Learning, Knowing, and Deciding

What to Buy

You can name a star for someone for around $26. An acre of moon land will run you around $30. On Friday, December 19, 2003, at 3 A.M., Grant DePorter paid $113,824 for a baseball with the sole purpose of destroying it.

Not only do we purchase things that serve no practical purpose for us (such as moon land and stars), but we also purchase some items because of what they symbolize. On October 14, 2003, the Chicago Cubs were playing the Florida Marlins at Wrigley Field in the sixth game of the National League Championship Series baseball playoffs. Pitcher Mark Prior was pitching a three-hit shutout when Luis Castillo hit a pop foul fly. Cubs leftfielder Moises Alou was ready to catch the ball for the out when Steve Bartman, a then unknown but now infamous fan, deflected the ball. Had Moises Alou caught the ball it would have been an out, led to a possible win, and given the Cubs a chance to go to the World Series for the first time since 1945. Many fans attributed the Cubs’ poor performance and ultimate loss of a Series trip to the Bartman incident. To add insult to injury, Steve Bartman didn’t actually end up with the ball; rather, a lawyer sitting close by identified only as “Jim” obtained the ball and then eventually auctioned it off. Restaurant managing partner Grant DePorter paid $113,824 for the foul ball and the publicity the Harry Caray restaurant group received when the establishment hosted the blowup blowout on February 26, 2004. In DePorter’s case, he purchased the baseball because it symbolized what many Chicago Cubs fans felt was a dark day for their team. By destroying the ball, he was symbolically destroying this bit of tainted Cubs history.

Why did Mr. DePorter buy something only to “consume” it by destroying it? What purpose does owning some “moon land” serve? How is it that we part with hard-earned (or inherited) dollars for a variety of items that we may or may not consume?

We buy some items because we were taught that every household should have them. You should have a loaf of bread in the house, so many people buy loaves of bread only to let them mold. We apply similar logic to a variety of things such as computers, televisions, chairs, tables, beds, and even cars. That is, we may feel we need something simply because we have somehow learned that we need it.

Marketing professionals know they will fare well if they can fulfill a need. If they sell luxury items (things you don’t need), their job is to create the need, and then tell you which product will fulfill that need. Many times this means you are not just buying a product but also intangible emotions, values, ideals, and image. In this module we will carefully examine the consumer behavior process and how this process is affected by situational and ultimately social psychological factors.

The idea of consumer behavior seems quite straightforward at first glance. That is, we’ve all experienced this process, purchasing food, gum, candy, or shoes. These are all simple money–product exchanges, learned as soon as one is old enough to reach a counter and lay a few dollars on it. However, on closer examination the process of purchasing is much more complex and involves many nuances.
that the average consumer may not consider. For example, where did you make the purchase? Why did you choose that store instead of the one down the street? Is it something you could have purchased online? Did you send someone to make the purchase for you (such as your mom, spouse, or roommate)? Did you open the purchase right away and begin consuming the product, or is it a gift for someone else? Did you buy just what you needed for today, or did you stock up for future needs you may encounter? What did you do with the packaging? Recycle it? Toss it out? How did you feel about the product? Did you tell someone else about your consumption experience? Did someone infer something about you because of your choice? What needs does the product fulfill? All of these things are encompassed by consumer behavior.

The field of consumer behavior encompasses much more than what is covered in this module. However, this module will focus on topics at the intersection of consumer behavior and social psychology. In the persuasion and attitude chapters, the ways in which we may be persuaded to buy are thoroughly covered. In the next section, decision making will be very briefly discussed. The remaining sections will focus more on the purchase and consumption situation and process rather than on advertising and decision making per se. The primary intersection between consumer behavior and social psychology is that both fields are interested in how situational influences may affect consumer purchasing, using, and disposing behavior.

What Is for Sale?
Let's turn briefly to a few aspects of consumer behavior that reach beyond simple decision-making processes. First, marketers are selling more than a product that meets a practical need. People tend to be emotionally involved in their purchases. Teenagers worldwide are targeted by advertising emphasizing American brands, so much so that the United States and its symbols are used in many global campaigns aimed at youth (Frith & Mueller, 2003). If all one
needed was clothes to avoid exposure, then certainly any pants and shirts would do. However, the clothes you wear matter not only because others form impressions about the way you look (e.g., neat, pressed, well put together) but because we also form impressions based on the products a person chooses. Car manufacturers are not selling transportation machines; they are selling relationships with cars. The commercials do not emphasize that the car rarely breaks down, but rather how much you will love your car and how much your car will love the road. Advertisers sell relationships and ideals to us by increasing our associations between products and those feelings or needs (Kilbourