboration interferes with the processing of the recommended change in behaviour – the receiver is too busy thinking of reasons why the message doesn't apply to him or her to pay attention to the offered solution.<sup>119</sup>

A study that manipulated subjects' degree of anxiety about AIDS, for example, found that condom ads were evaluated most positively when a moderate threat was used. In this context, copy that promoted the use of the condom because 'Sex is a risky business' (moderate threat) resulted in more attitude change than either a weaker threat that instead emphasized the product's sensitivity or a strong threat that discussed the certainty of death from AIDS.<sup>120</sup> Similarly, scare tactics have not been as effective as hoped in getting teenagers to decrease their use of alcohol or drugs. Teens simply tune out the message or deny its relevance to them.<sup>121</sup> On the other hand, a study of adolescent responses to social versus physical threat appeals in drug prevention messages found that social threat is a more effective strategy.<sup>122</sup>

Some of the research on fear appeals may be confusing a threat (the literal content of a message, such as saying 'engage in safe sex or die') with fear (an emotional response to the message). According to this argument, greater fear does result in greater persuasion – but not all threats are equally effective because different people will respond differently to the same threat. Therefore, the strongest threats are not always the most persuasive because they may not have the desired impact on the perceiver. For example, raising the spectre of AIDS is about the strongest threat that can be delivered to sexually active

young people – but this tactic is only effective if they believe they will get the disease. Because many young people (especially those who live in fairly affluent areas) don't believe that 'people like them' will be exposed to the AIDS virus, this strong threat may not actually result in a high level of fear.<sup>123</sup> The bottom line is that more precise measures of actual fear responses are needed before definitive conclusions can be drawn about the impact of fear appeals on consumption decisions.



**multicultural  
dimensions**

American gun manufacturers are capitalizing on women's fears regarding self- and home defence. According to the National Rifle Association, 15-20 million American women own guns. At least three manufacturers have introduced guns for women. One company makes a .32 magnum model called a 'Bonnie', to go with a .38 'Clyde' for his-and-hers shooting. Smith & Wesson introduced the LadySmith, a revolver with a slimmed-down grip.<sup>124</sup> The company's ads have been criticized for preying on the fears of women. They include such copy as 'The world is different today than when you grew up' and 'Personal security is a very real issue'. A magazine called *Women & Guns* now has a readership of over 25,000.<sup>125</sup> In addition to gun safety, it features articles on firearm fashions. The cover of a recent issue featured an attractive woman wearing a pistol holder strapped above her knee with the caption 'Self-Defense Goes Thigh High'.

### The message as artform: metaphors be with you

Marketers may be thought of as storytellers who supply visions of reality similar to those provided by authors, poets and artists. These communications take the form of stories because the product benefits they describe are intangible and must be given tangible meaning by expressing them in a form that is concrete and visible. Advertising creatives rely (consciously or not) on various literary devices to communicate these meanings. For example, a character like the Jolly Green Giant or the California Raisins may personify a

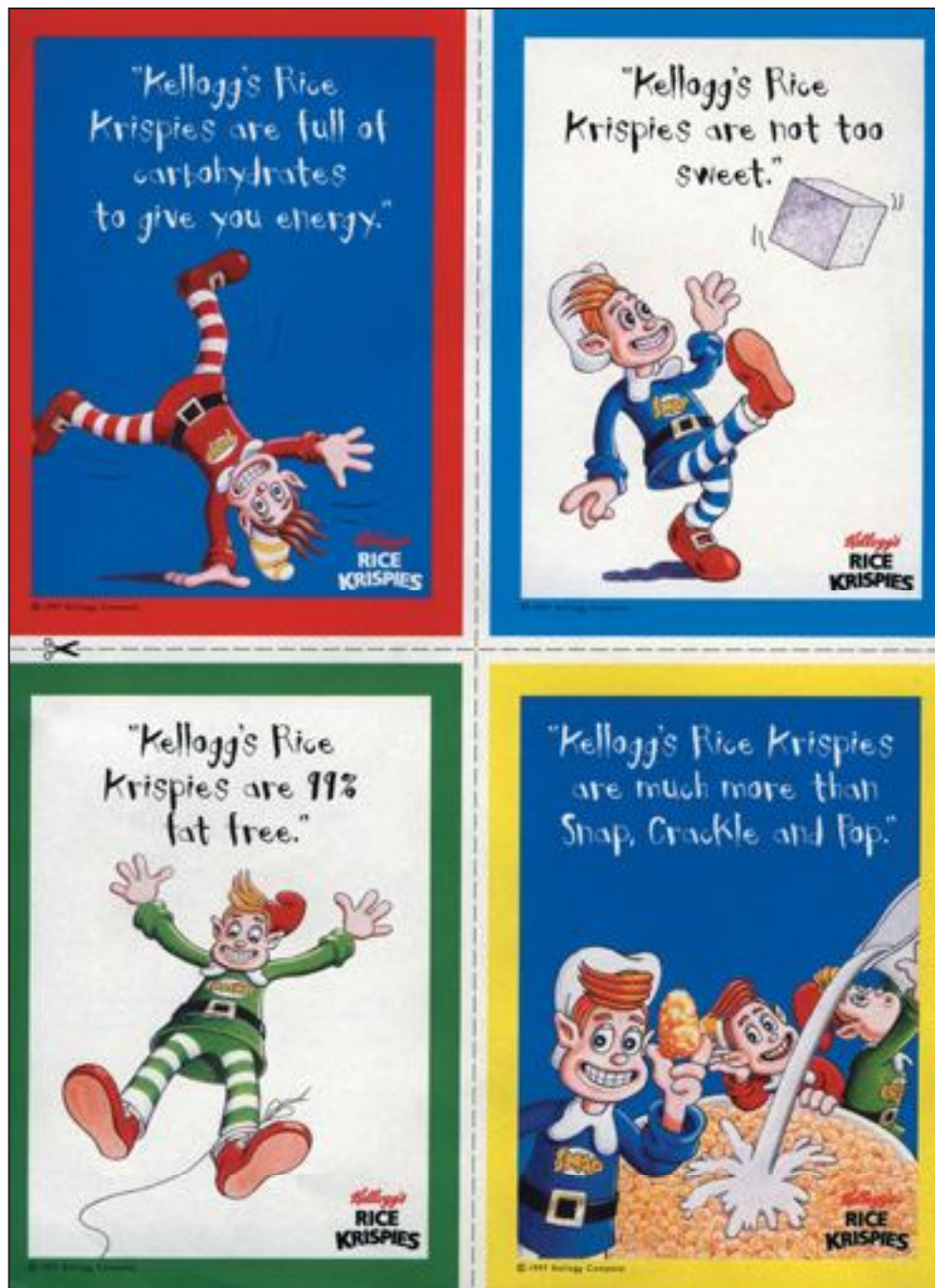


Fairy uses the metaphor of 'lighting the fuse and blowing the germs away' in its sales pitch for Lemon Fairy with its antibacterial agents.

The Advertising Archives

product or service. Many ads take the form of an *allegory*, 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', whereas 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

**Table 6.3** Some examples of advertising resonance

Product/headline	Visual
Embassy Suites: 'This Year, We're Unwrapping Suites by the Dozen'	Chocolate kisses with hotel names underneath each
Toyota auto parts: 'Our Lifetime Guarantee May Come as a Shock'	Man holding a shock absorber
Bucks filter cigarettes: 'Herd of These?'	Cigarette pack with a picture of a stag
Bounce fabric softener: 'Is There Something Creeping Up Behind You?'	Woman's dress bunched up at the back of her due to static
Pepsi: 'This Year, Hit the Beach Topless'	Pepsi bottle cap lying on the sand
ASICS athletic shoes: 'We Believe Women Should Be Running the Country'	Woman jogging in a rural setting

Source: Adapted from Edward F. McQuarrie and David Glen Mick, 'On resonance: A critical pluralistic inquiry into advertising rhetoric', *Journal of Consumer Research* 19 (September 1992): 182, Table 1. Reprinted with permission of The University of Chicago Press.

equate its Metaphors line of shoes with comfort. Metaphors allow the marketer to activate meaningful images and apply them to everyday events.<sup>126</sup> In the stock market, 'white knights' battle 'hostile raiders' using 'poison pills', while Tony the Tiger allows us to equate Frosties cereal with strength, and Merrill Lynch's bull sends the message that the company is 'a breed apart'.<sup>127</sup>

- **Resonance** is another type of literary device that is frequently used in advertising. It is a form of presentation that combines a play on words with a relevant picture. Table 6.3 gives some examples of actual ads that rely on the principle of resonance. Whereas metaphor substitutes one meaning for another by connecting two things that are in some way similar, resonance uses an element that has a double meaning, such as a pun in which there is a similarity in the sound of a word but a difference in meaning. For example, an ad for a diet strawberry shortcake dessert might bear the copy 'berried treasure' so that the qualities associated with buried treasure – being rich, hidden and associated with adventurous pirates – are conveyed about the brand. Because the text departs from expectations, it creates a state of tension or uncertainty on the part of the viewer until he or she figures out the word play. Once the consumer 'gets it', he or she may prefer the ad to a more straightforward message.<sup>128</sup> Research into how consumers process complex advertising images which are mainly pictures with little or no accompanying text (i.e. 'copy-less' ads) is still in its early stages.<sup>129</sup>

### Forms of story presentation

Just as a story can be told in words or pictures, the way the audience is addressed can also make a difference. Commercials are structured like other art forms, borrowing conventions from literature and art as they communicate their messages.<sup>130</sup> One important distinction is between a *drama* and a *lecture*.<sup>131</sup> A lecture is like a speech where the source speaks directly to the audience in an attempt to inform them about a product or persuade them to buy it. Because a lecture clearly implies an attempt at persuasion, the audience will regard it as such. Assuming listeners are motivated to do so, the merits of the message will be weighed, along with the credibility of the source. Cognitive responses, such as counter-arguments, will occur. The appeal will be accepted to the extent that it overcomes objections and is congruent with a person's beliefs.

In contrast, a drama is similar to a play or film. Whereas an argument holds the viewer at arm's length, a drama draws the viewer into the action. The characters only address

the audience indirectly; they interact with each other about a product or service in an imaginary setting. Dramas attempt to be experiential – to involve the audience emotionally. In *transformational advertising*, the consumer associates the experience of product usage with some subjective sensation. Thus, ads for the Infiniti attempted to transform the ‘driving experience’ into a mystical, spiritual event.

## ■ THE SOURCE VS. THE MESSAGE: SELL THE STEAK OR THE SIZZLE?

Two major components of the communications model, the source and the message, have been reviewed. Which aspect has more impact in persuading consumers to change their attitudes? Should marketers worry more about *what* is said, or *how* it’s said and *who* says it?

The answer is, it depends. Variations in a consumer’s level of involvement, as discussed in Chapter 4, result in the activation of very different cognitive processes when a message is received. Research indicates that this level of involvement will determine which aspects of a communication are processed. The situation appears to resemble a traveller who comes to a fork in the road: one or the other path is chosen, and this choice has a big impact on the factors that will make a difference in persuasion attempts.

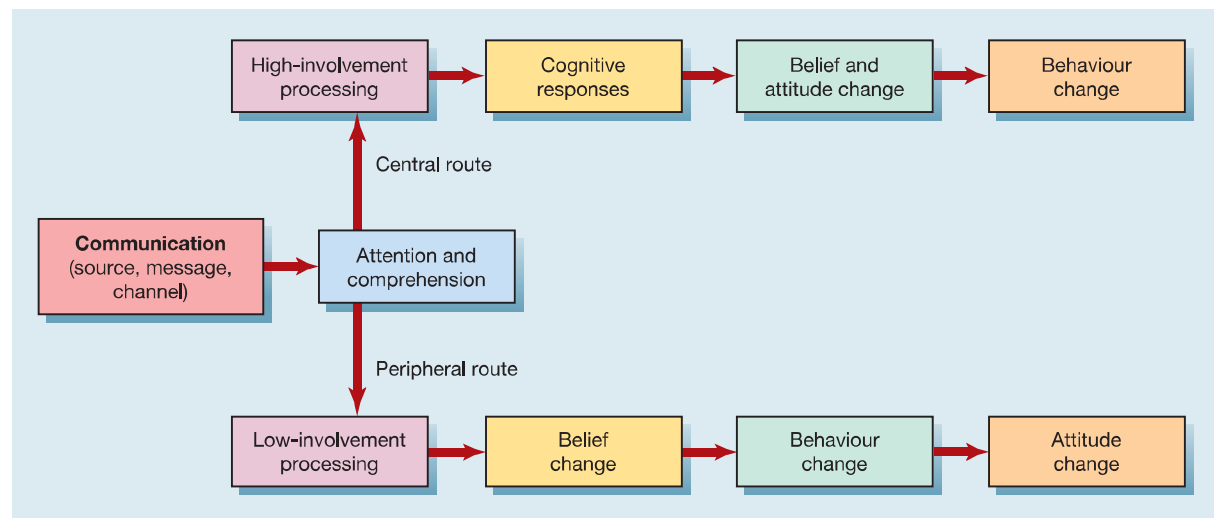
### The elaboration likelihood model

- The **elaboration likelihood model (ELM)** assumes that once a consumer receives a message he or she begins to process it.<sup>132</sup> Depending on the personal relevance of this information, one of two routes to persuasion will be followed. Under conditions of high involvement, the consumer takes the *central route* to persuasion. Under conditions of low involvement, a *peripheral route* is taken instead. This model is shown in Figure 6.6.

#### The central route to persuasion

When the consumer finds the information in a persuasive message to be relevant or somehow interesting, he or she will carefully attend to the message content. The person is likely actively to think about the arguments presented and generate *cognitive responses* to these arguments. On hearing a radio message warning about drinking alcohol while

**Figure 6.6** The elaboration likelihood model of persuasion



Source: From *Consumer Behavior*, 2nd edn, by John C. Mowen, Macmillan Publishing Company.



pregnant, an expectant mother might say to herself, 'She's right. I really should stop drinking alcohol now that I'm pregnant.' Or, she might offer counter-arguments, such as 'That's a load of nonsense. My mother had a cocktail every night when she was pregnant with me, and I turned out OK.' If a person generates counter-arguments in response to a message, it is less likely that he or she will yield to the message, whereas the generation of further supporting arguments by the consumer increases the probability of compliance.<sup>133</sup>

The central route to persuasion is likely to involve the traditional hierarchy of effects, as discussed in Chapter 5. Beliefs are carefully formed and evaluated, and the resulting strong attitudes will be likely to guide behaviour. The implication is that message factors, such as the quality of arguments presented, will be important in determining attitude change. Prior knowledge about a topic results in more thoughts about the message and also increases the number of counter-arguments.<sup>134</sup>

### The peripheral route to persuasion

In contrast, the peripheral route is taken when the person is not motivated to think deeply about the arguments presented. Instead, the consumer is likely to use other cues in deciding on the suitability of the message. These cues might include the product's package, the attractiveness of the source, or the context in which the message is presented. Sources of information extraneous to the actual message content are called *peripheral cues* because they surround the actual message.

The peripheral route to persuasion highlights the paradox of low involvement discussed in Chapter 4: when consumers do not care about a product, the stimuli associated with it increase in importance. The implication here is that low-involvement products may be purchased chiefly because the marketer has done a good job in designing a 'sexy' package, choosing a popular spokesperson, or perhaps just creating a pleasant shopping environment.

### Support for the ELM model

The ELM model has received a lot of research support.<sup>135</sup> In one study, undergraduates were exposed to one of several mock advertisements for Break, a new brand of low-alcohol beer. Using the technique of *thought listing*, they were asked to provide their thoughts about the ads, which were later analysed. Two versions of the ads are shown on p. 198.<sup>136</sup> Three independent variables crucial to the ELM model were manipulated.

- 1 *Message-processing involvement*: Some subjects were motivated to be highly involved with the ads. They were promised a gift of low-alcohol beer for participating in the study and were told that the brand would soon be available in their area. Low-involvement subjects were not promised a gift and were told that the brand would be introduced in a distant area.
- 2 *Argument strength*: One version of the ad used strong, compelling arguments to drink Break (e.g. 'Break contains one-half of the amount of alcohol of regular beers and, therefore, has less calories than regular beer.'), whereas the other listed only weak arguments (e.g. 'Break is just as good as any other regular beer.')
- 3 *Source characteristics*: Both ads contained a photo of a couple drinking the beer, but their relative social attractiveness was varied by their dress, their posture and non-verbal expressions, and the background information given about their educational achievements and occupations.

Consistent with the ELM model, high-involvement subjects had more thoughts related to the ad messages than did low-involvement subjects, who devoted more cognitive activity to the sources used in the ad. The attitudes of high-involvement subjects were more likely to be swayed by powerful arguments, whereas the attitudes of

### Introducing the new breakthrough in beer.

There are times when you want the taste and refreshment that only beer can provide, without the alcohol content of regular beer—now you have that choice with **BREAK** beer.



John and Becky Fitzgerald enjoying the great taste of Break.

**EDUCATION:** recent graduates of a major university.  
**PROFESSION:** John, orthopedic surgeon; Becky, corporate lawyer.

**HOBBIES:** running, basketball, photography, and travel.



**For the good times, without the bad times.**

### Introducing the new breakthrough in beer.

There are times when you want the taste and refreshment that only beer can provide, without the alcohol content of regular beer—now you have that choice with **BREAK** beer.



John and Becky Fitzgerald enjoying the great taste of Break.

**EDUCATION:** high school graduates.  
**PROFESSION:** John, sales clerk for a department store; Becky, tail booth operator.

**HOBBIES:** bowling, TV, movies, and stock car races.



**For the good times, without the bad times.**

Craig Andrews, J. and Shrimp, T.A. (1990) Effects of Involvement, Argument, Strength, and Source Characteristics on Central and Peripheral Processing in Advertising, *Psychology & Marketing*, 7, Fall, pp. 195-214. Copyright © 1990 John Wiley & Sons, Inc. Reprinted with permission of John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

low-involvement subjects were more likely to be influenced by the ad version using attractive sources. The results of this study, paired with numerous others, indicate that the relative effectiveness of a strong message and a favourable source depends on consumers' level of involvement with the product being advertised.

These results underscore the basic idea that highly involved consumers look for the 'steak' (strong, rational arguments). Those who are less involved are more affected by the 'sizzle' (the colours and images used in packaging or endorsements by famous people). It is important to remember, however, that the same communications variable can be both a central and a peripheral cue, depending on its relation to the attitude object. The physical attractiveness of a model might serve as a peripheral cue in a car commercial, but her beauty might be a central cue for a product such as shampoo, where the product's benefits are directly tied to enhancing attractiveness.<sup>137</sup>

## ■ CHAPTER SUMMARY

- *Persuasion* refers to an attempt to change consumers' attitudes.
- The *communications model* specifies the elements needed to transmit meaning. These include a source, message, medium, receiver, and feedback.
- The *traditional view of communications* tends to regard the perceiver as a passive element in the process. Proponents of the *uses and gratifications approach* instead regard the consumer as an active participant who uses media for a variety of reasons.
- New developments in *interactive communications* highlight the need to consider the active roles a consumer might play in obtaining product information and building a relationship with a company. Advocates of *permission marketing* argue that it's more effective to send messages to consumers who have already indicated an interest in learning about a product than trying to contact people 'cold' with these solicitations.

- A product-related communication that directly yields a transaction is a *first-order response*. Customer feedback in response to a marketing message that is not in the form of a transaction is a *second-order response*. This may take the form of a request for more information about a good, service or organization, or perhaps receipt of a 'wish list' from the customer that specifies the types of product information he or she would like to get in the future.
- Two important characteristics that determine the effectiveness of a source are its *attractiveness* and *credibility*. Although celebrities are often used with the purpose of enhancing these characteristics, their credibility is not always as strong as marketers hope. Marketing messages that consumers perceive as buzz (that are authentic and consumer-generated) tend to be more effective than those they categorize as hype (that are inauthentic, biased and company-generated).
- Some elements of a message that help to determine its effectiveness are whether it is conveyed in words or pictures, whether an emotional or a rational appeal is employed, the frequency with which it is repeated, whether a conclusion is drawn, whether both sides of the argument are presented, and whether the message includes fear, humour or sexual references.
- Advertising messages often incorporate elements from art or literature such as dramas, lectures, metaphors, allegories and resonance.
- The relative influence of the source versus the message depends on the receiver's level of involvement with the communication. The *elaboration likelihood model* specifies that a less involved consumer will more likely be swayed by source effects, whereas a more involved consumer will be more likely to attend to and process components of the actual message.

### ► KEY TERMS

**Avatar** (p. 180)

**Buzz** (p. 175)

**Communications model** (p. 168)

**Comparative advertising** (p. 186)

**Corporate paradox** (p. 175)

**Elaboration likelihood model (ELM)**  
(p. 196)

**Fear appeals** (p. 191)

**Hype** (p. 175)

**Interactionist** (p. 169)

**Metaphor** (p. 194)

**Permission marketing** (p. 169)

**Persuasion** (p. 166)

**Resonance** (p. 195)

**Sleeper effect** (p. 173)

**Source attractiveness** (p. 176)

**Source credibility** (p. 173)

**Two-factor theory** (p. 184)

**Uses and gratifications theory** (p. 169)



## CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR CHALLENGE

- 1 Identify the theoretical and managerial issues in changing attitudes through communications as outlined in the vignette about Jenny, and her baby Freddie, at the beginning of the chapter. Identify and discuss the ethical issues of using marketing techniques to promote social behaviours (e.g. healthy eating during pregnancy; breast is best). Are these issues similar to the ethical issues in promoting 'wet shaving' among European women? Why or why not?

- 2 A government agency wants to encourage the use of designated drivers by people who have been drinking. What advice could you give the organization about constructing persuasive communications? Discuss some factors that might be important, including the structure of the communications, where they should appear, and who should deliver them. Should fear appeals be used, and if so, how?
- 3 Why would a marketer consider saying negative things about his or her product? When is this strategy feasible? Can you find examples of it?
- 4 Create a list of celebrities who match up with products in your country. What are the elements of the celebrities and products that make for a 'good match'? Why? Which celebrities have a global or European-wide appeal, and why?
- 5 Go to the Martell cognac website at [www.martell.com](http://www.martell.com) and review the company's site. To attract more young men to the lagging spirits brand, the 'I am Martell' ad campaign and website aim to build a cult following around a French woman, synonymous with the brand. Martell's new global campaign relies heavily on sex appeal. How does this campaign seem to match up with your country's cultural values? Does the campaign seem persuasive to you? Why, or why not?
- 6 A marketer must decide whether to incorporate rational or emotional appeals in its communications strategy. Describe conditions that are more favourable for using one or the other.
- 7 Collect ads that rely on sex appeal to sell products. How often are the benefits of the actual product communicated to the reader?
- 8 'Too often humour is used generically, using a celebrity, funny technique or twist in the tale, with the brand just tacked on.'<sup>138</sup> Find humorous ads which are examples and counter-examples of this statement; and then critique this point of view.
- 9 Observe the process of counter-argumentation by asking a friend to talk out loud while watching a commercial. Ask him or her to respond to each point in the ad or to write down reactions to the claims made. How much scepticism regarding the claims can you detect?
- 10 Make a log of all the commercials shown on one television channel during a six-hour period. Categorize each according to product category, and whether they are presented as drama or argument. Describe the types of messages used (e.g. two-sided arguments), and keep track of the types of spokespeople (TV actors, famous people, animated characters). What can you conclude about the dominant forms of persuasive tactics currently employed by marketers?
- 11 Collect examples of ads that rely on the use of metaphors or resonance. Do you feel these ads are effective? If you were marketing the products, would you feel more comfortable with ads that use a more straightforward, 'hard-sell' approach? Why, or why not?
- 12 Create a list of current celebrities whom you feel typify cultural categories (clown, mother figure, etc.). What specific brands do you feel each could effectively endorse?
- 13 The American Medical Association encountered a firestorm of controversy when it agreed to sponsor a line of health care products manufactured by Sunbeam (a decision it later reversed). Should trade or professional organizations, health or legal professionals, journalists, professors and others endorse specific products at the expense of other offerings?

- 14 Conduct an 'avatar hunt' by going to e-commerce websites, online video game sites and online communities like The Sims or Cybertown that let people select what they want to look like in cyberspace. What seem to be the dominant figures people are choosing? Are they realistic or fantasy characters? Male or female? What types of avatars do you believe would be most effective for each of these different kinds of websites and why?
- 15 Many companies rely on celebrity endorsers as communications sources to persuade. Especially when targeting younger people, these spokespeople often are 'cool' musicians, athletes or film stars. In your opinion, who would be the most effective celebrity endorser today, and why? Who would be the least effective? Why?

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# THE SELF



Gareth, a marketing director, is a happily married man, and his two children aged ten and nine provide immense joy in his life. However, at 42 he feels younger than his years, and somewhat anxious about his totally family-oriented life - he has a nice house, a magnificent garden and takes regular family holidays in rural France. But he has begun to feel the loss of his previous, extravagant, carefree life, one in which he perceived himself to be a well-dressed, admired individual of good taste and discernment who always turned heads when he entered the room. He is apprehensive that his 'Gareth the family man' role has totally taken over his life's spirit.

It's a life he loves and one which has his complete commitment, but one which he also views as 'prudent and sensible'.

Some months into the development of these feelings, Gareth is contacted by his company's personnel department about replacing his company car. Three years earlier he had selected a sensible Audi 80 with the needs of the family in mind. In the meantime, his wife has bought a Volvo Estate, which is always used for family travel. He has an exorbitant budget allocated to car purchase, due to his long-term commitment and excellent contribution to company performance over the last 18 months. As a result he can select almost any car he desires. After a prolonged search and extensive thought he decides on a Porsche Boxster.

The Porsche Boxster, a well-designed and admired car for the driver of good taste and discernment, has the image of a sporty, confident, powerful individual. The current press campaign displays a successful 30-something man being admired at the traffic lights, in the office car parks *and* at the local school collecting his children. Whilst driving home Gareth plays his CD collection at full volume, exceeds the legal speed limit when he believes it is 'safe' to do so, and generally feels more like the much-revered Gareth who graduated some 20 years ago. Now to consider trying some of those men's cosmetics and moisturizers that he's read so much about lately in *Maxim*, *GQ*, *Esquire* and *FHM* magazines . . .

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## ■ PERSPECTIVES ON THE SELF

Gareth is not alone in feeling that his self-image and possessions affect his 'value' as a person. Consumers' insecurities about their appearance are rampant: it has been estimated that 72 per cent of men and 85 per cent of women are unhappy with at least one aspect of their appearance.<sup>1</sup> Reflecting this discontent, new cosmetics for men and new clinical 'beauty procedures' have grown rapidly in Europe in the past few years, and revenues for men's cosmetics are projected to approach 1 billion euros!<sup>2</sup> Many products, from cars to aftershave, are bought because the person is trying to highlight or hide some aspect of the self. In this chapter, we'll focus on how consumers' feelings about themselves shape their consumption habits, particularly as they strive to fulfil their society's expectations about how a male or female should look and act.

### Does the self exist?

The 1980s were called the 'Me Decade' because for many this time was marked by an absorption with the self. While it seems natural to think about each consumer having a self, this concept is actually a relatively new way of regarding people and their relationship to society. The idea that each human life is unique, rather than a part of a group, developed in late medieval times (between the eleventh and fifteenth centuries in Europe). The notion that the self is an object to be pampered is even more recent. In addition, the emphasis on the unique nature of the self is much greater in Western societies.<sup>3</sup> Many Eastern cultures by contrast stress the importance of a collective self, where the person's identity is derived in large measure from his or her social group.

Both Eastern and Western cultures see the self as divided into an inner, private self and an outer, public self. But where they differ is in terms of which part is seen as the 'real you'. The West tends to subscribe to an independent construal of the self which emphasizes the inherent separateness of each individual. Non-Western cultures, in contrast, tend to focus on an interdependent self where one's identity is largely defined by the relationships one has with others.<sup>4</sup>

For example, a Confucian perspective stresses the importance of 'face' – others' perceptions of the self and maintaining one's desired status in their eyes. One dimension of face is *mien-tzu* – reputation achieved through success and ostentation. Some Asian cultures developed explicit rules about the specific garments and even colours that certain social classes and occupations were allowed to display, and these live on today in Japanese style manuals which provide very detailed instructions for dressing and for addressing a particular individual.<sup>5</sup> That orientation is at odds with such Western practices as 'casual Fridays', which encourage employees to express their unique selves. To illustrate these cross-cultural differences further, a recent Roper Starch Worldwide survey compared consumers in 30 countries to see which were the most and least vain. Women living in Venezuela topped the charts: 65 per cent said they thought about their appearance all the time.<sup>6</sup> Other high-scoring countries included Russia and Mexico. The lowest scorers lived in the Philippines and Saudi Arabia (where only 28 per cent of consumers surveyed agreed with this statement).

The self can be understood from many different theoretical vantage points. As discussed in Chapter 4, a psychoanalytical or Freudian perspective regards the self as a system of competing forces riddled with conflict. In Chapter 3 we also noted that behaviourists tend to regard the self as a collection of conditioned responses. From a cognitive orientation, the self is an information-processing system, an organizing force that serves as a nucleus around which new information is processed.<sup>7</sup>

### Self-concept

- The **self-concept** refers to the beliefs a person holds about his or her attributes, and how he or she evaluates these qualities. While one's overall self-concept may be positive, there

are certainly parts of the self that are evaluated more positively than others. For example, Gareth felt better about his professional identity than he did about his pending 'middle age' identity.

### Components of the self-concept

The self-concept is a very complex structure. It is composed of many attributes, some of which are given greater emphasis when the overall self is being evaluated. Attributes of self-concept can be described along such dimensions as their content (for example, facial attractiveness vs. mental aptitude), positivity or negativity (i.e. self-esteem), intensity, stability over time and accuracy (that is, the degree to which one's self-assessment corresponds to reality).<sup>8</sup> As we'll see later in the chapter, consumers' self-assessments can be quite distorted, especially with regard to their physical appearance.

### Self-esteem

Self-esteem refers to the positivity of a person's self-concept. People with low self-esteem do not expect that they will perform very well, and they will try to avoid embarrassment, failure or rejection. In developing a new line of snack cakes, for example, Sara Lee found that consumers low in self-esteem preferred portion-controlled snack items because they felt they lacked self-control.<sup>9</sup> In contrast, people with high self-esteem expect to be successful, will take more risks and are more willing to be the centre of attention.<sup>10</sup> Self-esteem is often related to acceptance by others. As you probably remember, teenagers who are members of high-status groups have higher self-esteem than their excluded classmates.<sup>11</sup>

Marketing communications can influence a consumer's level of self-esteem. Exposure to ads can trigger a process of *social comparison*, where the person tries to evaluate his or her self by comparing it to the people depicted in these artificial images. This form of comparison appears to be a basic human motive, and many marketers have tapped into this need by supplying idealized images of happy, attractive people who just happen to be using their products.

The social comparison process was illustrated in a study which showed that female college students do tend to compare their physical appearance with advertising models. Furthermore, study participants who were exposed to beautiful women in advertisements afterwards expressed lowered satisfaction with their own appearance, as compared to controls.<sup>12</sup> Another study demonstrated that young women's perceptions of their own body shapes and sizes can be altered after being exposed to as little as 30 minutes of television programming.<sup>13</sup>

*Self-esteem advertising* attempts to change product attitudes by stimulating positive feelings about the self.<sup>14</sup> One strategy is to challenge the consumer's self-esteem and then show a linkage to a product that will provide a remedy. Sometimes compliments are derived by comparing the person to others. One recent European advertising campaign even took to comparing different European nationalities, with the focus on self-esteem. British women face a stereotype: they are the plump ones on the beaches of Europe. Until now, that image has been fodder for jokes – not an advertising campaign. Slim-Fast, the diet brand, is running ads that rally British women to lose weight or lose face to sexier Continental counterparts in France, Spain and Sweden. One Slim-Fast ad is a photo of a French model and reads, 'I love British women. They make me look great.' Another spot shows a gorgeous Spanish woman, 'Face it, British women, it's not last year's bikini getting smaller.' One proposed ad read: 'You've got to be brave to share the beach with me.' After focus groups found it too insulting, the advertising agency softened the copy by making it more collective. It became: 'British women are so brave sharing the beach with us.' They also dropped the line, 'I bet your boyfriend thinks I look great in this.'<sup>15</sup>

### Real and ideal selves

Self-esteem is influenced by a process where the consumer compares his or her actual standing on some attribute to some ideal. A consumer might ask 'Am I as attractive as I

- ▶ would like to be?', 'Do I make as much money as I should?', and so on. The **ideal self** is
- ▶ a person's conception of how he or she would like to be, while the **actual self** refers to our more realistic appraisal of the qualities we have or lack.

The ideal self is partly moulded by elements of the consumer's culture, such as heroes or people depicted in advertising who serve as models of achievement or appearance.<sup>16</sup> Products may be purchased because they are believed to be instrumental in helping us achieve these goals. Some products are chosen because they are perceived to be consistent with the consumer's actual self, while others are used to help reach the standard set by the ideal self.

### Fantasy: bridging the gap between the selves

While most people experience a discrepancy between their real and ideal selves, for some consumers this gap is larger than for others. These people are especially good targets for marketing communications that employ *fantasy* appeals.<sup>17</sup> A **fantasy** or daydream is a self-induced shift in consciousness, which is sometimes a way of compensating for a lack of external stimulation or of escaping from problems in the real world.<sup>18</sup> Many products and services are successful because they appeal to consumers' tendency to fantasize. These marketing strategies allow us to extend our vision of ourselves by placing us in unfamiliar, exciting situations or by permitting us to try interesting or provocative roles. And with today's technology, like Dove's Real Beauty campaign<sup>19</sup> or the virtual digitized preview from the plastic surgeon's PC of how your new face lift will probably look, consumers can experiment before taking the plunge in the real world.

## Multiple selves

In a way, each of us is really a number of different people – your mother probably would not recognize the 'you' that emerges while you're on holiday with a group of friends! We have as many selves as we do different social roles. Depending on the situation, we act differently, use different products and services, and we even vary in terms of how much we like ourselves. A person may require a different set of products to play a desired role: she may choose a sedate, understated perfume when she is being her professional self, but splash on something more provocative on Saturday night as she becomes her *femme fatale* self. The dramaturgical perspective on consumer behaviour views people much like actors who play different roles. We each play many roles, and each has its own script, props and costumes.<sup>20</sup>

The self can be thought of as having different components, or *role identities*, and only some of these are active at any given time. Some identities (e.g. husband, boss, student) are more central to the self than others, but other identities (e.g. stamp collector, dancer or advocate for greater equality in the workplace) may be dominant in specific situations. For example, executives in a survey undertaken in the United States, the UK and some Pacific Rim countries said that different aspects of their personalities come into play depending on whether they are making purchase decisions at home or at work. Not surprisingly, they report being less time-conscious, more emotional and less disciplined in their home roles.<sup>21</sup>

### Symbolic interactionism

- ▶ If each person potentially has many social selves, how does each develop and how do we decide which self to 'activate' at any point in time? The sociological tradition of **symbolic interactionism** stresses that relationships with other people play a large part in forming the self.<sup>22</sup> This perspective maintains that people exist in a symbolic environment, and the meaning attached to any situation or object is determined by the interpretation of these symbols. As members of society, we learn to agree on shared meanings. Thus, we 'know' that a red light means stop, or that McDonald's 'golden arches' mean fast food.



While this Bianco Footwear ad is making a visually playful metaphor which likens the 'Stiletto Effect' of the model's legs to the stiletto heel of the shoes, an additional message to female consumers is also part of the ad – the message that thin is fashionable.

Bianco Footwear Danmark A/S

Like other social objects, the meanings of consumers themselves are defined by social consensus. The consumer interprets his or her own identity, and this assessment is continually evolving as he or she encounters new situations and people. In symbolic interactionist terms, we *negotiate* these meanings over time. Essentially the consumer poses the question: 'Who am I in this situation?' The answer to this question is greatly influenced by those around us: 'Who do *other people* think I am?' We tend to pattern our behaviour on the perceived expectations of others in a form of *self-fulfilling prophecy*. By acting the way we assume others expect us to act, we may confirm these perceptions. This pattern of self-fulfilling behaviour is often expressed in our 'gendered roles', as we will see later in this chapter.

### The looking-glass self

- This process of imagining the reactions of others towards us is known as 'taking the role of the other', or the **looking-glass self**.<sup>23</sup> According to this view, our desire to define ourselves operates as a sort of psychological sonar: we take readings of our own identity by 'bouncing' signals off others and trying to project what impression they have of us. The looking-glass image we receive will differ depending upon whose views we are considering.

Like the distorted mirrors in a funfair, our appraisal of who we are can vary, depending on whose perspective we are taking and how accurately we are able to predict their evaluations of us. A successful man like Gareth may have doubts about his role as a middle-aged 'family man' as it conflicts with his earlier self-image as dapper and carefree (whether these perceptions are true or not). A self-fulfilling prophecy may be at work here, since these 'signals' can influence Gareth's actual behaviour. If he doesn't believe he's dapper, he may choose clothing and behaviour that actually make him less dapper. On the other hand, his self-confidence in a professional setting may cause him to



assume that others hold his 'executive self' in even higher regard than they actually do (we've all known people like that!).

### Self-consciousness

There are times when people seem to be painfully aware of themselves. If you have ever walked into a class in the middle of a lecture and noticed that all eyes were on you, you can understand this feeling of *self-consciousness*. In contrast, consumers sometimes behave with shockingly little self-consciousness. For example, people may do things in a stadium, a riot or a student party that they would never do if they were highly conscious of their behaviour.<sup>24</sup>

Some people seem in general to be more sensitive to the image they communicate to others (on the other hand, we all know people who act as if they're oblivious to the impression they are making!). A heightened concern about the nature of one's public 'image' also results in more concern about the social appropriateness of products and consumption activities.

Several measures have been devised to measure this tendency. Consumers who score high on a scale of *public self-consciousness*, for example, are also more interested in clothing and are heavier users of cosmetics.<sup>25</sup> A similar measure is *self-monitoring*. High self-monitors are more attuned to how they present themselves in their social environments, and their product choices are influenced by their estimates of how these items will be perceived by others.<sup>26</sup> Self-monitoring is assessed by consumers' extent of agreement with such items as 'I suppose I put on a show to impress or entertain others', or 'I would probably make a good actor'.<sup>27</sup> High self-monitors are more likely than low self-monitors to evaluate products consumed in public in terms of the impressions they make on others.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, other research has looked at aspects of *vanity*, such as a fixation on physical appearance or on the achievement of personal goals. Perhaps not surprisingly, groups like body-builders and fashion models tend to score higher on this dimension.<sup>29</sup>

## ■ CONSUMPTION AND SELF-CONCEPT

By extending the dramaturgical perspective a bit further, it is easy to see how the consumption of products and services contributes to the definition of the self. For an actor to play a role convincingly, he or she needs the correct props, stage setting and so on. Consumers learn that different roles are accompanied by *constellations* of products and activities which help to define these roles.<sup>30</sup> Some 'props' are so important to the roles we play that they can be viewed as a part of the *extended self*, a concept to be discussed shortly.

### Products that shape the self: you are what you consume

Recall that the reflected self helps to shape self-concept, which implies that people see themselves as they imagine others see them. Since what others see includes a person's clothing, jewellery, furniture, car and so on, it stands to reason that these products also help to determine the perceived self. A consumer's products place him or her in a social role, which helps to answer the question 'Who am I *now*?'

People use an individual's consumption behaviours to help them make judgements about that person's social identity. In addition to considering a person's clothes, grooming habits, and such like, we make inferences about personality based on a person's choice of leisure activities (squash vs. soccer), food preferences (vegetarians vs. 'steak and chips' people), cars or home decorating choices. People who are shown pictures of someone's sitting room, for example, are able to make surprisingly accurate guesses

about his or her personality.<sup>31</sup> In the same way that a consumer's use of products influences others' perceptions, the same products can help to determine his or her *own* self-concept and social identity.<sup>32</sup>

A consumer exhibits *attachment* to an object to the extent that it is used by that person to maintain his or her self-concept.<sup>33</sup> Objects can act as a sort of security blanket by reinforcing our identities, especially in unfamiliar situations. For example, students who decorate their room or house with personal items are less likely to drop out. This coping process may protect the self from being diluted in an unfamiliar environment.<sup>34</sup>

- The use of consumption information to define the self is especially important when an identity is yet to be adequately formed, something that occurs when a consumer plays a new or unfamiliar role. **Symbolic self-completion theory** predicts that people who have an incomplete self-definition tend to complete this identity by acquiring and displaying symbols associated with it.<sup>35</sup> Adolescent boys may use 'macho' products like cars and cigarettes to bolster their developing masculinity: these items act as a 'social crutch' to be leaned on during a period of uncertainty about identity.

### Loss of self

The contribution of possessions to self-identity is perhaps most apparent when these treasured objects are lost or stolen. One of the first acts performed by institutions that want to repress individuality and encourage group identity, such as prisons or convents, is to confiscate personal possessions.<sup>36</sup> Victims of burglaries and natural disasters commonly report feelings of alienation, depression or of being 'violated'. One consumer's comment after being robbed is typical: 'It's the next worse thing to being bereaved; it's like being raped.'<sup>37</sup> Burglary victims exhibit a diminished sense of community, reduced sense of privacy and take less pride in their house's appearance than do their neighbours.<sup>38</sup>

The dramatic impact of product loss is highlighted by studying post-disaster conditions, when consumers may literally lose almost everything but the clothes on their backs following a fire, hurricane, flood or earthquake. Some people are reluctant to undergo the process of recreating their identity by acquiring all new possessions. Interviews with disaster victims reveal that some are reluctant to invest the self in new possessions and so become more detached about what they buy. This comment from a woman in her fifties is representative of this attitude: 'I had so much love tied up in my things. I can't go through that kind of loss again. What I'm buying now won't be as important to me.'<sup>39</sup>

### Self/product congruence

- Because many consumption activities are related to self-definition, it is not surprising to learn that consumers demonstrate consistency between their values (see Chapter 4) and the things they buy.<sup>40</sup> **Self-image congruence models** predict that products will be chosen when their attributes match some aspect of the self.<sup>41</sup> These models assume a process of cognitive matching between these attributes and the consumer's self-image.<sup>42</sup>

While results are somewhat mixed, the ideal self appears to be more relevant as a comparison standard for highly expressive social products such as perfume. In contrast, the actual self is more relevant for everyday, functional products. These standards are also likely to vary by usage situation. For example, a consumer might want a functional, reliable car to commute to work everyday, but a flashier model with more 'zing' when going out on a date in the evening. Sadly, there are examples of people using products by which the goal of enhancing the ideal self ends up conflicting with and damaging the actual self. The body-building craze that swept through the United States and the north-east of England resulted in an increasing number of young men using anabolic steroids for body-building. This steroid use may 'bulk up' the physique (and provide a faster

attainment of the ideal self), but it also damages the actual self, since the steroids cause male infertility.<sup>43</sup>

Research tends to support the idea of congruence between product usage and self-image. One of the earliest studies to examine this process found that car owners' ratings of themselves tended to match their perceptions of their cars – drivers of the sporty Pontiac model saw themselves as more active and flashier than did Volkswagen drivers.<sup>44</sup> Congruity has also been found between consumers and their most preferred brands of beer, soap, toothpaste and cigarettes relative to their least preferred brands, as well as between consumers' self-images and their favourite shops.<sup>45</sup> Some specific attributes that have been found to be useful in describing some of the matches between consumers and products include rugged/delicate, excitable/calm, rational/emotional and formal/informal.<sup>46</sup>

While these findings make some intuitive sense, we cannot blithely assume that consumers will always buy products whose characteristics match their own. It is not clear that consumers really see aspects of themselves in down-to-earth, functional products that don't have very complex or human-like images. It is one thing to consider a brand personality for an expressive, image-oriented product like perfume and quite another to impute human characteristics to a toaster.

Another problem is the old 'chicken-and-egg' question: do people buy products because the products are seen as similar to the self, or do they *assume* that these products must be similar because they have bought them? The similarity between a person's self-image and the images of products purchased does tend to increase with ownership, so this explanation cannot be ruled out.

## The extended self

As noted earlier, many of the props and settings consumers use to define their social roles in a sense become a part of their selves. Those external objects that we consider a part of us comprise the **extended self**. In some cultures, people literally incorporate objects into the self – they lick new possessions, take the names of conquered enemies (or in some cases eat them) or bury the dead with their possessions.<sup>47</sup> We don't usually go that far, but many people do cherish possessions as if they were a part of them. Many material objects, ranging from personal possessions and pets to national monuments or landmarks, help to form a consumer's identity. Just about everyone can name a valued possession that has a lot of the self 'wrapped up' in it, whether it is a treasured photograph, a trophy, an old shirt, a car or a cat. Indeed, it is often possible to construct a pretty accurate 'biography' of someone just by cataloguing the items on display in his or her bedroom or office.

In one study on the extended self, people were given a list of items that ranged from electronic equipment, facial tissues and television programmes to parents, body parts and favourite clothes. They were asked to rate each in terms of its closeness to the self. Objects were more likely to be considered a part of the extended self if 'psychic energy' was invested in them by expending effort to obtain them or because they were personalized and kept for a long time.<sup>48</sup>

In an important study on the self and possessions, four levels of the extended self were described. These range from very personal objects to places and things that allow people to feel like they are rooted in their larger social environments:<sup>49</sup>

- *Individual level.* Consumers include many of their personal possessions in self-definition. These products can include jewellery, cars, clothing and so on. The saying 'You are what you wear' reflects the belief that one's things are a part of what one is.
- *Family level.* This part of the extended self includes a consumer's residence and its furnishings. The house can be thought of as a symbolic body for the family and often is a central aspect of identity.



This Italian ad demonstrates that our favourite products are part of the extended self.

D'Adda, Lorenzini, Vigorelli, BBDO S.p.A.  
Photo: Ilan Rubin

- *Community level.* It is common for consumers to describe themselves in terms of the neighbourhood or town from which they come. For farming families or residents with close ties to a community, this sense of belonging is particularly important.
- *Group level.* Our attachments to certain social groups can be considered a part of self. A consumer may feel that landmarks, monuments or sports teams are a part of the extended self.

## ■ GENDER ROLES

Sexual identity is a very important component of a consumer's self-concept. People often conform to their culture's expectations about how those of their gender should act, dress, speak and so on. Of course, these guidelines change over time, and they can differ radically across societies. Some societies are highly dichotomized, with little tolerance for deviation from gender norms. In other societies this is not the case, and greater freedom in behaviour, including behaviour stemming from sexual orientation, is allowed. In certain societies, lip-service is paid to gender equality, but inequalities are just under the surface; in others, there is greater sharing of power, of resources and of decision-making. To the extent that our culture is everything that we learn, then virtually all aspects of the consumption process must be affected by culture. It is not always clear to what extent sex differences are innate rather than culturally shaped – but they're certainly evident in many consumption decisions.<sup>50</sup>

Consider the gender differences market researchers have observed when comparing the food preferences of men and women. Women eat more fruit, men are more likely to eat meat. As one food writer put it, 'Boy food doesn't grow. It is hunted or killed.' Men are more likely to eat Frosted Flakes or Corn Flakes, while women prefer multigrain cereals. Men are more likely than women to consume soft drinks, while women account

for the bulk of sales of bottled water. The sexes also differ sharply in the quantities of food they eat: when researchers at Hershey's discovered that women eat smaller amounts of sweets, the company created a white chocolate confection called Hugs, one of the most successful food launches of all time.

## Gender differences in socialization

A society's assumptions about the proper roles of men and women are communicated in terms of the ideal behaviours that are stressed for each sex (in advertising, among other places). It is likely, for instance, that many women eat smaller quantities because they have been 'trained' to be more delicate and dainty.

### Gender goals and expectations

- ▶ In many societies, males are controlled by **agentive goals**, which stress self-assertion and mastery. Females, on the other hand, are taught to value **communal goals**, such as affiliation and the fostering of harmonious relations.<sup>51</sup>

Every society creates a set of expectations regarding the behaviours appropriate for men and women, and finds ways to communicate these priorities. This training begins very young: even children's birthday stories reinforce sex roles. A recent analysis showed that while stereotypical depictions have decreased over time, female characters in children's books are still far more likely to take on nurturant roles such as baking and gift-giving. The adult who prepares the birthday celebration is almost always the mother – often no adult male is present at all. On the other hand, the male figure in these stories is often cast in the role of a miraculous provider of gifts.<sup>52</sup>

### Macho marketers?

Marketing has historically been defined largely by men, so it still tends to be dominated by male values. Competition rather than cooperation is stressed, and the language of warfare and domination is often used. Strategists often use distinctly masculine concepts: 'market penetration' or 'competitive thrusts', for example. Marketing articles in academic journals also emphasize agentive rather than communal goals. The most pervasive theme is power and control over others. Other themes include instrumentality (manipulating people for the good of an organization) and competition.<sup>53</sup> This bias may diminish in years to come, as more marketing researchers begin to stress such factors as emotions and aesthetics in purchase decisions, and as increasing numbers of women graduate in marketing!

## Gender vs. sexual identity

- ▶ Sex role identity is a state of mind as well as body. A person's biological gender (i.e. male or female) does not totally determine whether he or she will exhibit **sex-typed traits**, or characteristics that are stereotypically associated with one sex or the other. A consumer's subjective feelings about his or her sexuality are crucial as well.<sup>54</sup>

Unlike maleness and femaleness, masculinity and femininity are *not* biological characteristics. A behaviour considered masculine in one culture may not be viewed as such in another. For example, the norm in northern Europe, and in Scandinavia in particular, is that men are stoic, while cultures in southern Europe and in Latin America allow men to show their emotions. Each society determines what 'real' men and women should and should not do.

### Sex-typed products

Many products also are *sex-typed*: they take on masculine or feminine attributes, and consumers often associate them with one sex or another.<sup>55</sup> The sex-typing of products is often



created or perpetuated by marketers (e.g. Princess telephones, boys' and girls' toys, and babies' colour-coded nappies). Even brand names appear to be sex-typed: those containing alphanumerics (e.g. Formula 409, 10W40, Clorox 2) are assumed to be technical and hence masculine.<sup>56</sup> Our gender also seems to influence the instrumentality of the products we buy. Studies have shown that men tend to buy instrumental and leisure items impulsively, projecting independence and activity, while women tend to buy symbolic and self-expressive goods concerned with appearance and emotional aspects of self. Other research has shown, for example, that men take a more self-oriented approach to buying clothing, stressing its use as expressive symbols of personality and functional benefits, whilst women have 'other-oriented' concerns, choosing to use clothes as symbols of their social and personal interrelatedness with others.<sup>57</sup>

### Androgyny

- Masculinity and femininity are not opposite ends of the same dimension. **Androgyny** refers to the possession of both masculine and feminine traits.<sup>58</sup> Researchers make a distinction between *sex-typed people*, who are stereotypically masculine or feminine, and *androgynous people*, whose mixture of characteristics allows them to function well in a variety of social situations.

Differences in sex-role orientation can influence responses to marketing stimuli, at least under some circumstances.<sup>59</sup> For example, research evidence indicates that females are more likely to undergo elaborate processing of message content, so they tend to be more sensitive to specific pieces of information when forming a judgement, while males are more influenced by overall themes.<sup>60</sup> In addition, women with a relatively strong masculine component in their sex-role identity prefer ad portrayals that include non-traditional women.<sup>61</sup> Some research indicates that sex-typed people are more sensitive to the sex-role depictions of characters in advertising, although women appear to be more sensitive to gender role relationships than are men.



This French shoe ad pokes fun at ads that demean women by proclaiming: 'No woman's body was exploited in the making of this advertisement.'

Eram and Devarrieuxvillaret Ad Agency



This ad illustrates the 'men-bashing' approach taken by some advertisers who are trying to appeal to women.

*Advertising Age* (1994). Photo courtesy of Goldsmith/Jeffrey and Bodyslimmers

In one study, subjects read two versions of a beer advertisement, couched in either masculine or feminine terms. The masculine version contained phrases like 'X Beer has the strong aggressive flavour that really asserts itself with good food and good company . . .', while the feminine version made claims like 'Brewed with tender care, X Beer is a full-bodied beer that goes down smoothly and gently . . .' People who rated themselves as highly masculine or highly feminine preferred the version that was described in (respectively) very masculine or feminine terms.<sup>62</sup> Sex-typed people in general are more concerned with ensuring that their behaviour is consistent with their culture's definition of gender appropriateness.

### Female gender roles

Gender roles for women are changing rapidly. Social changes, such as the dramatic increase in the proportion of women in waged work, have led to an upheaval in the way women are regarded by men, the way they regard themselves and in the products they choose to buy. Modern women now play a greater role in decisions regarding traditionally male purchases. For example, more than 60 per cent of new car buyers under the age of 50 are female, and women even buy almost half of all condoms sold.<sup>63</sup>



**multicultural  
dimensions**

One of the most marked changes in gender roles is occurring in Japan. Traditional Japanese wives stay at home and care for their children while their husbands work late and entertain clients. The good Japanese wife is expected to walk two paces behind her husband. However, these patterns are changing as women are less willing to live vicariously through their husbands. More than half of Japanese women aged between 25 and 29 are either working or looking for a job.<sup>64</sup> Japanese marketers and advertisers are beginning to depict women in professional situations (though still usually in subservient roles), and even to develop female market segments for such traditionally male products as cars.

### Segmenting women

In the 1949 film *Adam's Rib*, Katharine Hepburn played a stylish and competent lawyer. This film was one of the first to show that a woman can have a successful career and still be happily married. Historically, married women have worked outside the home, especially during wartime. However, the presence of women in a position of authority is a fairly recent phenomenon. The evolution of a new managerial class of women has forced marketers to change their traditional assumptions about women as they target this growing market.

Ironically, it seems that in some cases marketers have overcompensated for their former emphasis on women as housewives. Many attempts to target the vast market of females employed outside the home tend to depict all these women in glamorous, executive positions. This portrayal ignores the fact that the majority of women do not hold such jobs, and that many work because they have to, rather than for self-fulfilment. This diversity means that not all women should be expected to respond to marketing campaigns that stress professional achievement or the glamour of the working life.

Whether or not they work outside the home, many women have come to value greater independence and respond positively to marketing campaigns that stress the freedom to make their own lifestyle decisions. American Express has been targeting women for a long time, but the company found that its 'Do you know me?' campaign did not appeal to women as much as to men. A campaign aimed specifically at women featured confident women using their American Express cards. By depicting women in active situations, the company greatly increased its share of the woman's credit card market.<sup>65</sup>

### Cheesecake: the depiction of women in advertising

As implied by the ads for Virginia Slims cigarettes – 'You've come a long way, baby!' – attitudes about female sex roles changed remarkably during the twentieth century. Still, women continue to be depicted by advertisers and the media in stereotypical ways. Analyses of ads in such magazines as *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Playboy* and even *Ms.* have shown that the large majority of women included were presented as sex objects (so-called 'cheesecake' ads) or in traditional roles.<sup>66</sup> Similar findings have been obtained in both the UK and the United States.<sup>67</sup> One of the biggest culprits may be rock videos, which tend to reinforce traditional women's roles.

Ads may also reinforce negative stereotypes. Women are often portrayed as stupid, submissive, temperamental, or as sexual objects who exist solely for the pleasure of men. An ad for Newport cigarettes illustrated how the theme of female submission may be perpetuated. The copy 'Alive with pleasure!' was accompanied by a photo of a woman in the woods, playfully hanging from a pole being carried by two men. The underlying message may be interpreted as two men bringing home their captured prey.<sup>68</sup>

Although women continue to be depicted in traditional roles, this situation is changing as advertisers scramble to catch up with reality. For example, the highly successful Dove Real Beauty campaign has significantly changed women's perceptions of what is 'beautiful', particularly with respect to the notion of beauty and natural ageing. The campaign shows women in various roles, and at varying ages, and the notion of 'beauty' is central to the discussions.<sup>69</sup> Women are now as likely as men to be central characters in television commercials. But while males are increasingly depicted as spouses and parents, women are still more likely than men to be seen in domestic settings. Also, about 90 per cent of all narrators in commercials are male. The deeper male voice apparently is perceived as more authoritative and credible.<sup>70</sup>

Some ads now feature *role reversal*, where women occupy traditional men's roles. In other cases, women are portrayed in romantic situations, but they tend to be more sexually dominant. Ironically, current advertising is more free to emphasize traditional female traits now that sexual equality is becoming more of an accepted fact. This freedom

is demonstrated in a German poster for a women's magazine. The caption reads 'Today's women can sometimes show weakness, because they are strong'.



**marketing  
pitfall**

Marketers continue to grapple with ways to entice female customers for traditionally male-oriented products, such as cars and computers, without offending them. One early effort by Tandy Corp. illustrates the potential for these efforts to backfire. When the company decided to market personal computers to women in 1990, it did so by packaging them with software for doing such 'feminine' tasks as making Christmas lists, taking inventories of silverware and china, and generating recipes. Women were not amused by the homemaker stereotype, and the campaign failed.<sup>71</sup>

## Male sex roles

While the traditional conception of the ideal male as a tough, aggressive, muscular man who enjoys 'manly' sports and activities is not dead, society's definition of the male role is evolving. Men in the late 1990s were allowed to be more compassionate and to have close friendships with other men. In contrast to the depiction of macho men who do not show feelings, some marketers were promoting men's 'sensitive' side. An emphasis on male bonding was the centrepiece of many ad campaigns, especially for beers.<sup>72</sup>

The prototype of the 'new man' was expressed in the positioning statement for Paco Rabanne Pour Homme, an aftershave that attempted to focus on this new lifestyle: 'Paco Rabanne Pour Homme is a prestige men's fragrance for the male who is not a clichéd stereotype, the man who understands and accepts the fluidity of male/female relationships.' The ideal personality of the target consumer for the aftershave was described by the company with adjectives like confident, independent, romantic, tender and playful.



REO certainly has a clearly targeted market for their new cologne. Does this exclusive brand positioning make good business sense to you? Why or why not?

The Advertising Archives

In several European countries, the recent strong rise of sales of male cosmetics, moisturizers and beauty aids for men is all part of the rise of the 'male metro-sexual'. Having male celebrities like David Beckham, Brad Pitt and Tom Cruise (each approaching an 'older' age, and still looking great!) use cosmetics has been a real boost to sales. At Bumrungrad Hospital in Bangkok, the strongest growing cosmetic procedure comes from males in America and Europe, who come for face lifts and a series of shots to boost testosterone, a combination of procedures which makes for a younger appearance and more virile man.<sup>73</sup>



### marketing opportunity

As sex roles for males evolve, formerly 'feminine' products such as fragrances and hair colouring are being marketed to men. Even nail polish is slowly making its way onto men's bathroom shelves - the Hard Candy line offers its Candy Man collection, which includes a metallic gold called Cowboy and a forest green shade named Oedipus. And, responding to pressures felt by many men to look younger, ads aimed at getting men to remove grey hair have tripled over the past decade. Roper Starch Worldwide reports that 36 per cent of men have either tried colouring their hair or were open to it. L'Oréal's new Feria line for men's hair includes new hues like Camel (brownish orange) and Cherry Cola. Other vanity products introduced in recent years include Bodyslimmers underwear that sucks in the waist, and Super Shaper Briefs that round out the buttocks (for an extra \$5 the buyer can get an 'endowment pad' that slips in the front . . . ).<sup>74</sup>

Men in Japan are taking it a step further: it's fashionable for everyone from high school students to professional baseball players to tweeze their eyebrows. Others are putting mud packs on their cheeks and using hairpins, and market researchers are starting to see an interest among men in wearing foundation make-up. These choices illustrate the lengths to which one sex will go to please the other: the men are apparently trying to compete with the large number of boyish, clean-cut actors and singers who are now the rage among young Japanese women.<sup>75</sup>

### The joys of fatherhood

Males' lifestyles are changing to allow greater freedom of expression in clothing choices, hobbies such as cooking, and so on. Men are getting more involved in bringing up children, and advertising campaigns for such companies as Kodak, Omega watches and Pioneer electronics stress the theme of fatherhood.<sup>76</sup> Still, this change is coming slowly. A commercial for 7-11 stores (a corner shop chain in America and western Europe) showed two men out for a walk, each with a pushchair. As they neared a 7-11, they began to push faster until they were racing each other. The campaign's creative director explained, 'We showed them engaged in a competition to make it easier for men to accept the concept of taking care of children.'<sup>77</sup>

### Beefcake: the depiction of men in advertising

Men as well as women are often depicted in a negative fashion in advertising. They frequently come across as helpless or bumbling. As one advertising executive put it, 'The woman's movement raised consciousness in the ad business as to how women can be depicted. The thought now is, if we can't have women in these old-fashioned traditional roles, at least we can have men being dummies.'<sup>78</sup>

Just as advertisers are criticized for depicting women as sex objects, so the same accusations can be made about how males are portrayed - a practice correspondingly known as 'beefcake'.<sup>79</sup> An advertising campaign for Sansabelt trousers featured the theme 'What women look for in men's pants.' Ads featured a woman who confides, 'I always lower my eyes when a man passes [pause] to see if he's worth following.' One female executive



commented, 'turnabout is fair play . . . If we can't put a stop to sexism in advertising . . . at least we can have some fun with it and do a little leering of our own.'<sup>80</sup>

### Gay and lesbian consumers

Gay and lesbian consumers are still largely ignored by marketers. This situation is starting to change, however, as some marketers are acknowledging the upmarket demographic profile of these consumers.<sup>81</sup> IKEA, the Swedish furniture retailer with outlets throughout Europe and in several major US cities, broke new ground by running a TV spot featuring a gay male couple purchasing a dining-room table at the shop.<sup>82</sup> Other major companies making an effort to market to homosexuals include AT&T, Anheuser-Busch, Apple Computers, Benetton, Philip Morris, Seagram and Sony.<sup>83</sup> Gay consumers can even get their own credit card – a Rainbow Visa card issued by Travelers Bank USA. Using tennis star Martina Navratilova as spokeswoman, such groups as the National Center for Lesbian Rights are benefited by users of the card. The card allows people who don't qualify based on income to apply with a same-sex partner.<sup>84</sup>

The percentage of the population that is gay and lesbian is difficult to determine, and efforts to measure this group have been controversial.<sup>85</sup> However, the respected research company Yankelovich Partners Inc., which has tracked consumer values and attitudes since 1971 in its annual Monitor survey, now includes a question about sexual identity in its survey. This study was virtually the first to use a sample that reflects the population as a whole instead of polling only smaller or biased groups (such as readers of gay publications) whose responses may not be representative of all consumers. About 6 per cent of respondents identified themselves as gay/homosexual/lesbian.

As civil rights gains are made by gay activists, the social climate is becoming more favourable for firms targeting this market segment.<sup>86</sup> In one of the first academic studies in this field, the conclusion was that gays and lesbians did not qualify as a market segment because they did not satisfy the traditional criteria of being identifiable, accessible and of sufficient size.<sup>87</sup> Subsequent studies have argued that the segmentation criteria rely on outdated assumptions regarding the nature of consumers, marketing activities and the ways in which media are used in the contemporary marketplace. Here, the argument is that identifiability is an unreliable construct for socially subordinated groups, and really isn't the issue anyway. How marketers segment (by race, ethnicity, gender or, in this case, sexuality) isn't as important as whether the group itself expresses consumption patterns in identifiable ways. Similarly, the accessibility criterion continues with the assumption of active marketers who contact passive consumers. This criterion also



As gays and lesbians continue to become more socially intergrated into the mainstream of European cultures, many companies (large and small) are also becoming more visible and open in their support of this social movement. This photo, taken at the Gay & Lesbian Parade in Berlin in June 2001, shows the involvement and support of Ford in the day's celebrations.

needs to take into account the dramatic changes in media over the past two decades, in particular the use of speciality media by marketers to access special-interest segments. Gay consumers are also active web surfers: the website **Gay.com** attracts 1 million consumers a month. As many as 65 per cent of gay and lesbian internet users go online more than once a day and over 70 per cent make purchases online.<sup>88</sup> Finally, sufficient size assumes separate campaigns are necessary to reach each segment, an assumption that ignores consumers' ability and willingness to explore multiple media.<sup>89</sup>

At least in some parts of the United States and Europe, homosexuality appears to be becoming more mainstream and accepted. Mattel even sells an Earring Magic Ken doll, complete with *faux*-leather vest, lavender mesh shirt and two-tone hair (though the product has become a favourite of gay men, the company denied it was targeted at that group).



#### marketing opportunity

Lesbian consumers have recently been in the cultural spotlight, perhaps due in part to the actions of such high-profile cultural figures as Martina Navratilova, singers k.d. lang and Melissa Etheridge, and actress Ellen deGeneres. Whatever the reason, American Express, Stolichnaya vodka, Atlantic Records and Naya bottled water are among those corporations now running ads in lesbian publications (an ad for American Express Travellers Cheques for Two shows two women's signatures on a cheque). Acting on research that showed that lesbians are four times as likely to own one of their cars, Subaru of America recently began to target this market as well.<sup>90</sup>

## ■ BODY IMAGE

- ▶ A person's physical appearance is a large part of his or her self-concept. **Body image** refers to a consumer's subjective evaluation of his or her physical self. As was the case with the overall self-concept, this image is not necessarily accurate. A man may think of himself as being more muscular than he really is, or a woman may think she is fatter than is the case. In fact, it is not uncommon to find marketing strategies that exploit consumers' tendencies to distort their body images by preying upon insecurities about appearance, thereby creating a gap between the real and the ideal physical self and, consequently, the desire to purchase products and services to narrow that gap.

### Body cathexis

- ▶ A person's feelings about his or her body can be described in terms of **body cathexis**. Cathexis refers to the emotional significance of some object or idea to a person, and some parts of the body are more central to self-concept than others. One study of young adults' feelings about their bodies found that these respondents were most satisfied with their hair and eyes and had least positive feelings about their waists. These feelings were related to consumption of grooming products. Consumers who were more satisfied with their bodies were more frequent users of such 'preening' products as hair conditioner, hairdryers, aftershave, artificial tanning products, toothpaste and pumice soap.<sup>91</sup> In a large-scale study of older women in six European countries, the results showed that women would like to 'grow old beautifully', and that they were prepared to follow diets, exercise and use cosmetics to reach this goal. Wrinkles were the biggest concern, and Greek and Italian women were by far the most concerned about how to combat ageing, with northern European women expressing more agreement with the statement that ageing was natural and inevitable.<sup>92</sup>



As suggested by this Benetton ad, a global perspective on ideals of beauty is resulting in more ways to be considered attractive.

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## Ideals of beauty

A person's satisfaction with the physical image he or she presents to others is affected by how closely that image corresponds to the image valued by his or her culture. In fact, ► infants as young as two months show a preference for attractive faces.<sup>93</sup> An **ideal of beauty** is a particular model, or exemplar, of appearance. Ideals of beauty for both men and women may include physical features (big breasts or small, bulging muscles or not) as well as clothing styles, cosmetics, hairstyles, skin tone (pale vs. tan) and body type (petite, athletic, voluptuous, etc.).

### Is beauty universal?

Recent research indicates that preferences for some physical features over others are 'wired in' genetically, and that these reactions tend to be the same among people around the world. Specifically, people appear to favour features associated with good health and youth, attributes linked to reproductive ability and strength. Men are also more likely to use a woman's body shape as a sexual cue, and it has been theorized that this is because feminine curves provide evidence of reproductive potential. During puberty a typical female gains almost 15 kg of 'reproductive fat' around hips and thighs which supplies the approximately 80,000 extra calories needed for pregnancy. Most fertile women have waist : hip ratios of 0.6 : 0.8, an hourglass shape that happens to be the one men rank highest. Even though preferences for total weight change, waist : hip ratios tend to stay in this range – even the super-thin model Twiggy (who pioneered the 'waif' look decades before Kate Moss!) had a ratio of 0.73.<sup>94</sup> Other positively valued female characteristics include a higher forehead than average, fuller lips, a shorter jaw and a smaller chin and nose. Women, on the other hand, favour men with a heavy lower face, those who are slightly above average height and those with a prominent brow.

Of course, the way these faces are 'packaged' still varies enormously, and that's where marketers come in. Advertising and other forms of mass media play a significant role in determining which forms of beauty are considered desirable at any point in time. An ideal of beauty functions as a sort of cultural yardstick. Consumers compare themselves to some standard (often advocated by the fashion media) and are dissatisfied with their appearance to the extent that it doesn't match up to it. These mass media portrayals have been criticized not only on social grounds, but on issues of health as well. In a study

of New Zealand print advertisements over the period 1958–88, the findings confirmed that advertising models became thinner and less curvaceous over the 30-year period, resulting in contemporary models being approximately 8.5 kg lighter than they would be if they had the same body shape as models of the late 1950s. To achieve the currently fashionable body shape, a young woman of average height would have to weigh approximately 42 kg, which is far below the recommended level for good health.<sup>95</sup> Clearly, what constitutes ‘beauty’ for women involves a number of complex relationships – a recent study in the Netherlands found that Dutch women consider friendliness, self-confidence, happiness and humour are the most important pillars of female beauty, while only 2 per cent found ‘pretty’ as a description for female beauty. A majority of the over 3,200 women in the study felt that the media’s depiction of the ‘ideal’ female beauty was unrealistic. Most of the women in the study complained slightly over their weight and the shape of their body.<sup>96</sup>

### Ideals of beauty over time

While beauty may be only skin deep, throughout history and across cultures women in particular have worked very hard to attain it. They have starved themselves, painfully bound their feet, inserted plates into their lips, spent countless hours under hairdryers, in front of mirrors and beneath ultraviolet lights, and have undergone breast reduction or enlargement operations to alter their appearance and meet their society’s expectations of what a beautiful woman should look like.

Periods of history tend to be characterized by a specific ‘look’, or ideal of beauty. American history can be described in terms of a succession of dominant ideals. For example, in sharp contrast to today’s emphasis on health and vigour, in the early 1800s it was fashionable to appear delicate to the point of looking ill. The poet John Keats described the ideal woman of that time as ‘a milk white lamb that bleats for man’s protection’. Other looks have included the voluptuous, lusty woman as epitomized by Lillian Russell, the athletic Gibson Girl of the 1890s, and the small, boyish flapper of the 1920s as exemplified by Clara Bow.<sup>97</sup>

Throughout much of the nineteenth century, the desirable waistline for American women was 18 inches, a circumference that required the use of corsets pulled so tight that they routinely caused headaches, fainting fits, and possibly even the uterine and spinal disorders common among women of the time. While modern women are not quite as ‘strait-laced’, many still endure such indignities as high heels, body waxing, eye-lifts and liposuction. In addition to the millions spent on cosmetics, clothing, health clubs and fashion magazines, these practices remind us that – rightly or wrongly – the desire to conform to current standards of beauty is alive and well.

The ideal body type of Western women has changed radically over time, and these changes have resulted in a realignment of *sexual dimorphic markers* – those aspects of the body that distinguish between the sexes. For example, analyses of the measurements of *Playboy* centrefolds over a 20-year period from 1958 to 1978 show that these ideals got thinner and more muscular. The average hip measurement went from 36 inches in 1958 to just over 34 inches in 1978. Average bust size shrank from almost 37 inches in 1958 to about 35 inches in 1978.<sup>98</sup>

The first part of the 1990s saw the emergence of the controversial ‘waif’ look, where successful models (notably Kate Moss) were likely to have bodies resembling those of young boys. More recently, the pendulum seems to be shifting back a bit, as the more buxom ‘hourglass figure’ popular in the 1950s (exemplified by the Marilyn Monroe ideal) has reappeared.<sup>99</sup> One factor leading to this change has been the opposition to the use of super-thin models by feminist groups, who charge that these role models encourage starvation diets and eating disorders among women who want to emulate the look.<sup>100</sup> These groups have advocated boycotts against companies like Coca-Cola and Calvin Klein who have used wafer-thin models in their advertising. Some protesters have even



The Dove campaign emphasizes that our ideals about beauty, and what is beautiful, vary over time, place and age.

The Advertising Archives

taken to pasting stickers over these ads that read 'Feed this woman', or 'Give me a cheeseburger'.

We can also distinguish among ideals of beauty for men in terms of facial features, musculature and facial hair – who could confuse Tom Cruise with Mr Bean? In fact, one national survey which asked both men and women to comment on male aspects of appearance found that the dominant standard of beauty for men is a strongly masculine, muscled body – though women tend to prefer men with less muscle mass than men themselves strive to attain.<sup>101</sup> Advertisers appear to have the males' ideal in mind – a study of men appearing in advertisements found that most sport the strong and muscular physique of the male stereotype.<sup>102</sup>

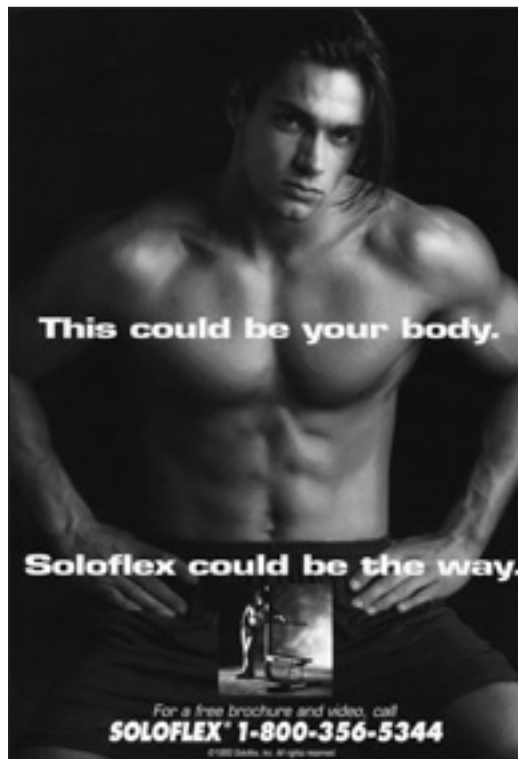
## Working on the body

Because many consumers are motivated to match up to an ideal appearance, they often go to great lengths to change aspects of their physical selves. From cosmetics to plastic surgery, tanning salons to diet drinks, a multitude of products and services are directed towards altering or maintaining aspects of the physical self in order to present a desirable appearance. It is difficult to overstate the importance of the physical self-concept (and the desire by consumers to improve their appearance) to many marketing activities.

### Sizeism

As reflected in the expression 'you can never be too thin or too rich', many Western societies have an obsession with weight. Even primary school children perceive obesity as worse than being disabled.<sup>103</sup> The pressure to be slim is continually reinforced both by advertising and by peers. Americans in particular are preoccupied by what they weigh. They are continually bombarded by images of thin, happy people.





Could this really be your body? Physical self-concept and improving one's appearance are important motivations in consumer behaviour.

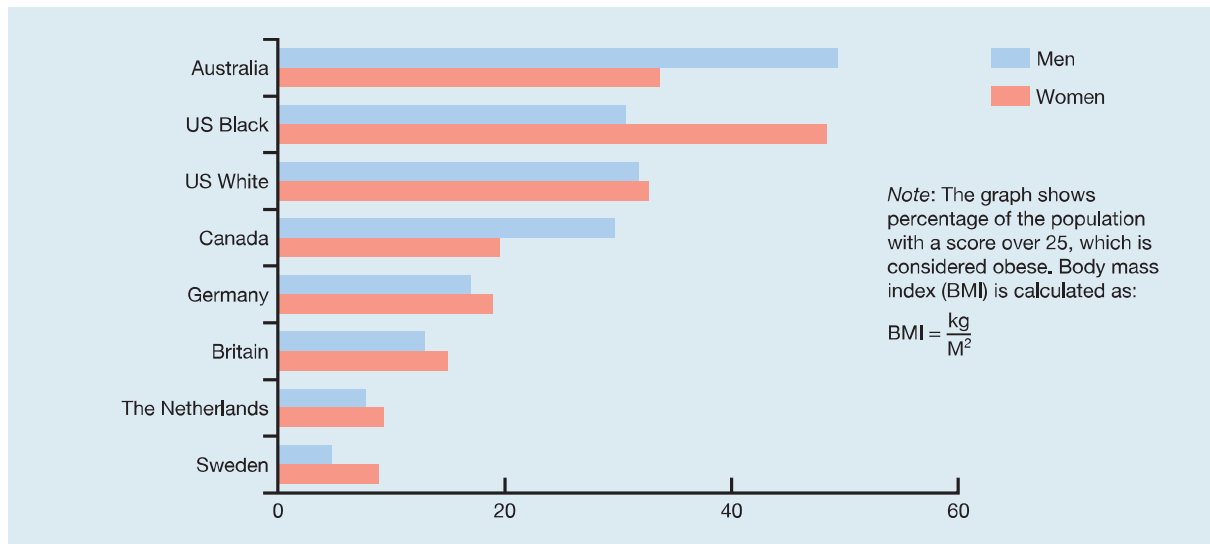
Soloflex, Inc.

How realistic are these appearance standards? In Europe, the public discourse on appearance and body weight is becoming more active and visible, particularly with respect to the weight of European children. Of the 77 million children in the European Union, 14 million are overweight. In 2005, the EU planned to launch a 'platform' on diet, physical activity and health as a public policy approach to the issue of weight. Obesity is especially acute in Mediterranean countries, underscoring concerns that people in the southern region are turning away from the traditional diet of fish, fruits and vegetables to fast food, high in fat and refined carbohydrates.<sup>104</sup> Still, many consumers focus on attaining an unrealistic ideal weight, sometimes by relying on height and weight charts which show what one should weigh. These expectations are communicated in subtle ways. Even fashion dolls, such as the ubiquitous Barbie, reinforce the ideal of thinness. The dimensions of these dolls, when extrapolated to average female body sizes, are unnaturally long and thin.<sup>105</sup> In spite of Americans' obsession about weight, as a country they continue to have a greater percentage of obesity in the general population relative to all European countries, as shown in Figure 7.1. Within Europe, Greek, Spanish, British and German men lead the European Union in measures of obesity.<sup>106</sup> Want to calculate your own body mass index? Go to <http://www.consumer.gov/weightloss/bmi.htm#BMI> and fill in your personal data.

### Body image distortions

While many people perceive a strong link between self-esteem and appearance, some consumers unfortunately exaggerate this connection even more, and sacrifice greatly to attain what they consider to be a desirable body image. Women tend to be taught to a greater degree than men that the quality of their bodies reflects their self-worth, so it is not surprising that most major distortions of body image occur among females.

Men do not tend to differ in ratings of their current figure, their ideal figure and the figure they think is most attractive to women. In contrast, women rate both the figure

**Figure 7.1** Body mass index for selected countries

Source: Adapted from *Salt Lake City Tribune* (11 March 1997): A-1; see also *The Economist* (9 December 2000): 57.

they think is most attractive to men and their ideal figure as much thinner than their actual figure.<sup>107</sup> In one survey, two-thirds of college women admitted resorting to unhealthy behaviour to control weight. Advertising messages that convey an image of slimness help to reinforce these activities by arousing insecurities about weight.<sup>108</sup>

A distorted body image has been linked to the rise in ineating disorders, which are particularly prevalent among young women. People with anorexia regard themselves as fat, and starve themselves in the quest for thinness. This condition may be accompanied by bulimia, which involves two stages: first, binge eating occurs (usually in private), where more than 5,000 calories may be consumed at one time. The binge is then followed by induced vomiting, abuse of laxatives, fasting and/or overly strenuous exercise – a ‘purging’ process that reasserts the woman’s sense of control.

Most eating disorders are found in white, teenaged girls and students. Victims often have brothers or fathers who are hypercritical of their weight. In addition, binge eating may be encouraged by one’s peers. Groups such as athletic teams and social clubs at school may develop positive norms regarding binge eating. In one study of a female social club, members’ popularity within the group increased the more they binged.<sup>109</sup>

Eating disorders do affect some men as well. They are common among male athletes who must also conform to various weight requirements, such as jockeys, boxers and male models.<sup>110</sup> In general, though, most men who have distorted body images consider themselves to be too light rather than too heavy: society has taught them that they must be muscular to be masculine. Men are more likely than women to express their insecurities about their bodies by becoming addicted to exercise. In fact, striking similarities have been found between male compulsive runners and female anorexics. These include a commitment to diet and exercise as a central part of one’s identity and susceptibility to body image distortions.<sup>111</sup>

### Cosmetic surgery

American consumers are increasingly electing to have cosmetic surgery to change a poor body image.<sup>112</sup> More than half a million cosmetic surgical procedures are performed in the US every year, and this number continues to grow.<sup>113</sup> There is no longer much (if any) psychological stigma associated with having this type of operation: it is commonplace and accepted among many segments of consumers.<sup>114</sup> In fact, men now account for as

many as 20 per cent of plastic surgery patients. Popular operations include the implantation of silicon pectoral muscles (for the chest) and even calf implants to fill out 'chicken legs'.<sup>115</sup>



### multicultural dimensions

Belly button reconstruction is now a popular form of cosmetic surgery in Japan, as women strive for the perfect navel they can show off as they wear the midriff fashions now popular there. The navel is an important part of Japanese culture, and mothers often save a baby's umbilical cord. In Japanese, a 'bent navel' is a grouch, and the phrase which would roughly mean 'give me a break' translates as 'yeah, and I brew tea in my belly button'. A popular insult among children: 'Your mother has an outie [protruding belly button]'.<sup>116</sup>

Many women turn to surgery either to reduce weight or to increase sexual desirability. The use of liposuction, where fat is removed from the thighs with a vacuum-like device, has almost doubled since it was introduced in the United States in 1982.<sup>117</sup> Some women believe that larger breasts will increase their allure and undergo breast augmentation procedures. Although some of these procedures have generated controversy due to possible negative side effects, it is unclear whether potential medical problems will deter large numbers of women from choosing surgical options to enhance their (perceived) femininity. The importance of breast size to self-concept resulted in an interesting and successful marketing strategy undertaken by an underwear company. While conducting focus groups on bras, an analyst noted that small-chested women typically reacted with hostility when discussing the subject. They would unconsciously cover their chests with their arms as they spoke and felt that their needs were ignored by the fashion industry. To meet this overlooked need, the company introduced a line of A-cup bras called 'A-OK' and depicted wearers in a positive light. A new market segment was born. Other companies are going in the opposite direction by promoting bras that create the illusion of a larger cleavage. In Europe and the United States, both Gossard and Playtex are aggressively marketing specially designed bras offering 'cleavage enhancement' which use a combination of wires and internal pads to create the desired effect. Recently, the market for women's bras has had to contend with at least one natural development: unaugmented breasts (no surgery) are getting bigger by themselves, as a result of using the pill and changes in diet. The average cup size in Britain has grown from 34B to 36C over the past 30 years, and bra designers such as Bioform and Airotic, and retailers such as Knickerbox and Victoria's Secret, have all responded with new product offerings to meet what they consider to be a long-term market trend.<sup>118</sup>

### Body decoration and mutilation

The body is adorned or altered in some way in every culture. Decorating the self serves a number of purposes.<sup>119</sup>



### multicultural dimensions

Cosmetic surgeons often try to mould their patients into a standard ideal of beauty, using the features of such Caucasian classic beauties as Grace Kelly or Katharine Hepburn as a guide. The aesthetic standard used by surgeons is called the *classic canon*, which spells out the ideal relationships between facial features. For example, it states that the width of the base of the nose should be the same as the distance between the eyes.

However, this standard applies to the Caucasian ideal, and is being revised as people from other ethnic groups are demanding less rigidity in culture's definition of what is beautiful. Some consumers are rebelling against the need to conform to the Western ideal. For example, a rounded face is valued as a sign of beauty by many Asians, and thus giving cheek implants to an Asian patient would remove much of what makes her face attractive.

Some surgeons who work on African-Americans are trying to change the guidelines they use when sculpting features. For example, they argue that an ideal African-American nose is shorter and has a more rounded tip than does a Caucasian nose. Doctors are beginning to diversify their 'product lines', offering consumers a broader assortment of features that better reflect the diversity of cultural ideals of beauty in a heterogeneous society.<sup>120</sup>

Racial differences in beauty ideals also surfaced in a study of teenagers. White girls who were asked to describe the 'ideal' girl agreed she should be 5ft 7ins, weigh between 45 and 50 kg, and have blue eyes and long, flowing hair - in other words, she should look a lot like a Barbie doll. Almost 90 per cent of the girls in this study said they were dissatisfied with their weight.

In contrast, 70 per cent of the black girls in the same study responded that they were *satisfied* with their weight. They were much less likely to use physical characteristics to describe the ideal girl, instead emphasizing someone who has a personal sense of style and who gets along with others. It was only when prodded that they named such features as fuller hips, large thighs and a small waist, which, the authors of the study say, are attributes valued by black men.<sup>121</sup>

- *To separate group members from non-members.* The Chinook Indians of North America used to press the head of a newborn baby between two boards for a year, permanently altering its shape. In our society, teenagers go out of their way to adopt distinctive hair and clothing styles that will distinguish them from adults.
- *To place the individual in the social organization.* Many cultures engage in rites of passage at puberty when a boy symbolically becomes a man. Young men in Ghana paint their bodies with white stripes to resemble skeletons to symbolize the death of their child status. In Western culture, this rite may involve some form of mild self-mutilation or engaging in dangerous activities.
- *To place the person in a gender category.* The Tchikrin Indians of South America insert a string of beads in a boy's lip to enlarge it. Western women wear lipstick to enhance femininity. At the turn of the century, small lips were fashionable because they represented women's submissive role at that time.<sup>122</sup> Today, big, red lips are provocative and indicate an aggressive sexuality. Some women, including a number of famous actresses and models, have collagen injections or lip inserts to create large, pouting lips (known in the modelling industry as 'liver lips').<sup>123</sup>
- *To enhance sex-role identification.* Wearing high heels, which podiatrists agree are a prime cause of knee and hip problems, backaches and fatigue, can be compared with the traditional Oriental practice of foot-binding to enhance femininity. As one doctor observed, 'When they [women] get home, they can't get their high-heeled shoes off fast enough. But every doctor in the world could yell from now until Doomsday, and women would still wear them.'<sup>124</sup>
- *To indicate desired social conduct.* The Suyu of South America wear ear ornaments to emphasize the importance placed in their culture on listening and obedience. In Western society gay men may wear an earring to signal how they expect to be treated.
- *To indicate high status or rank.* The Hidates Indians of North America wear feather ornaments that indicate how many people they have killed. In our society, some people wear glasses with clear lenses, even though they do not have eye problems, to increase their perceived status.
- *To provide a sense of security.* Consumers often wear lucky charms, amulets, rabbits' feet and so on to protect them from the 'evil eye'. Some modern women wear a 'mugger whistle' around their necks for a similar reason.

### Tattoos

Tattoos – both temporary and permanent – are a popular form of body adornment. This body art can be used to communicate aspects of the self to onlookers and may serve some of the same functions that other kinds of body painting do in primitive cultures. In fact, much of the recent literature and discourse on tattoos centres on the theme of users as ‘Modern Primitives’.<sup>125</sup> Tattoos (from the Tahitian *ta-tu*) have deep roots in folk art. Until recently, the images were crude and were primarily either death symbols (e.g. a skull), animals (especially panthers, eagles and snakes), pin-up women or military designs. More current influences include science fiction themes, Japanese symbolism and tribal designs.

A tattoo may be viewed as a fairly risk-free (?) way of expressing an adventurous side of the self. Tattoos have a long history of association with people who are social outcasts. For example, the faces and arms of criminals in sixth-century Japan were tattooed as a way of identifying them, as were Massachusetts prison inmates in the nineteenth century. These emblems are often used by marginal groups, such as bikers or Japanese *yakuza* (gang members), to express group identity and solidarity. In Europe today, the growth of tattoos on individuals of all ages and social classes can be seen both as a form of communication, and a growth in commodification. European consumers are more and more often using their own skin as part of their expression of consumer culture.<sup>126</sup>

### Body piercing

Decorating the body with various kinds of metallic inserts has evolved from a practice associated with some fringe groups to become a popular fashion statement. Piercings can range from a hoop protruding from a navel to scalp implants, where metal posts are inserted in the skull (do not try this at home!). Publications such as *Piercing Fans International Quarterly* are seeing their circulations soar and websites featuring piercings



Body decoration can be permanent, or (hopefully!) temporary, in order to distinguish oneself, shock others, signify group membership, or express a particular mood or message.

The Advertising Archives



and piercing products are attracting numerous followers. This popularity is not pleasing to hard-core piercing fans, who view the practice as a sensual consciousness-raising ritual and are concerned that now people just do it because it's trendy. As one customer waiting for a piercing remarked, 'If your piercing doesn't mean anything, then it's just like buying a pair of platform shoes.'<sup>127</sup>

## ■ CHAPTER SUMMARY

- Consumers' *self-concepts* are reflections of their attitudes towards themselves. Whether these attitudes are positive or negative, they will help to guide many purchase decisions; products can be used to bolster self-esteem or to 'reward' the self.
- Many product choices are dictated by the similarity the consumer perceives between his or her personality and attributes of the product. The *symbolic interactionist perspective* on the self implies that each of us actually has many selves, and a different set of products is required as props to play each. Many things other than the body can also be viewed as part of the self. Valued objects, car, homes and even attachments to sports teams or national monuments are used to define the self, when these are incorporated into the extended self.
- A person's *sex-role identity* is a major component of self-definition. Conceptions about masculinity and femininity, largely shaped by society, guide the acquisition of 'sex-typed' products and services.
- Advertising and other media play an important role in socializing consumers to be male and female. While traditional women's roles have often been perpetuated in advertising depictions, this situation is changing somewhat. The media do not always portray men accurately either.
- Sometimes these activities are carried to an extreme, as people try too hard to live up to cultural ideals. One example is found in eating disorders, where women in particular become obsessed with thinness.
- A person's conception of his or her body also provides feedback to self-image. A culture communicates certain ideals of beauty, and consumers go to great lengths to attain these. Many consumer activities involve manipulating the body, whether through dieting, cosmetic surgery or tattooing.

### ► KEY TERMS

**Actual self** (p. 210)  
**Agentic goals** (p. 216)  
**Androgyny** (p. 217)  
**Body cathexis** (p. 223)  
**Body image** (p. 223)  
**Communal goals** (p. 216)  
**Extended self** (p. 214)  
**Fantasy** (p. 210)

**Ideal of beauty** (p. 224)  
**Ideal self** (p. 210)  
**Looking-glass self** (p. 211)  
**Self-concept** (p. 208)  
**Self-image congruence models** (p. 213)  
**Sex-typed traits** (p. 216)  
**Symbolic interactionism** (p. 210)  
**Symbolic self-completion theory** (p. 213)



## CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR CHALLENGE

- 1 How might the creation of a self-conscious state be related to consumers who are trying on clothing in changing rooms? Does the act of preening in front of a mirror change the dynamics by which people evaluate their product choices? Why?
- 2 Is it ethical for marketers to encourage infatuation with the self?
- 3 List three dimensions by which the self-concept can be described.
- 4 Compare and contrast the real vs. the ideal self. List three products for which each type of self is likely to be used as a reference point when a purchase is considered.
- 5 Watch a series of ads featuring men and women on television. Try to imagine the characters with reversed roles (the male parts played by women, and vice versa). Can you see any differences in assumptions about sex-typed behaviour?
- 6 To date, the bulk of advertising targeted at gay consumers has been placed in exclusively gay media. If it was your decision, would you consider using mainstream media to reach gays, who constitute a significant proportion of the general population? Or, bearing in mind that members of some targeted segments have serious objections to this practice, especially when the product (e.g. alcohol, cigarettes) may be viewed as harmful in some way, do you think gays should be singled out at all by marketers?
- 7 Do you agree that marketing strategies tend to have a male-oriented bias? If so, what are some possible consequences for specific marketing activities?
- 8 Construct a 'consumption biography' of a friend or family member. Make a list and/or photograph his or her favourite possessions, and see if you or others can describe this person's personality just from the information provided by this catalogue.
- 9 Some consumer advocates have protested at the use of super-thin models in advertising, claiming that these women encourage others to starve themselves in order to attain the 'waif' look. Other critics respond that the media's power to shape behaviour has been overestimated, and that it is insulting to people to assume that they are unable to separate fantasy from reality. What do you think?

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# Appealing to taste buds or healthy lifestyles? Marketing low-fat foods to consumers in Greece

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## THE SETTING

A number of health organizations, including the World Health Organization (WHO), have recommended consumers '... to reduce daily fat intake below 30 per cent of total calories'; '... to limit intake of saturated fatty acids, which should not exceed 10 per cent of total energy intake'; and '... to consume less than 300 mg of cholesterol daily'. The need to reduce fat and cholesterol-related consumption is gaining increasing public acceptance. Growing awareness of the link between diet and health has led to major changes in consumer habits. As a result, there is a growing demand for foods with health enhancing properties, such as 'low-fat' or 'light' products. For the past decade, world production of low-fat food has expanded and it is now a multi-billion dollar industry. In the UK, for example, sales of reduced calorie products amounted to more than US\$800 million, with an estimated growth of 5 per cent per year; and in the United States sales since the mid 1990s have grown to US\$40 billions.

The concept of low-fat products means that these products have a minimal level of fat. This level often requires some modifications to the composition and nature of the product. This modification can affect different aspects of these low-fat products, including their sensory properties and their healthiness. This means that claims such as 'low', 'reduced', 'less', 'lean', 'light', 'healthy' are not always supported by a clear definition of the changes in the composition of the product. This has led to considerable confusion among consumers. Besides being perceived as healthier, low-fat products must offer good quality and hedonic attributes, which should in principle be at least the same as those of the regular (full-fat) products to which consumers are accustomed, if these low-fat products are to be a commercial success. Thus, the conflict between 'health' and 'sensory appeal' (e.g. taste) is recognized as being influential in the choice of low-fat products by consumers.

Another important influential factor in the low-fat food market has been the drive for weight loss, i.e. the body's aesthetic appeal. Over the last decades, there has been a marked trend toward an increasingly thin, and yet physically fit, ideal of attractiveness in economically

advanced societies, directly linked to the consumption of low-fat food products. However, cost is an equally important factor in this market. Higher lean-to-fat ratios and other non-food ingredients have tended to raise the cost of manufacturing low-fat products. It is estimated that these new low-fat products may be anywhere from 10 to 30 per cent dearer than their full-fat counterparts. This apparent drawback may be partially offset by the fact that growing numbers of consumers are interested in reducing fat intake and so may perceive low-fat products as better value for money.

## THE SURVEY

A study in 2002 examined Greek consumers' attitudes towards low-fat food products. The research revolved around the potential conflict between the 'sensory appeal' (taste) and the 'healthiness' of low-fat products. The study aimed to segment the Greek market in terms of users' attitudes towards light products. All four consumer clusters identified in the survey paid particular attention to the hedonic factor when consuming food, and assigned less importance to price in their overall selection criteria when choosing foodstuffs. Additionally, the percentages of awareness of and use of low-fat products, by consumers, were approximately equal, while the market penetration of these low-fat products was fairly widespread.

Cluster 1 consisted of '*fervent supporters*' of the low-fat food products. The large majority of this cluster (strongly) agreed that low-fat products met their expectations in terms of sensory characteristics, and that low-fat products are healthier due to their lower calorie content.

Cluster 2 comprised '*satisfied consumers with low-fat food products' healthiness*'. Almost all these cluster members (strongly) agreed that low-fat products did not meet their expectations in terms of sensory appeal. However, the vast majority of the cluster believed that low-fat products are healthier when compared with their full-calorie counterparts.

Cluster 3 was defined as the '*opposed to the low-fat products*'. In line with cluster 2, all cluster 3 members believed that low-fat products did not meet their expectations in terms of sensory characteristics.

Furthermore, they (strongly) disagreed with the view that low-fat products are healthier than their full-calorie equivalents. Cluster members were either occasional low-fat product users or they bought them for another reason, e.g. weight loss for aesthetic reasons, without consciously relating this to improved health.

Finally, cluster 4 comprised '*satisfied consumers with low-fat food products' sensory characteristics*'. Low-fat products met the sensory expectations of the large majority of this fourth cluster. They were occasional low-fat product buyers, for whom the taste of the low-fat products was not perceived to be a constraint, or, similar to cluster 3, they consumed low-fat products for aesthetic reasons.

Overall, the survey concluded that those consumers who considered low-fat products to be healthy tended to be young, a slightly higher ratio of male to female, mostly married, of average income, and their educational level did not appear to be related to their high degree of health awareness. Those who did not think that low-fat products were healthy tended to be middle-aged, of either sex, mostly married, of low to average income, and their educational level was not a significant discriminating factor. In general, the socio-demographic differences were not particularly remarkable.

### THE LESSONS LEARNED

Greek consumers seemed to be willing to substitute specially manufactured low-fat foods in their diet. It appears that low-fat products constitute common food choices; and the purchase of low-fat foods cannot be taken as indicative of any kind of 'innovative' food purchase behaviour.

One of the most important findings was consumers' uncertainty about whether or not low-fat food products are superior to their full-calorie counterparts in terms of sensory appeal and healthiness. This uncertainty was shared by more than one type of low-fat product user. The motives behind the selection of low-fat foods differed for different consumer types, and are linked to different attitudes towards hedonism and healthiness. These two motives seem to function either as substitutes or in a complementary way, depending on the perceptions that consumers have of low-fat foods.

Furthermore, the main constraint Greek consumers are faced with when consuming light foods is their sensory appeal, especially when these low-fat foods are compared to 'common' food products. Healthiness seems to be much less important as a constraint on Greek consumer behaviour. While information which identifies products as low in fat generally lowers judgements of expected sensory quality, the magnitude of this effect was often found to be rather small, partly because it

differed markedly in strength and direction amongst various consumer sub-groups, in this particular case among the four clusters. On the contrary, low-fat foods were considered to be healthier by the majority (61.3 per cent) of the sample.

### MARKETING IMPLICATIONS

A very popular misinterpretation of the 'low-fat' claim means that a large percentage of consumers perceive low caloric intake products as healthier products. Yet this equation is accurate only indirectly, through the beneficial results of a low-fat diet in terms of individual health and physical condition. Two important matters seem to be overlooked: (a) weight reduction as a selection motive for low-fat food is not, and should not be, directly related to one's health, although it constitutes a potential motive to buy light food products for a large percentage of consumers (clusters 3 and 4), and (b) the fact that these products possibly contain some unhealthy chemical additives such as fat substitutes.

Consequently, the degree of conscious purchasing of low-fat foods closely reflects consumers' underlying health consciousness, which thus turns out to be a central motive of low-fat preference. Clusters 1 and 2 which perceive low-fat products as being healthier can be considered to be conscious low-fat food 'buyers'. On the other hand, the remaining 40 per cent appear to purchase low-fat foods either occasionally ('opposed') or because of reasons not directly related to the health consciousness selection motive ('users').

Nevertheless, marketers need to recognize that willingness to purchase foods in order to be healthy is often combined with a willingness to pay premiums for purchasing low-fat food products. Culture, education, purchasing power and other factors (e.g. labelling, information) considerably influence consumer habits, and hence the percentage of income spent on food. Since all social groups do not purchase the same kind of food products, the extent to which price affects acceptance will vary according to the type of low-fat product and the type of consumer motivation.

Finally, two additional implications should be kept in mind: (1) hedonic responses to sensory characteristics of foods may be modified by extended sensory exposure. This should be encouraging for the low-fat food industry in the long run, because whereas dietary changes initially have had poor acceptance by clusters 2 and 3, these may over time achieve better levels of acceptance simply through repeated use; (2) when consumers have a negative opinion about the healthiness of low-fat food, as is the case with clusters 3 and 4, counter-arguments via marketing communications might be the only way in which these opinions can be challenged and changed.

**QUESTIONS**

- 1 Search for market data/reports about low-fat food products in your country. In your opinion, does the conflict between taste and healthiness also apply?
- 2 Identify the 4Ps for low-fat products (product, price, place, promotion) for each consumer cluster. Which of the four components should the relevant promotion strategy be based on?
- 3 Comment on consumers' tendency to misinterpret the low-fat claim to be a healthy claim. Do you believe that this applies to your country too? Can you think of examples from other product categories where consumers tend to misinterpret the different claims made about goods and services?



# Should I – or shouldn't I? Consumers' motivational conflicts in purchase decisions for electronics

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Consumers are faced with decisions throughout their daily lives. Making choices in general, and deciding how to spend money on products in particular, often involves a psychological conflict. According to Miller, a motivational conflict arises due to 'competition between incompatible responses' within an individual (Miller 1944), because it often involves several positive (approach-approach), several negative (avoidance-avoidance), and also several positive as well as negative (approach-avoidance) consequences. Should I have a tomato pizza or sushi? Should I spend my money on a concert ticket or would it be better to save it for my holidays? Should I take the car and search for a parking space for half an hour or should I take the underground and lose an hour in travelling time?

## THE GROWTH IN CONSUMER ELECTRONICS PURCHASING

A purchase decision which is of increasing importance for young Austrians involves spending money on electronics, and in particular on communications. According to Euromonitor, the strongest growth in consumer expenditure over the last few years, at 174.9 per cent, was on communications. This trend was driven particularly by mobile phones and the internet. Further growth is expected, and it is forecast that by 2015 around 5.4 billion euros will be spent on communications. In terms of PC ownership, an increase of 953.8 per cent between 1990 and 2003 resulted in a penetration of 34.7 per cent, compared to just 3.3 per cent in 1990. The number of people making online purchases as a percentage of the total number of online users was 47.5 per cent in 2003, up from 20.1 per cent in 2000.

Sales of consumer electronics, and in particular portable as well as digital equipment, including DVD players, MiniDisc players, MP3 players and portable computers are growing, in contrast to the downward trends which can be observed in many white and brown goods, which are characterised by saturation and extreme competition. Fascination with new equipment and increasing mobility are two factors which lure consumers into electronics stores, in order to purchase the technical equipment, such as mobile phones, MP3

players, DVD players and state-of-the-art computers which are central to their lifestyles. Furthermore, the different functionalities of the products – for instance, mobile phones with integrated fax and internet access, computers with built-in CD writers and/or DVD players – make consumer electronics appealing to the youth population. These items make it less necessary to invest in several appliances, which in turn saves money for consumers. Overall, new products like these generate new social trends at work and at home as they allow greater flexibility in lifestyles and make it possible for people to be more mobile.

## RETAIL STRUCTURE IN AUSTRIA

The durable goods retail sector in Austria is extremely fragmented with a large number of small and medium-sized traders with one outlet. In general, the retail sector in Austria is gradually turning into a modern, consumer-oriented, market-driven environment with consumers favouring large retail outlets and specialist chain stores. Price competition in the retail sector is extremely aggressive and the retailer concentration in many retail sub-sectors is increasing. However, there is stringent legislation in Austria to protect the small and medium-sized retailers from the rapid expansion of larger retailers. This legislation includes, for example, stringent building regulations to stop the expansion of new megastores, shopping centres and large outlets; strict shop opening hours and regulations to stop retailers opening stores on Sundays; and strict requirements for the awarding of business licences. Labour laws are also strict and extensive, although minimum salaries are relatively low in the retail sector. However, paid holidays and other compulsory payments (sick leave and high social insurance costs) increase the cost of labour to around 200 per cent of the salary.

There has been some liberalization, for instance with seasonal sales. These rules were abolished in 1992. Before that, only two sales per year were allowed, in summer and winter, and their dates were fixed by law. The government also extended the shop opening hours in 1997 as, after joining the EU in 1995, many Austrians living in the border regions started to cross over to Germany, Italy and other neighbouring countries to go

shopping on Saturdays and to get round the restricted shopping hours in Austria. To sum up, consumers' growing preference in Austria is for large outlets with a broader range of products at low prices and very little service, and with plenty of parking spaces.

The leading retailer in the durable goods sector in Austria is Media-Saturn. It has a market share of around 40 per cent among the sector specialists. It has two strong retail brands, Media Markt and Saturn, which have totally different outlet strategies to create maximum market exposure for Media-Saturn. Media Markt outlets are between 2,500 sq m and 3,000 sq m in size, located on the outskirts of cities in large shopping complexes and positioned as specialist retailers for the consumer electronics sector. Saturn outlets, on the other hand, have an average selling space of around 350 sq m, and are located in inner cities, in department stores or shopping centres. Both target the middle-market and lower-upper market segments in the durable goods sector with mass-market products. The unique selling point for both outlets is value for money. They sell well-known consumer electronics manufacturers' brands as well as some exclusive products at competitive prices. In 2003, Media-Saturn had 22 outlets with sales of 629.5 million euros and it is planning continued expansion in the future. Cosmos and Niedermeyer are the other two specialist multiples. In 2003, Cosmos had 20 outlets (sales 296.1 million euros) and Niedermeyer 120 (sales 226.2 million euros), spread throughout the country.

## SCENARIO

Eva recently started studying psychology in Vienna and for that reason she moved from the very small town in which she grew up to the capital, Vienna. She rented a room in a nice flat which she shares with three other students, Viktoria, Franz and Dominik.

One afternoon after she got back from a lecture, Eva picked up the post and found a leaflet from a big electronics retailer, offering a notebook at a special price. She looked at it with particular interest because, since moving to Vienna, Eva had been looking for a notebook which she could use for studying and also for sending emails and chatting with friends all around the world. The Samsung P28 Series seemed to be perfect for her, because it provides a high degree of connectivity with USB ports for connecting peripherals such as printers and digital cameras. It also included the option of integrated wireless LAN to connect to public wireless 'hot spots'. Without knowing exactly how that works, Eva was sure she had seen adverts about hot spots before and thought she might well make use of that, too. She also wanted to send pictures to her friends with the

digital camera she had been given for her birthday and therefore thought that this particular feature would be perfect for her.

Eva must have been sitting in the kitchen reading the leaflet for about half an hour when Viktoria and Franz came home. Eva thought that this would be a good opportunity to ask them for their opinions about the special offer. Franz as a student of informatics is very interested in technical applications, so perhaps he would be able to explain to her what hot spots were and whether or not she needed USB ports. At that point a lively argument broke out about the best place to buy a laptop. Viktoria had recently been to one of the big electronics stores in Mariahilferstrasse, a busy shopping street, because she had wanted to buy a MiniDisc player. Franz knew most of the electronics stores because he was a real enthusiast, hanging around them whenever possible and trying out new products. By then Dominik had also come home so he joined in as well. He frequently visited Saturn or Cosmos because he could listen to new CDs as long as he wanted in the booths there.

However, Viktoria was very negative about the big retailers, because her last visit hadn't been very successful. Asked why, she said: 'It must be one of the largest and the most popular places in town! I visited it during working hours and it was so overcrowded! All those long shelves with no clear indication about where to find anything. It was really difficult for me to find the section where they sold MiniDisc players. Also I was so confused by all the adverts hanging up everywhere.' Franz interrupted. He laughed at her and scoffed that *this* was such a typical girlie-thing: women never find the right place because they lack any sense of spatial orientation; and they don't understand technical stuff anyway. *He* had never had any difficulties in finding what he wanted. 'So, then, why does it always take so long when you go to do the shopping?' she yelled at him. Everybody in the flat-share knew that he had negative feelings about shopping and often got lost around the supermarket.

'Viktoria is right,' Dominik said, trying to calm things down and take the heat out of the quarrel, 'and even worse is that it is almost impossible to get hold of one of the sales assistants to find out any information. The chances of finding one with accurate information are really low.' Once he had had to wait almost 40 minutes to find a sales assistant to ask about a particular mobile phone. The assistant was nice and friendly and tried to help, but he was not responsible for that particular product and could only give very general information. Even worse, the information on the price tag was wrong and when Dominik, after waiting another 20 minutes at the cash desk, wanted to pay, it turned out that it cost

almost double what was shown on the ticket. 'Never mind,' Dominik said, 'at least the listening stations are okay there and nobody bothers you, because they have plenty of them.'

Viktoria didn't give up at this point. She was proud of her consumer skills. She said she usually visited several electronics stores to look at different brands and prices. She had found out about different offers by looking up information on the internet. If after all this she was still in some doubt, then she would find a salesperson to ask for advice. However, she admitted, that's the least preferred option, because she always got the feeling that they just wanted to persuade her to buy the most expensive product, although they knew that most people look for the cheapest price or at least the best price/value ratio. Eventually, she ordered her MiniDisc player online from a shop Franz recommended. She was attracted to buy online by the price, and also because it was an exciting experience purchasing online. She already knew what the MiniDisc player looked like from the electronics stores she had visited beforehand. However, Dominik held the opposite view about online shopping. 'I am definitely not a "sissy", but have you ever thought of how secure the payment procedure really is? I wouldn't give them my details that easily!'

The discussion went on for some time. Eva remained unsure about whether or not she should consider the advertised notebook in her purchase decision. She was also a little bit disappointed because she still had no exact idea of the technical features and didn't dare to ask Franz. The stories that her friends reported were not very persuasive and she didn't like to feel like a fool being alone in an overcrowded and disorganized shopping environment. So she decided to text her friend Silvia, who had recently bought a notebook. The next day they went together to Mariahilferstrasse, which Eva always enjoyed as she loved window shopping. When they entered the shop, the two young women headed towards the place where the special offers were displayed. It took about ten minutes before they found it and to their big surprise the counter, which was covered with point of sale material about 'Our recent advertising campaign' was more or less empty. Instead of notebooks, there were only empty boxes lying around.

They looked for somebody on the staff and asked a young guy if he had a clue where all the notebooks had gone. The answer they received was rather unsatisfactory. He declared himself not responsible for this section of the store and told them to look for somebody else. It took them some time to find an older man who was bustling around some TV sets so they

expected him to be responsible for electronics, which he immediately confirmed. When they told him that they wanted to buy the Samsung laptop which was advertised in the flyer, he responded that they had already run out of stock. Already very annoyed, they felt cheated and they asked him what the store offered as an alternative. They followed him into an area where lots of notebooks were displayed. Obviously he wasn't really happy at having to accompany them and to explain to them the advantages and disadvantages of the different models, so Eva and Silvia decided to look at them on their own, which they usually liked doing rather than talking to the sales assistants in these shops. They spent half an hour comparing models and Silvia's recent shopping experience. However, the range of laptops wasn't very impressive, two or three other models had also run out of stock, especially the cheaper ones. With feelings of disappointment Eva and Silvia left the store without having bought anything.

### QUESTIONS

- 1 Discuss the motivational conflict Eva is experiencing. What are the approach aspects and what are the avoidance aspects in her situation? Which kind of conflict is she in?
- 2 What causes the motivational conflicts for the flat-mates in terms of
  - (a) situational/environmental aspects?
  - (b) social aspects?
  - (c) personal/psychological aspects?
 Compare and discuss differences between them.
- 3 Eva is in a difficult situation and does not know how to resolve the conflict. She ended up not buying at that particular store but still did not succeed in purchasing a laptop. What other options does she have to resolve the uneasy and uncomfortable situation and at the same time get the desired product?
- 4 Viktoria bought her MiniDisc Player online. Discuss this kind of 'escape'. Should bricks-and-mortar companies try to avoid giving consumers such escapes? What strategies would you recommend to bricks-and-mortar companies?
- 5 Using your own experiences from similar situations, identify and evaluate potential conflict relievers.

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# Prams are not just for babies ...<sup>1</sup>

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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.

## DORTE

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 Matias, 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 Matias 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 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 no-name brand 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!*



*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 "Odder" 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 "Odder" pram. It's 1,000 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 Dorthe relates herself to her pram(s)? 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 Dorthe 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/related differently to this ideal? If yes, how?
- 3 Consider the symbolic interactionism perspective discussed in Chapter 7. How is the meaning of Dorthe'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 Dorthe'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).

# Hidden motives: is consumer behaviour shaped by fairy-tale archetypes?

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## ARCHETYPES AND CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

Ernest Dichter and Vance Packard were convinced that consumer behaviour is shaped by hidden motives, which can be detected by using psychoanalytical research. For instance, Ernest Dichter argued that whenever consumers eat ice cream, in fact what they are trying to do is to satisfy the innate need for 'security'. These psychoanalytical findings (derived from 'research on the couch' rather than from experimental research in a laboratory) have attracted controversy because they do not fit into 'exact' positivistic research paradigms with respect to inter-subjective perceived comprehensibility. This has meant that consumer behaviour researchers have tended to neglect these research findings. However, current progress in neuro(physio-)logical research and modern brain imaging technologies has started to allow us to shed some light on unconscious processes and instincts, thus offering the possibility of validating psychoanalytical research today which was originally undertaken by Sigmund Freud many decades ago.

Jung's archetypal psychology also belongs to this group of psychoanalytical research about consumer behaviour. Carl G. Jung (1875–1961) was influenced by his mentor Sigmund Freud, but developed his own ideas – and in contrast to Freud, Jung was not such a staunch supporter of experimental or neurological research. Using Jung's theory (1954/1959a, b), the psyche can be divided into three parts. Part one is the conscious mind termed the 'ego'. Closely related to the ego is the second part, the '*personal* unconscious' that includes anything not presently conscious. The personal unconscious includes both memories that can easily be brought to mind and those that have been suppressed for some reason. Jung's third part of the psyche is called the '*collective* unconscious', and it is this element that makes his theory stand out from others.

Jung's collective unconscious can be characterized as the 'psychic inheritance' or as the kind of knowledge with which all human beings are born. The individual is never directly aware of this collective reservoir of experiences, but it can indirectly influence personal feelings and behaviour. Effects that illustrate the functioning of the collective unconscious are experiences of first love, of déjà vu and the immediate recognition and

understanding of certain myths. The content of the collective unconscious is characterized by so-called 'archetypes' that represent inborn and universal ways of perceiving and comprehending the world, and which provide individuals with 'wisdom' about the past and predispose people to experience the world as their ancestors did. Thus, archetypes have an instinctive or biological function (Veen 1994) and act as regulators and stimulators. As inherent experiences of the human species, they are stable across time and societies, but can be culturally coded in typical iconic representations (Hirschman 2000).

The variety of archetypal images is substantial. In this study special attention is devoted to (1) the hero, who is characterized as a man who can master all challenges in life and is able to rescue an unhappy or threatened woman, and (2) the Cinderella archetype, the young, innocent and beautiful woman, who lives in distress or misery and is rescued by a gallant prince who promises her a wonderful life free of worry and care.

## ARCHETYPES AND ADVERTISING CAMPAIGNS

Walle (1986: 22) argues that archetypes 'constitute valuable tools for practitioners such as strategic planners of promotional campaigns', because archetypal advertising resonates from innate human universals and focuses on innate needs. Indeed, a content analysis of advertisements in German magazines and newspapers shows that many brands (even prestigious credit institutions or sophisticated newspapers) use archetypal motives like brave heroes, innocent maidens like Sleeping Beauty, or pictures associated with such fairy tales as *Cinderella*, *The Frog Prince*, or animal archetypes like the faithful horse or the lion in their marketing communications.

Do advertising campaigns that are shaped by archetypal myths really appeal to all consumers? As a counter-argument, the feminist movement (e.g. Enns 1994: 73; Lauter and Rupprecht 1985) believes that, on the one hand, the greater the prevalence of fairy tales about heroic men and needy women, the more difficult it will be for women to change stereotypical role expectations. On the other hand, currently more and more students are female; they often achieve better

examination results than their male colleagues and increasing numbers of women are gaining high career positions. Thus, the Cinderella archetype may be called into question by women's current experience, or may even be changing. The book *The Cinderella Complex* (Dowling 1981) questions the abdication of women's power to males and asks why, in the old fairy tales, we never hear about what happens to the young Cinderella after she marries the prince. Will she really be happy and satisfied with a spouse role or will there be a tendency to break out of the repressive castle existence? To summarize, we could question whether a modern young woman still believes that she needs to do no more with her life than find a gallant prince who will take care of her. In other words: do typical archetypes like Cinderella or Sleeping Beauty really reflect women's ideals and can they therefore be used successfully in advertising strategies?

In this context, a relationship between personality variables and preferred archetypes can be assumed. Holbrook and Olney (1995) found that people vary in the degree to which they are attracted either by romanticism or by classicism. These findings could lead to the assumption that individual levels of romanticism also influence the perceived appeal of different archetypes such as Cinderella-like figures, or Sleeping Beauty.

In our study (for details see Groeppel-Klein, Domke and Bartmann 2005), we investigated whether archetypes like Cinderella or Sleeping Beauty cause positive attitudes and unconscious responses. In order to gain insights into the more or less unconscious reactions of test participants, we measured *phasic arousal* evoked by archetypal stimuli. From a psycho-physiological perspective, arousal is a fundamental feature of behaviour. It can be defined as the basic neuro-physiological process underlying all activity in the human organism. Thus, arousal is the basis of emotions, motivation, information processing and behavioural reactions (Bagozzi, Gopinath and Nyer 1999). Basically, a distinction can be made between tonic and phasic arousal. Tonic arousal refers to a relatively long-term state of consciousness. Phasic arousal arises in response to specific stimuli, resulting in short-term variations in the arousal level. It indicates the body's ready state for reaction and is closely related to attention, that is, enhanced sensitivity of the organism to relevant stimuli and stimuli processing (Boucsein 1992).

Empirical studies emphasize the relevance of phasic arousal in marketing communication (Groeppel-Klein and Baun 2001). *Arousal* is an important factor in *predicting approach behaviour*. Furthermore, since consumers cannot willingly influence their arousal reactions, it is

either a valid indicator of *unconscious reactions* or a detection mechanism for social desirability articulation biases – providing that arousal is measured accurately. In contrast to verbal methods, psycho-physiological measures such as heart rate, electroencephalogram (EEG), and electrodermal reaction (EDR) are the most valid indicators, since *deliberately influencing* the test results obtained from these methods is almost impossible. In addition, EDR (Boucsein 1992: 263) is considered to be the most sensitive indicator of arousal that could be relevant to behaviour and can be recorded *simultaneously* with the perception of a stimulus. Due to these advantages, we employed EDR as indicator. EDR is founded on the psycho-physiological fact that increasing arousal leads to increasing sweat gland activity of the palms of our hands, and even the very smallest psychological change can be detected (Boucsein 1992). The hydration depends on external and internal factors and leads to electric conductivity of the skin, thus making it possible to measure it by means of two electrodes attached to the skin. The amplitude (measured in  $\eta$ -Siemens) describes the strength of each phasic arousal reaction. The intensity of perceived arousal over a certain *period of time* can be arrived at by summing all single amplitudes so as to obtain the *total amplitude* that is the most important phasic arousal parameter in experiments.

## EXPERIMENTAL STUDIES

Archetypal advertising focuses on innate needs. This would suggest that a message that is compatible with innate desires or desired behaviour will evoke higher arousal than one that is less focused on these innate drives. Thus, we can hypothesize whether a TV commercial or a film that uses a typical fairy-tale archetype (like Cinderella) will evoke higher phasic arousal reactions than films without this archetype. Furthermore, the question arises whether all people show similar responses, or whether different personalities are more or less attracted by Cinderella-archetypes.

We tested our hypotheses in two empirical studies. The first study was conducted in October and November 2004 in a lecture room at our university. First, students were chosen randomly and asked if they were interested in participating in an advertising experiment. Then, the participants completed a general questionnaire about their personal attitudes towards career, family, self-concept, self-esteem and romanticism. Students were told that we wanted to arrange a typical advertising situation, in which films are normally interrupted by TV commercials. Before being presented with different TV commercials, the test participant was attached to the

EDR electrodes and asked to relax and to watch the film just as in a cinema or at home. Only one commercial used an archetypal myth: the story taking place in a typical enchanted 'fairy-tale castle'. The prince wants to rescue and wake up Sleeping Beauty, but all kissing attempts fail. Only the aroma and flavour of a cookie (named Prinzenrolle) works, so that Sleeping Beauty is finally enraptured by her rescuer. During EDR registration, a marker was set on the registered data whenever a new commercial started, and another one when the scene from the film began. Thus, the arousal reaction of each commercial and of the film could be registered. After showing the TV commercials, half the sample (randomly chosen) was presented with the last scene of *Pretty Woman* whereas the other half watched a sequence from *Gone With The Wind*. We chose these two films, because, on the one hand, the Cinderella 'archetype has shaped movies such as *Pretty Woman*' (Waters 2003), whereas on the other, Scarlett O'Hara (as we established through an internet search) is characterized as a 'woman who fought with her sweat and blood to keep her family's plantation, a woman who overcame every war and obstacle' (unknown reviewer, [www.target.com](http://www.target.com)) and 'her incredible tenacity makes her a contender' (Isaacs 2004: 4). Thus, viewing the film was also part of the experiment though participants were not aware of it. Afterwards, EDR test participants were detached from the electrodes, and completed the second part of the questionnaire, including items measuring attitude towards the ad, the brand and the film.

The second study was conducted in February 2005, with an experimental design and questionnaire comparable to those of Study 1. In contrast to our first study, half the sample (randomly chosen) was exposed to the archetypal TV commercial Sleeping Beauty (Prinzenrolle), whereas the other half was exposed to a more informational TV commercial of Prinzenrolle that showed a group of cooks (called the 'cookie-experts') with white coats and long chef's hats preparing hot chocolate sauce for their delicious cookies. This experimental design was chosen in order to find out if the archetypal TV commercial of Prinzenrolle was indeed more effective than a more informational spot for the same brand. Furthermore, the Calgon water-softener spot of Study 1 was replaced by a spot also advertising cookies (with the brand name Hanuta). This clip showed a female fencer fighting with one of the famous three musketeers. She wins and gets the Hanuta. This commercial was chosen, on the one hand, to present a tough and fearless *female* actor and, on the other, to show an additional 'sweets' spot to examine whether arousal reactions were simply evoked by this special *product category*. After presenting the TV commercials,

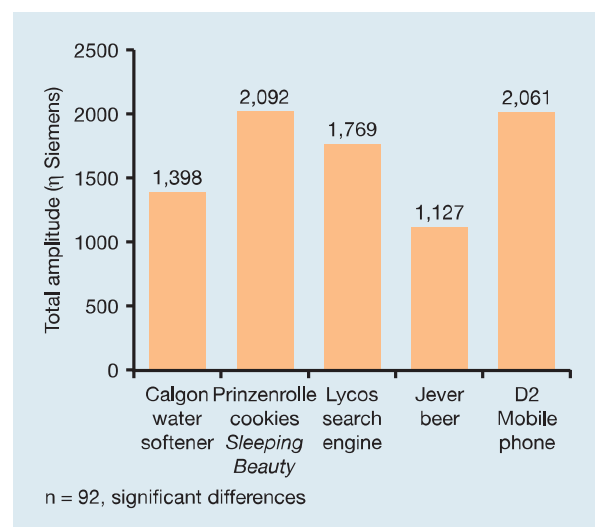
half the sample viewed the last scene of *Pretty Woman* whereas the other half watched a sequence from *Erin Brockovich*. Scarlett O'Hara (Study 1) is probably one of the most prominent examples of a fearless female character. However, *Gone With The Wind* was shot before the Second World War and is set in the American Civil War, whereas *Pretty Woman* was produced in 1990 and features a modern *zeitgeist*. Furthermore, Julia Roberts is one of the most popular actresses in Hollywood, and the arousal reaction to *Pretty Woman* might simply be due to her charisma. Therefore, in the second study, we wanted to control a potential Julia Roberts effect, and compared *Pretty Woman* to another film starring Julia Roberts as Erin Brockovich who is characterized as 'an inspirational reminder of the power of the human spirit. Her passion, tenacity, and steadfast desire to fight for the rights of the underdog defied the odds' ([www.erinbrockovich.com](http://www.erinbrockovich.com)).

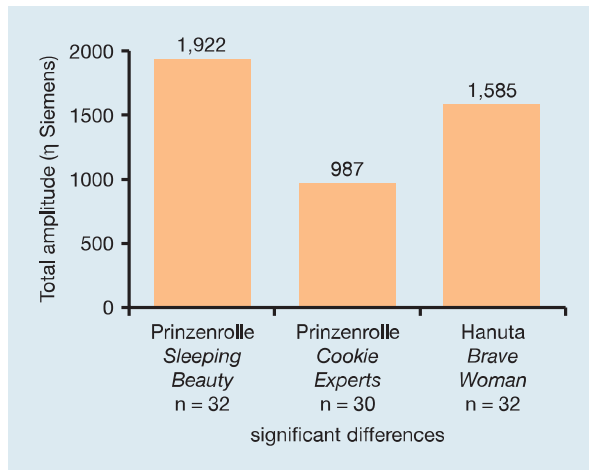
## RESULTS

The first study compares the archetypal TV commercial (Prinzenrolle) with four other non-archetypal commercials, and demonstrates significantly higher arousal for the archetypal spot (Figure 1). In Study 2, we built in controls to test for whether the famous brand name or the product category might be responsible for the arousal reactions, with the result that the archetypal spot evokes a significantly higher level of arousal (Figure 2) and a more positive attitude towards the ad than both the informational spot for this brand and the Hanuta spot.

The film presenting a typical Cinderella archetype as character (*Pretty Woman*) was compared with

**Figure 1** Study 1 – Arousal differences between commercials



**Figure 2** Study 2 – Arousal differences between cookie commercials

films presenting brave, aggressive and selfish female characters (Study 1: Scarlett O'Hara, *Gone With The Wind*; Study 2: *Erin Brockovich*). The results show significantly higher arousal (Figure 3) and a more favourable attitude towards the film featuring the Cinderella archetype.

In our first study, we also investigated the relationship between personality types and responses to the archetypal commercial and the different films. Using statements measuring attitudes towards career, family, romanticism, self-concept clarity and self-esteem, we found three personality groups among female test participants. Women in the first segment are characterized by romanticism (they enjoy daydreaming and believe in love at first sight), they want to be protected by their future husband and yearn for a life

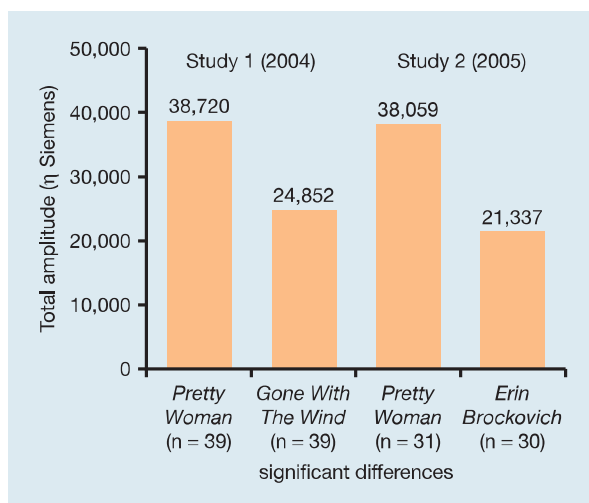
without worries. Though they are quite self-confident, they still have an unclear self-concept. This segment is called 'optimistic daydreamers'. The second group (called 'cool self-made women') considers it important to believe in facts rather than dreams, and always likes to keep a cool head. They have a clear self-concept and high self-esteem. The third cluster ('self-condemned losers') has an extremely negative score on 'high self-esteem'. These women perceive themselves as failures, and have no self-confidence at all. They are neither energetic nor career oriented, nor do they have any optimistic daydreams as to how they could change their lives. However, they want to be protected in life. Regarding the archetypal commercial, arousal and assessment of the commercial differ significantly between the three female groups ('optimistic daydreamers' showed very positive responses). The results of the arousal responses with respect to *Pretty Woman* yielded no significant differences between the three clusters. Does this mean that even 'cool-headed women' cannot avoid being affected unconsciously by the *Pretty Woman* story?

### QUESTIONS

- 1 Explain the notion of 'archetypes'.
- 2 In our studies EDR was used as an indicator to measure 'phasic arousal'. Explain the 'arousal construct' and how EDR measurement works. Why was this method used?
- 3 Discuss the relationship between personality traits and preference for Cinderella archetypes from a female *and* a male perspective. Women's emancipation might also have changed men's expectations and philosophy about life. Analogously, we could question whether men are still attracted by the hero scheme. Does a man always feel capable of mastering all obstacles, and is he really keen on assuming responsibility for his wife and family, or does the hero claim rather lead to a feeling of being burdened? How would you measure gender differences?
- 4 Do you agree with Walle (1986: 22) who describes archetypes as constituting 'valuable tools for practitioners such as strategic planners of promotional campaigns'?

### EXERCISES

- 1 Conduct a content analysis of current advertising campaigns in newspapers and magazines published in your country. Do you also find archetypal ads?
- 2 Imagine you were a researcher with the task of analysing the effects of archetypes in advertising campaigns, but you have no opportunity to use EDR

**Figure 3** Arousal differences between films



measurement. Which alternative methods would you use to find out whether consumer behaviour is shaped by archetypes?

- 3 Discuss the relevance of new brain imaging technologies to consumer research. Do you think that psychoanalytical research may be validated one day by these new methods?

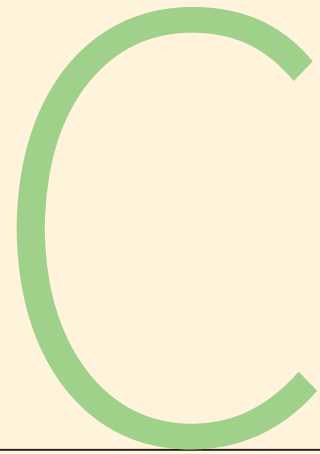
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# CONSUMERS AS DECISION-MAKERS



part

This part explores how we make consumption decisions and discusses the many influences exerted by others in this process. Chapter 8 focuses on the basic sequence of steps we undergo when making a decision. Chapter 9 considers how the particular situation we find ourselves in affects these decisions and how we go about evaluating what we've bought afterwards. Chapter 10 provides an overview of group processes and discusses the reasons why we are motivated to conform to the expectations of our fellow group members. It also considers how some individuals in particular (called 'opinion leaders') are likely to influence the consumption behaviour of others in a group.

**8**

Individual  
decision-  
making

**9**

Shopping,  
buying,  
evaluating  
and disposing

**10**

Group influence  
and opinion  
leadership

**Case studies**

**5-8**





## INDIVIDUAL DECISION-MAKING



Daniel has had it up to here. There's no way he is going to go on watching TV on his tiny, antiquated black-and-white set. It was bad enough trying to see the graphics of the possible answers to questions on *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?* The final straw was when he couldn't tell Arsenal from Ajax during last Wednesday night's football match. When he finally went next door – in total exasperation – to watch the second half on Michelle's big set, he really realized what he had been missing out on. Budget or not, it was time to act: a man has to get his priorities right.

Where to start looking? The Web, naturally. Daniel checks out a few comparison-shopping websites – there's no point in slogging around the high street shops at this early stage. After narrowing down his options, he ventures out to look at the possible sets which he has identified. He knows he will get some good advice at the small specialist high street retailer so he decides to start there; and then he can hunt around for the best buy. He figures he'll probably find the most affordable models at one of the out-of-town 'big shed' retailers. Arriving at the local specialist retailer, Daniel goes to the television section, where he can browse quietly away. Eventually, one of the sales assistants asks him if he wants any help. Daniel asks some questions, and gets some useful advice and tips about what features to think about when making his purchase; and one or two recommendations about current good buys. Before leaving the shop, Daniel asks the salesman to write down the model names and numbers (and prices) for him. Daniel then heads off to one of the out-of-town 'big shed' retailers. When he gets there he makes straight for the Video Zone at the back – barely noticing the rows of toasters, microwave ovens and stereos on his way. Within minutes, a smiling salesman in a cheap suit accosts him. Daniel reckons that these guys don't know what they're talking about, and they're just out to make a sale, no matter what. Anyway, he has already collected all the information he needs for making his decision.

Daniel starts to look at the 26-inch colour sets. He knew his friend Ruth had a set by Prime Wave that she really liked, and his fellow hockey player, Hannah, had warned him to stay away from the Kamashita. Although Daniel finds a Prime Wave model loaded with features such as a sleep timer, on-screen programming menu, cable compatible tuner, and picture-in-picture, he chooses the less-expensive Precision 2000X because it has one feature that really catches his fancy: stereo broadcast reception; and it had been highly recommended by the high street specialist retailer.

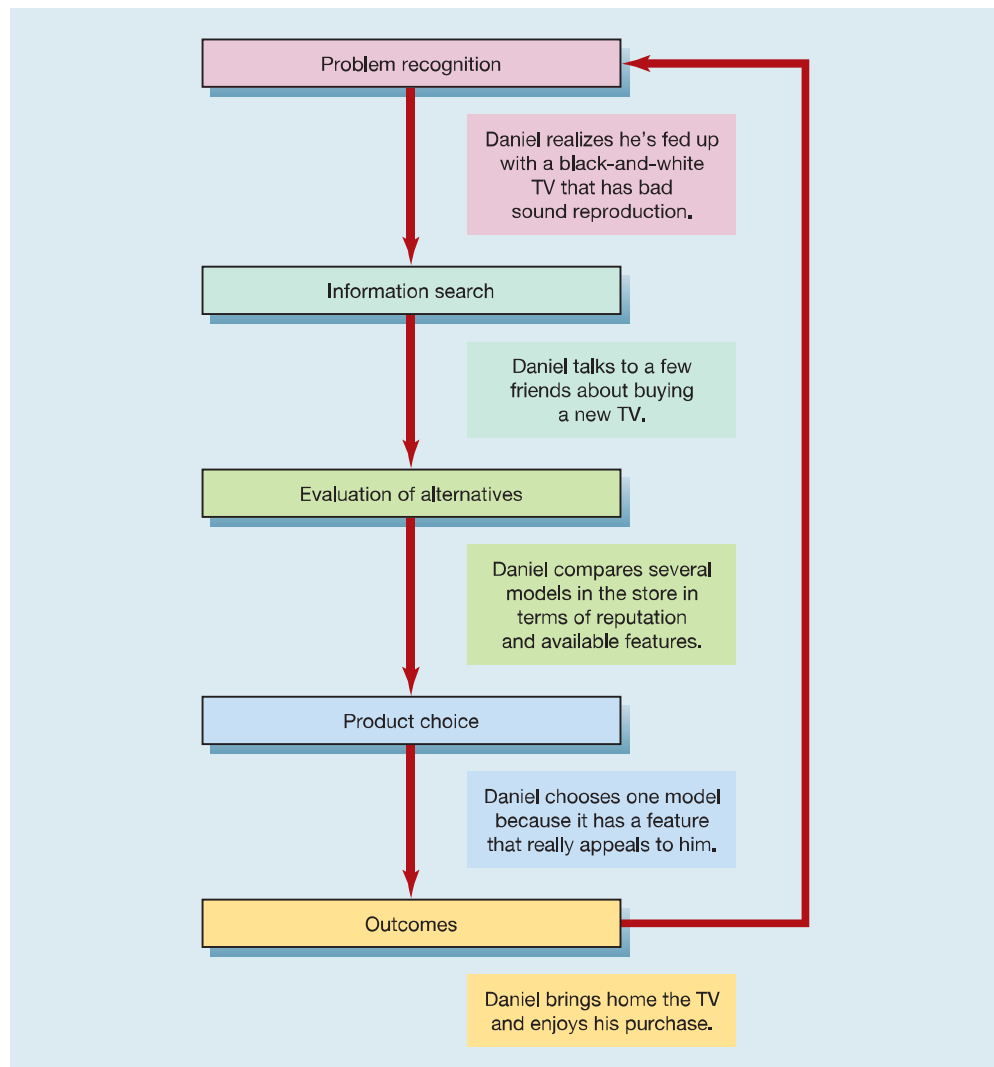
Later that day, Daniel is a happy man as he sits in his armchair, watching the Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race. If he's going to be a couch potato, he's going to do it in style . . . next up, the hockey championships.

## ■ CONSUMERS AS PROBLEM-SOLVERS

A consumer purchase is a response to a problem, which in Daniel's case is the perceived need for a new TV. His situation is similar to that encountered by consumers virtually every day of their lives. He realizes that he wants to make a purchase, and he goes through a series of steps in order to make it. These steps can be described as: (1) problem recognition, (2) information search, (3) evaluation of alternatives, and (4) product choice. After the decision is made, the quality of that decision affects the final step in the process, when learning occurs based on how well the choice worked out. This learning process, of course, influences the likelihood that the same choice will be made the next time the need for a similar decision occurs.

An overview of this decision-making process is shown in Figure 8.1. This chapter begins by considering various approaches consumers use when faced with a purchase decision. It then focuses on three of the steps in the decision process: how consumers recognize the problem, or need for a product; their search for information about product choices; and the ways in which they evaluate alternatives to arrive at a decision.

**Figure 8.1** Stages in consumer decision-making



Chapter 9 considers influences in the actual purchase situation, as well as the person's satisfaction with the decision.

Since some purchase decisions are more important than others, the amount of effort we put into each one differs. Sometimes the decision-making process is done almost automatically; we seem to make snap judgements based on very little information. At other times, reaching a purchase decision begins to resemble a full-time job. A person may literally spend days or weeks thinking about an important purchase such as a new home, even to the point of obsession.

## Perspectives on decision-making

- Traditionally, consumer researchers have approached decision-making from a **rational perspective**. In this view, people calmly and carefully integrate as much information as possible with what they already know about a product, painstakingly weighing the pluses and minuses of each alternative, and arriving at a satisfactory decision. This process implies that steps in decision-making should be carefully studied by marketing managers in order to understand how information is obtained, how beliefs are formed, and what product choice criteria are specified by consumers. Products then can be developed that emphasize appropriate attributes, and promotional strategies can be tailored to deliver the types of information most likely to be desired in the most effective formats.<sup>1</sup>

How valid is this perspective? While consumers do follow these decision-making steps when making some purchases, such a process is not an accurate portrayal of many of our purchase decisions.<sup>2</sup> Consumers simply do not go through this elaborate sequence every time they buy something. If they did, their entire lives would be spent making such decisions, leaving them with very little time to enjoy the things they eventually decide to buy. Some of our consumption behaviours simply don't seem 'rational' because they don't always seem to serve a logical purpose (e.g. people who break the law to collect the eggs of a rare bird in Scotland called an osprey even though the eggs have no monetary value<sup>3</sup>); other purchase behaviours are done with virtually no advance planning at all (e.g. impulsively grabbing that tempting bar of chocolate at the checkout till while waiting to pay for groceries in the supermarket). Still other actions are actually

- contrary to those predicted by rational models. For example, **purchase momentum** occurs when these initial impulses actually increase the likelihood that we will buy even more (instead of less as our needs are satisfied), almost as if we get caught up in a spending spree.<sup>4</sup>

Researchers are now beginning to realize that decision-makers actually possess a repertoire of strategies. A consumer evaluates the effort required to make a particular choice, and then he or she chooses a strategy best suited to the level of effort required. This sequence of events is known as *constructive processing*. Rather than using a big stick to kill an ant, consumers tailor their degree of cognitive 'effort' to the task at hand.<sup>5</sup> When a well-thought-out rational approach is necessary, we'll invest the brainpower required for the decision. Otherwise, we look for short cuts or fall back upon learned responses that 'automate' these choices. Researchers are also beginning to understand the role that controlling the information flow can have on consumers' decisions, as increased control leads to increased performance. These new insights promise to be particularly important in the new online environments where 'marketers have the potential to integrate interactive communication systems back into mass communication' (Deighton 1996)<sup>6</sup> where controlling the information flow can particularly influence the quality of consumers' decisions, memory, knowledge and confidence.<sup>7</sup> Research on information structure (the amount of information in a choice set) is also relevant in the new electronic marketplaces, where consumers are regularly faced with information overload when making decisions.<sup>8</sup> A recent study suggests that: 'consumers adapt their acquisition of information in



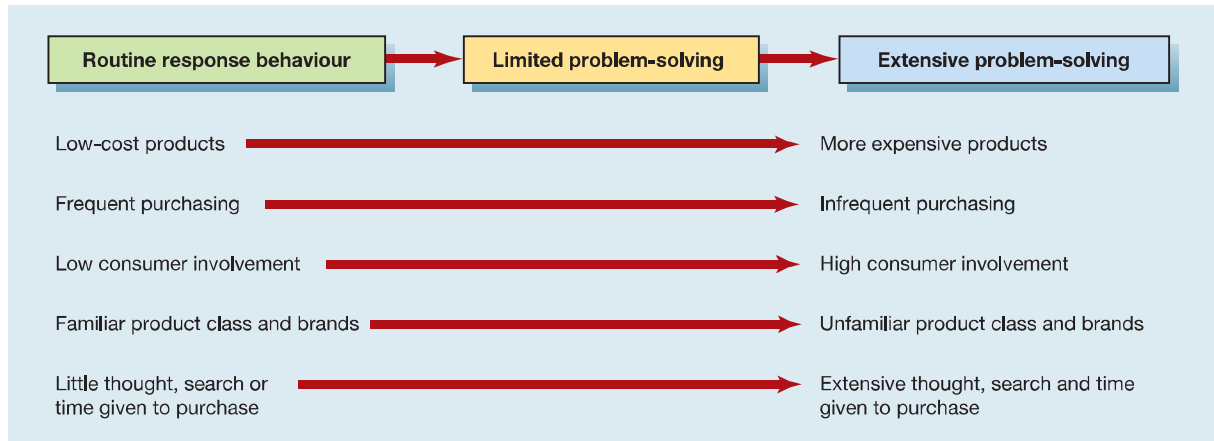
This ad for the US Postal Service presents a problem, illustrates the decision-making process and offers a solution.

United States Postal Service. USPS Corporate Signature is a trademark owned by the United States Postal Service. Used with permission. All rights reserved.

response to changes in information structure. When a choice set contains more information per element, fewer acquisitions are made, more time is spent per acquisition, and customers are more selective in their information acquisition.<sup>9</sup>

- Some decisions are made under conditions of low involvement, as discussed in Chapter 4. In many of these situations, the consumer's decision is a learned response to environmental cues (see Chapter 3), as when he or she decides to buy something on impulse that is being promoted as a special offer in a shop. A concentration on these
- types of decisions can be described as the **behavioural influence perspective**. Under these circumstances, managers must concentrate on assessing the characteristics of the environment, such as the design of a retail outlet or whether a package is enticing, that influence members of a target market.<sup>10</sup>

- In other cases, consumers are highly involved in a decision, but still the selections made cannot be explained entirely rationally. For example, the traditional approach is hard pressed to explain a person's choice of art, music, or even a partner. In these cases,
- no single quality may be the determining factor. Instead, the **experiential perspective** stresses the *Gestalt*, or totality, of the product or service.<sup>11</sup> Marketers in these areas focus on measuring consumers' affective responses to products or services and developing offerings that elicit appropriate subjective reactions.

**Figure 8.2** A continuum of buying decision behaviour

### Types of consumer decisions

One helpful way to characterize the decision-making process is to consider the amount of effort that goes into the decision each time it must be made. Consumer researchers have found it convenient to think in terms of a continuum, which is anchored on one end by habitual decision-making and at the other extreme by extended problem-solving. Many decisions fall somewhere in the middle and are characterized by limited problem solving. This continuum is presented in Figure 8.2.

#### Extended problem-solving

- Decisions involving **extended problem-solving** correspond most closely to the traditional decision-making perspective. As indicated in Table 8.1, the extended problem-solving process is usually initiated by a motive that is fairly central to the self-concept (see Chapter 7), and the eventual decision is perceived to carry a fair degree of risk. The

**Table 8.1** Characteristics of limited vs. extended problem-solving

	Limited problem-solving	Extended problem-solving
<b>Motivation</b>	Low risk and involvement	High risk and involvement
<b>Information search</b>	Little search Information processed passively In-store decision likely	Extensive search Information processed actively Multiple sources consulted prior to store visits
<b>Alternative evaluation</b>	Weakly held beliefs Only most prominent criteria used Alternatives perceived as basically similar Non-compensatory strategy used	Strongly held beliefs Many criteria used Significant differences perceived among alternatives Compensatory strategy used
<b>Purchase</b>	Limited shopping time; may prefer self-service Choice often influenced by store displays	Many outlets shopped if needed Communication with store personnel often desirable



consumer tries to collect as much information as possible, both from memory (internal search) and from outside sources (external search). Based on the importance of the decision, each product alternative is carefully evaluated. The evaluation is often done by considering the attributes of one brand at a time and seeing how each brand's attributes shape up to some set of desired characteristics.



net profit

Marketers continue to seek out strategies that enhance consumers' involvement with their messages and products in order to capture their attention and make it more likely that people will tune in to the information they are presenting. Interactive TV is one new route to achieving this goal. Cable companies, satellite TV, and software giants including Microsoft have made interactive TV a key part of their strategies, pouring billions into it. While Americans have been pretty apathetic about interactive, the concept is gaining critical mass in Europe, particularly in the UK. British consumers routinely use their TVs to place bets on races, change camera angles while watching sporting events (e.g. 'player-cams' that follow specific athletes during soccer games), and interact with game shows.<sup>12</sup>

Europeans also commonly use *teletext*, a one-way information service that lets them view news headlines, weather reports, schedules for film shows, flight times and other tidbits on their TVs. Again, these services are not easily found in the United States, partly because of the higher usage of the internet there. As a result, these applications are less likely to rely upon coordinated efforts among broadcasters and more on individual pay television providers. In addition, American companies have focused more on technology than content, while European firms have done the opposite. As one American industry executive observed, 'Here we were focused on building a better mousetrap. In Europe they were figuring out what the mouse wanted to eat.'<sup>13</sup>

#### Limited problem-solving

- **Limited problem-solving** is usually more straightforward and simple. Buyers are not as motivated to search for information or to evaluate each alternative rigorously. People instead use simple *decision rules* to choose among alternatives. These cognitive short cuts (more about these later) enable consumers to fall back on general guidelines, instead of having to start from scratch every time a decision is to be made.

#### Habitual decision-making

- Both extended and limited problem-solving modes involve some degree of information search and deliberation, though they vary in the degree to which these activities are undertaken. At the other end of the choice continuum, however, lies **habitual decision-making**; this refers to decisions that are made with little or no conscious effort. Many purchase decisions are so routinized that we may not realize we've made them until we look in our shopping trolleys. We make choices characterized by *automaticity* with minimal effort and without conscious control.<sup>14</sup>

While this kind of thoughtless activity may seem dangerous at worst or stupid at best, it is actually quite efficient in many cases. The development of habitual, repetitive behaviour allows consumers to minimize the time and energy spent on mundane purchase decisions. On the other hand, habitual decision-making poses a problem when a marketer tries to introduce a new way of doing an old task. In this case consumers must be convinced to 'unfreeze' their former habit and replace it with a new one – perhaps by using an ATM machine instead of a live bank teller, or switching to self-service petrol pumps instead of being served by an attendant.



marketing  
opportunity

Exciting advances in technology promise to automate our routine tasks even more. These new gadgets are part of a recent trend called **silent commerce** that enables transactions and information gathering to occur in the background without any direct intervention by consumers or managers. In Singapore, cars 'talk' to the streets they drive on. Retailers in the USA are testing a system that enables products to inform the store when they've been purchased so that stocks can be replenished quickly. In kitchens later on in this decade, ready-made frozen meals might automatically give cooking instructions to microwave ovens.<sup>15</sup>

Many of these new *smart products* will be possible because the items themselves will be embedded with a tiny plastic tag that holds a very inexpensive computer chip capable of storing a small amount of information along with a tiny antenna that lets the chip communicate with a computer network. Researchers predict that in time these tags will be on almost everything from egg cartons, that will alert a store manager when their contents have passed their expiry date, to roof tiles on houses that will email a roofing repair company when they fall off. A wine lover can check on the contents of her home wine cellar while browsing the new shipment of cabernets. You'll always know the location of your sunglasses – or maybe even those mysterious socks that always seem to 'vanish' in the tumble-dryer!<sup>16</sup>

Or, how about a doll that buys her own clothes? A new concept doll devised by Accenture is being billed as 'an autonomous purchasing object' that does just that. The firm took an ordinary Barbie doll and gave it wireless implants that let it communicate with other wired dolls and accessories within range to determine if it 'wants' them. For example, this beefed-up Barbie detects the presence of clothing and compares it with her existing wardrobe to see if she already owns that fashionable pair of low-waisted jeans. If not, the toy can send a purchase order to a home PC or buy straight from the manufacturer via a wireless connection. Her owner can limit Barbie's expense account, but otherwise she's on her own.<sup>17</sup>

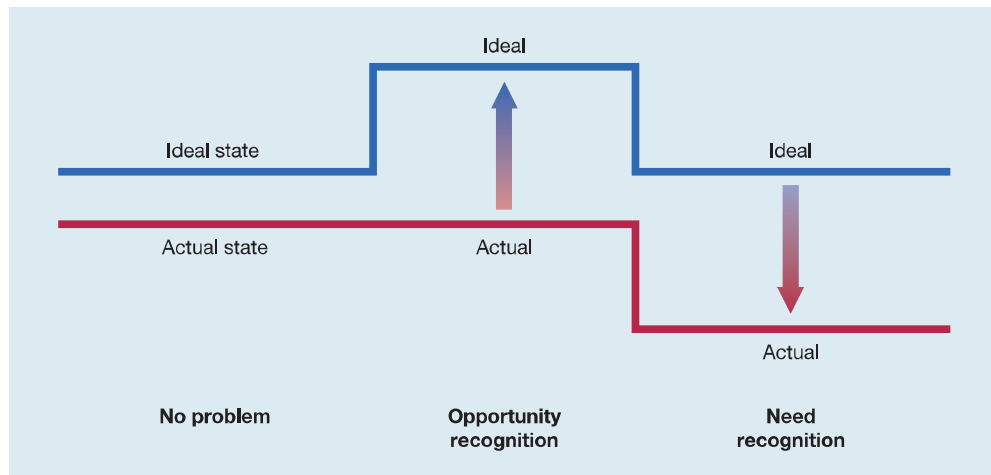
## ■ PROBLEM RECOGNITION

- **Problem recognition** occurs whenever the consumer sees a significant difference between his or her current state of affairs and some desired or ideal state. The consumer perceives there is a problem to be solved, which may be large or small, simple or complex. A person who unexpectedly runs out of petrol on the motorway has a problem, as does the person who becomes dissatisfied with the image of his or her car, even though there may be nothing mechanically wrong with it. Although the quality of Daniel's TV had not changed, for example, his *standard of comparison* was altered, and he was confronted with a desire he did not have prior to watching his friend's TV.

### Problem creation

Figure 8.3 shows that a problem can arise in one of two ways. As in the case of the person running out of petrol, the quality of the consumer's *actual state* can move downward (*need recognition*). On the other hand, as in the case of the person who craves a high-performance car, the consumer's *ideal state* can move upward (*opportunity recognition*). Either way, a gulf occurs between the actual state and the ideal state.<sup>18</sup> In Daniel's case, a problem was perceived as a result of opportunity recognition; his ideal state in terms of television reception quality was altered.

Need recognition can occur in several ways. The quality of the person's actual state can be diminished simply by running out of a product, by buying a product that turns out not to satisfy needs adequately, or by creating new needs (e.g. buying a house can set off an avalanche of other choices, because many new things will be needed to furnish the house). Opportunity recognition occurs when a consumer is exposed to different or

**Figure 8.3** Problem recognition: shifts in actual or ideal states

better quality products. This shift often occurs because the person's circumstances have somehow changed, as when an individual goes to university or gets a new job. As the person's frame of reference shifts, purchases are made to adapt to the new environment.



### marketing pitfall

A common structure for advertisements has been to present a person who has a physical or social problem, and then 'miraculously' show how the product will resolve it. Some marketers have gone so far as to invent a problem and then offer a remedy for it. In the 1940s, for example, the Talon zipper was touted as a cure for 'gaposis', the horrifying condition that develops when puckers appear around the buttons on a woman's skirt. Listerine, a mouthwash, which was originally sold to fight dandruff, carried warnings about 'bottle bacillus', which caused 'infectious dandruff'. Geritol gave us a remedy for 'tired blood', and Wisk detergent drew our attention to the shame of 'ring around the collar'.<sup>19</sup>

Even when real problems are depicted in ads, the offered solutions are sometimes too simplistic, implying that the problem will disappear if the product is used. One analysis of over 1,000 television ads found that about 80 per cent suggest that the problem will be resolved within seconds or minutes of using the product. In addition, 75 per cent of the ads make definite claims that the product will solve the problem, and over 75 per cent imply that this solution is a one-step process – all the consumer needs to do is buy the product, and the problem will go away.<sup>20</sup> Consumers, however, are becoming more cynical and less susceptible to such claims. As many marketers are discovering, consumers of the new millennium are more receptive to realistic ads that provide solid information about the product. In addition, both the government and consumer groups are now taking a more active interest in product claims, and marketers are more cautious about the content of their ads.

## Marketers' role in problem creation

While problem recognition can and does occur naturally, this process is often spurred by marketing efforts. In some cases, marketers attempt to create *primary demand*, where consumers are encouraged to use a product or service regardless of the brand they choose. Such needs are often encouraged in the early stages of a product's life cycle, as, for example, when microwave ovens were first introduced. *Secondary demand*, where consumers are prompted to prefer a specific brand instead of others, can occur only if primary demand already exists. At this point, marketers must convince consumers that a problem can be best solved by choosing their brand over others in the same category.

## ■ INFORMATION SEARCH

- Once a problem has been recognized, consumers need adequate information to resolve it. ► **Information search** is the process by which the consumer surveys his or her environment for appropriate data to make a reasonable decision. This section will review some of the factors involved in this search.

### Types of information search

A consumer may recognize a need and then search the marketplace for specific information (a process called *pre-purchase search*). On the other hand, many consumers, especially veteran shoppers, enjoy browsing just for the fun of it, or because they like to stay up-to-date on what's happening in the marketplace. They are engaging in *ongoing search*.<sup>21</sup> Some differences between these two search modes are described in Table 8.2.

**Table 8.2** A framework for consumer information search

	Pre-purchase search	Ongoing search
<b>Determinants</b>	Involvement in the purchase Market environment Situational factors	Involvement with the product Market environment Situational factors
<b>Motives</b>	Making better purchase decisions	Building a bank of information for future use Experiencing fun and pleasure
<b>Outcomes</b>	Increased product and market knowledge Better purchase decisions Increased satisfaction with the purchase outcome	Increased product and market knowledge, leading to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• future buying efficiencies</li> <li>• personal influences</li> </ul> Increased impulse buying Increased satisfaction from search and other outcomes

Source: Peter H. Bloch, Daniel L. Sherrell and Nancy M. Ridgway, 'Consumer search: An extended framework', *Journal of Consumer Research* 13 (June 1986): 120. Reprinted with permission by The University of Chicago Press.



**tangled web**

Following the dot.com bust of a few years ago, the Web has lost some of its original lustre. Yet most industry analysts still see a bright future for e-commerce – for example, while holiday retail sales overall were abysmal in 2002, online sales posted strong gains from the year before.<sup>22</sup> What is changing is what we'll see when we visit websites and what we do when we get there. Many website developers are cutting back on the glitzy 'bells and whistles' such as elaborate animations that take forever to load. A lot of web surfers are more goal-oriented than in the early days of the World Wide Web (that is, a few years ago).

Now many want to use the Web for information search rather than for entertainment (at least when they're not playing online video games). In March 2000, according to a survey by the Pew Internet & American Life Project in Washington, people averaged 90 minutes per online session. A year later, when the same people were polled, that number had dropped to 83 minutes. According to the report, those polled said that they were using the Web more to conduct business than to explore new areas, aiming to get offline as quickly as possible.<sup>23</sup> People are also seeking more control over what they see and what information they access.

Research on this process demonstrates that surfers who can provide input over what they see on a site remember more of the site's contents, exhibit superior knowledge about the domain and are more confident in their judgements.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, almost 80 per cent of internet users in a 2002 survey said they expect to find the product information they need on a website.<sup>25</sup> Web surfing isn't quite as much fun as it used to be, but it's becoming a lot more useful.

## Internal vs. external search

Information sources can be roughly broken down into two kinds: internal and external. As a result of prior experience and simply living in a consumer culture, each of us often has some degree of knowledge about many products already in our memory. When confronted with a purchase decision, we may engage in *internal search* by scanning our own memory bank to assemble information about different product alternatives (see Chapter 3). Usually, though, even the most market-aware of us needs to supplement this knowledge with external search, where information is obtained from advertisements, friends, or just plain people-watching.

## Deliberate vs. 'accidental' search

Our existing knowledge of a product may be the result of *directed learning*: on a previous occasion we had already searched for relevant information or experienced some of the alternatives. A parent who bought a birthday cake for one child last month, for example, probably has a good idea of the best kind to buy for another child this month.

Alternatively, we may acquire information in a more passive manner. Even though a product may not be of direct interest to us right now, exposure to advertising, packaging and sales promotion activities may result in *incidental learning*. Mere exposure over time to conditioned stimuli and observations of others results in the learning of much material that may not be needed for some time after the fact, if ever. For marketers, this result

# Pick up 3 boxes full of fresh ideas for the holidays.

**Brush less for baking.**  
Pick up a fresh box of ARM & HAMMER Pure Baking Soda for holiday baking.

**Brushless your kitchen.**  
It's time to change the way you keep things in the kitchen.

**Brushless the house.**  
Need a few ways to clean without scrubbing? Here's what you need to know.

**Freshen your bath, without your skin.**  
Thanks to your bath, you can keep things fresh.

**Brushless the oven.**  
It's time to change the way you clean your oven.

**Brushless the grill.**  
It's time to change the way you clean your grill.

**Clean your teeth, brushless your smile.**  
It's time to change the way you keep your smile fresh.

**Freshen your dishwasher.**  
It's time to change the way you keep your dishwasher fresh.

**Brushless your bathroom.**  
It's time to change the way you keep your bathroom fresh.

**Brushless your coffee pot.**  
It's time to change the way you keep your coffee pot fresh.

**3 ONE-LB. PACKAGES** **SAVE 15¢** **3 ONE-LB. PACKAGES**

ARM & HAMMER Pure Baking Soda

For more information, visit [www.armandhammer.com](http://www.armandhammer.com)

This ad for Arm & Hammer demonstrates the strategy of identifying new problems an existing product can solve.

Church & Dwight Co., Inc.



is a benefit of steady, 'low-dose' advertising, as product associations are established and maintained until the time they are needed.<sup>26</sup>

In some cases, we may be so expert about a product category (or at least believe we are) that no additional search is undertaken. Frequently, however, our own existing state of knowledge is not satisfactory to make an adequate decision, and we must look elsewhere for more information. The sources we consult for advice vary. They may be impersonal and marketer-dominated sources, such as retailers and catalogues; they may be friends and family members; or they may be unbiased third parties such as *Which?* magazine or other consumer reports which are published in a number of European countries.<sup>27</sup>



marketing  
pitfall

Labels provide valuable information about the proper way to use products, but sometimes they can be ... less than clear. Here are some examples of 'interesting' labels:<sup>28</sup>

- On a Conair Pro Style 1600 hair dryer: 'WARNING: Do not use in shower. Never use while sleeping.'
- Instructions for folding up a portable baby carriage: 'Step 1: Remove baby.'
- On Tesco's Tiramisu dessert (printed on bottom of box): 'Do not turn upside down.'
- On Marks & Spencer's bread pudding: 'Product will be hot after heating.'
- On packaging for a Rowenta iron: 'Do not iron clothes on body.'
- On Nytol sleeping aid: Warning: 'May cause drowsiness.'

## The economics of information

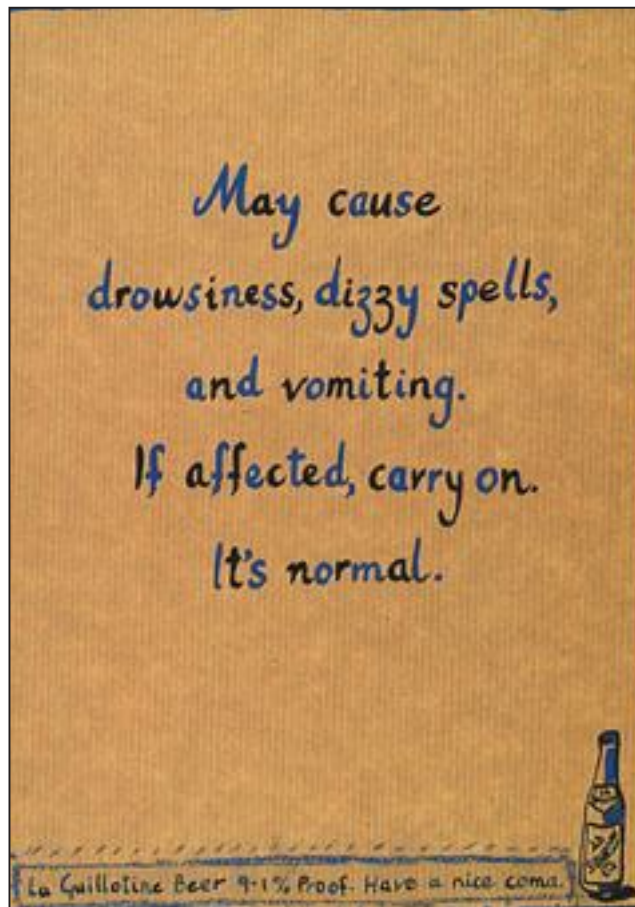
The traditional decision-making perspective incorporates the *economics-of-information* approach to the search process: it assumes that consumers will gather as much data as needed to make an informed decision. Consumers form expectations of the value of additional information and continue to search to the extent that the rewards of doing so (what economists call the *utility*) exceed the costs. This utilitarian assumption also implies that the most valuable units of information will be collected first. Additional pieces will be absorbed only to the extent that they are seen to be adding to what is already known.<sup>29</sup> In other words, people will put themselves out to collect as much information as possible, as long as the process of gathering it is not too onerous or time-consuming.<sup>30</sup>

- **Variety seeking**, the desire to choose new alternatives over more familiar ones, can influence consumers to switch from their favourite product to a less pleasurable item. This can occur even before an individual becomes satiated or tired of his or her favourite product. Explanations of this phenomenon stem from research that supports the idea that consumers are willing to trade enjoyment for variety because the unpredictability itself is rewarding; and variety seeking is a choice strategy that occurs as a result of pleasurable memories of ringing the changes.<sup>31</sup>

### Do consumers always search rationally?

This assumption of rational search is not always supported. As we've seen, consumers don't necessarily engage in a rational search process where they carefully identify every alternative before choosing one they prefer. The amount of external search for most products is surprisingly small, even when additional information would most likely benefit the consumer. For example, lower-income shoppers, who have more to lose by making a bad purchase, actually search *less* prior to buying than do more affluent people.<sup>32</sup>

Like our friend Daniel, some consumers typically visit only one or two stores and rarely seek out unbiased information sources prior to making a purchase decision,



This Singaporean beer ad reminds us that not all product decisions are made rationally.

especially when little time is available to do so.<sup>33</sup> This pattern is especially prevalent for decisions regarding durable goods such as appliances or cars, even when these products represent significant investments. One study of Australian car buyers found that more than a third had made only two or fewer trips to inspect cars prior to buying one.<sup>34</sup> Finally, there is some evidence that even having information available on the package does not necessarily mean that consumers make use of it. Environmentally friendly products in Finland are beginning to carry the Nordic Environmental Label to assist consumers in their choice of environmentally safe products. In a study which asked Finnish consumers to evaluate detergent and batteries choices, little use was made of and little trust was placed in the 'green label' on the packages, in spite of the positive attitudes that Finnish citizens have towards the environment. The results suggest that marketers have a long way to go in order to provide clear, easily comprehensible and unbiased information regarding 'green' products.<sup>35</sup>

This tendency to avoid external search is less prevalent when consumers consider the purchase of symbolic items, such as clothing. In those cases, not surprisingly, people tend to do a fair amount of external search, although most of it involves seeking the opinions of peers.<sup>36</sup> Although the stakes may be lower financially, these self-expressive decisions may be seen as having dire social consequences if the wrong choice is made. The level of perceived risk, a concept to be discussed shortly, is high.

In addition, consumers are often observed to engage in *brand switching*, even if their current brand satisfies their needs. For example, researchers for British brewer Bass Export who were studying the American beer market discovered a consumer trend

towards having a repertoire of two to six favourite brands, rather than sticking to only one. This preference for brand switching led the firm to begin exporting their Tennent's 1885 lager to the United States, positioning the brew as an alternative to young drinkers' usual favourite brands.<sup>37</sup>

Sometimes, it seems that people simply like to try new things – they are interested in variety seeking, in which the priority is to vary one's product experiences, perhaps as a form of stimulation or to reduce boredom. Variety seeking is especially likely to occur when people are in a good mood, or when there is relatively little stimulation elsewhere in their environment.<sup>38</sup> In the case of foods and beverages, variety seeking can occur due to a phenomenon known as *sensory-specific satiety*. Put simply, this means the pleasantness of a food item just eaten drops while the pleasantness of uneaten foods remains unchanged.<sup>39</sup> So even though we have favourites, we still like to sample other possibilities. Ironically, consumers may actually switch to less-preferred options for variety's sake even though they enjoy the more familiar option more. On the other hand, when the decision situation is ambiguous or when there is little information about competing brands, consumers tend to opt for the safe choice by selecting familiar brands and maintaining the status quo.

Brand familiarity influences confidence about a brand, which in turn affects purchase intention.<sup>40</sup> Still, the tendency of consumers to shift brand choices over time means that marketers can never relax in the belief that once they have won a customer, he or she is necessarily theirs forever.<sup>41</sup>

### Biases in the decision-making process

Consider the following scenario: You've been given a free ticket to an important football match. At the last minute, though, a sudden snowstorm makes getting to the football ground somewhat dangerous. Would you still go? Now, assume the same game and snowstorm, except this time you paid a lot of money for the ticket. Would you go?

- Analyses of people's responses to this situation and to other similar puzzles illustrates principles of **mental accounting**, where decisions are influenced by the way a problem is posed (called *framing*), and by whether it is put in terms of gains or losses.<sup>42</sup> For example, people are more likely to risk their personal safety in the storm if they paid for the football ticket. Only the most diehard fan would fail to recognize that this is an irrational choice, as the risk to the person is the same regardless of whether he or she got a great bargain on the ticket. This decision-making bias is called the *sunk-cost fallacy* – having paid for something makes us reluctant to waste it.

- Another bias is known as *loss aversion*. People place much more emphasis on loss than they do on gain. For example, for most people losing money is more unpleasant than gaining money is pleasant. **Prospect theory**, a descriptive model of how people make choices, finds that utility is a function of gains and losses, and risk differs when the consumer faces options involving gains versus those involving losses.<sup>43</sup>

To illustrate this bias, consider the following choices. For each, would you take the safe bet or choose to gamble?

- *Option 1.* You're given 100 euros and then offered a chance to flip a coin: heads you win 30 euros; tails you lose 30 euros.
- *Option 2.* You're given a choice of getting 100 euros outright, or accepting a coin flip that will win you either 115 euros or 85 euros.

In one study, 70 per cent of those given option 1 chose to gamble, compared to just 43 per cent of those offered option 2. Yet, the odds are the same for both options! The difference is that people prefer 'playing with the house money'; they are more willing to take risks when they perceive they're using someone else's resources. So, contrary to a rational decision-making perspective, we value money differently depending on its source. This explains why someone might choose to spend a big bonus on some frivolous

purchase, but they would never consider taking that same amount out of their savings account for this purpose.

Finally, research in mental accounting demonstrates that extraneous characteristics of the choice situation can influence our selections, even though they wouldn't if we were totally rational decision-makers. As one example, participants in a survey were provided with one of two versions of this scenario:

*You are lying on the beach on a hot day. All you have to drink is iced water. For the last hour you have been thinking about how much you would enjoy a nice cold bottle of your favorite brand of beer. A companion gets up to go and make a phone call and offers to bring back a beer from the only nearby place where beer is sold (either a fancy resort hotel or a small, run-down grocery store, depending on the version you're given). He says that the beer might be expensive and so asks how much you are willing to pay for it. . . . What price do you tell him?*

In this survey, the median price given by participants who were in the fancy resort version was \$2.65, but those given the grocery store version were only willing to pay \$1.50! In both versions the consumption act is the same, the beer is the same, and no 'atmosphere' is consumed because the beer is being brought back to the beach.<sup>44</sup> So much for rational decision-making!

### How much search occurs?

As a general rule, search activity is greater when the purchase is important, when there is a need to learn more about the purchase, and/or when the relevant information is easily obtained and utilized.<sup>45</sup> Consumers differ in the amount of search they tend to undertake, regardless of the product category in question. All things being equal, younger, better-educated people who enjoy the shopping/fact-finding process tend to conduct more information search. Women are more inclined to search than men are, as are those who place greater value on style and the image they present.<sup>46</sup> A recent study of information search in high technology markets suggested that use of information channels can be segmented by age and education, with older consumers accessing information channels with less complex information compared with more highly educated consumers who tend to search all information channels. In addition, 'during each segment of the search consumers tend to use multiple sources of information'.<sup>47</sup>

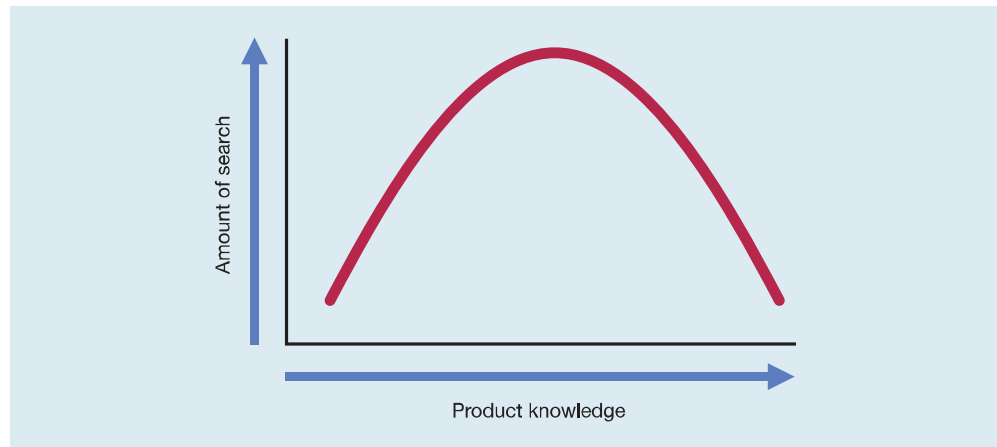
### The consumer's prior expertise

Should prior product knowledge make it more or less likely that consumers will engage in search? Product experts and novices use very different procedures during decision-making. Novices who know little about a product should be the most motivated to find out more about it. However, experts are more familiar with the product category, so they should be able to better understand the meaning of any new product information they might acquire.

So, who searches more? The answer is neither: search tends to be greatest among those consumers who are *moderately knowledgeable* about the product. There is an inverted-U relationship between knowledge and external search effort, as shown in Figure 8.4. People with very limited expertise may not feel they are capable of searching extensively. In fact, they may not even know where to start. Daniel, who did spend a lot of time researching his purchase, is only partly representative of this situation. He used the Web to do some research; visited a specialist store for advice and then went to one other store. However, he only looked at brands with which he was already familiar. In addition, he focused on only a small number of product features.<sup>48</sup>

The *type* of search undertaken by people with varying levels of expertise differs as well. Because experts have a better sense of what information is relevant to the decision, they tend to engage in *selective search*, which means their efforts are more focused and

**Figure 8.4** The relationship between amount of information search and product knowledge



efficient. In contrast, novices are more likely to rely on the opinions of others and to rely on 'non-functional' attributes, such as brand name and price, to distinguish among alternatives. They may also process information in a 'top-down' rather than a 'bottom-up' manner, focusing less on details than on the big picture. For instance, they may be more impressed by the sheer amount of technical information presented in an ad than by the actual significance of the claims made.<sup>49</sup>

#### Perceived risk

- ▶ As a rule, purchase decisions that involve extensive search also entail some kind of **perceived risk**, or the belief that the product has potentially negative consequences. Perceived risk may be present if the product is expensive or is complex and difficult to understand, or if the brand is unfamiliar. Mood effects on consumers' attitudes and perceptions about risk are stronger when brands are unfamiliar.<sup>50</sup> Perceived risk can also be a factor when a product choice is visible to others and we run the risk of embarrassment if the wrong choice is made.<sup>51</sup>

Figure 8.5 lists five kinds of risk – including objective (e.g. physical danger) and subjective factors (e.g. social embarrassment) – as well as the products that tend to be affected by each type. As this figure notes, consumers with greater 'risk capital' are less affected by perceived risks associated with the products. For example, a highly self-confident person would be less worried about the social risk inherent in a product, whereas a more vulnerable, insecure consumer might be reluctant to take a chance with a product that might not be accepted by peers.



#### marketing opportunity

The spread of the HIV virus has created a boom in home-testing kits which encourage people to find out if they have been infected in a less threatening environment than a clinic or a doctor's surgery. The typical kit allows the consumer to send a blood sample to a testing lab, and results are returned in 3-7 days. While high-risk groups such as adolescents and gay men are most likely to need the kits, some speculate that sales will come primarily from the 'worried well', those who are less likely to be infected in the first place. Companies are taking different approaches, ranging from humorous to provocative to serious, as they try to find the best way to reach people who are unlikely to go to a clinic to be tested. In one ad for Home Access, the copy (targeted at young, straight males) reads: 'Nothing arouses a woman like knowing you're responsible'.<sup>52</sup>



**Figure 8.5** Five types of perceived risk

	Buyers most sensitive to risk	Purchases most subject to risk
<b>Monetary risk</b>	Risk capital consists of money and property. Those with relatively little income and wealth are most vulnerable.	High-price items that require substantial expenditures are most subject to this form of risk.
<b>Functional risk</b>	Risk capital consists of alternate means of performing the function or meeting the need. Practical consumers are most sensitive.	Products or services whose purchase and use requires the buyer's exclusive commitment and precludes redundancy are most sensitive.
<b>Physical risk</b>	Risk capital consists of physical vigour, health and vitality. Those who are elderly, frail, or in ill health are most vulnerable.	Mechanical or electrical goods (such as vehicles or flammables), drugs and medical treatment, and food and beverages are most sensitive.
<b>Social risk</b>	Risk capital consists of self-esteem and self-confidence. Those who are insecure and uncertain are most sensitive.	Socially visible or symbolic goods, such as clothes, jewellery, cars, homes, or sports equipment are most subject to it.
<b>Psychological risk</b>	Risk capital consists of affiliations and status. Those lacking self-respect or attractiveness to peers are most sensitive.	Expensive personal luxuries that may engender guilt; durables; and services whose use demands self-discipline or sacrifice are most sensitive.

## ■ EVALUATION OF ALTERNATIVES

Much of the effort that goes into a purchase decision occurs at the stage in which a choice must be made from the available alternatives. After all, modern consumer society abounds with choices. In some cases, there may be literally hundreds of different brands (as in cigarettes) or different variations of the same brand (as in shades of lipstick), each clamouring for our attention.

Just for fun, ask a friend to name all of the brands of perfume she can think of. The odds are she will reel off three to five names rather quickly, then stop and think awhile before coming up with a few more. It is likely that the first set of brands are those with which she is highly familiar, and she probably wears one or more of these. The list may also contain one or two brands that she does not like and would perhaps like to forget. Note also that there are many, many more brands on the market that she did not name at all.

If your friend were to go to a shop to buy perfume, it is likely that she would consider buying some or most of the brands she listed initially. She might also consider a few more possibilities if these were forcefully brought to her attention while at the shop counter – for example, if she was approached by a salesperson who was spraying scent samples on shoppers, which is a common occurrence in some department stores.



This BT Cellnet ad appeals to the need for social recognition and approbation from peer groups.

The Advertising Archives

## Identifying alternatives

How do we decide which criteria are important, and how do we narrow down product alternatives to an acceptable number and eventually choose one instead of the others? The answer varies depending upon the decision-making process used. A consumer engaged in extended problem-solving may carefully evaluate several brands, whereas someone making a habitual decision may not consider any alternatives to their normal brand. Furthermore, some evidence indicates that more extended processing occurs in situations in which negative emotions are aroused due to conflicts among the choices available. This is most likely to occur where difficult trade-offs are involved, as when a person must choose between the risks involved in undergoing a bypass operation versus the potential improvement in his or her life if the operation is successful.<sup>53</sup>

- The alternatives actively considered during a consumer's choice process are his or her **evoked set**. The evoked set comprises those products already in memory (the retrieval set), plus those prominent in the retail environment. For example, recall that Daniel did not know much about the technical aspects of television sets, and he had only a few major brands in memory. Of these, two were acceptable possibilities and one was not. The alternatives that the consumer is aware of but would not consider buying are his or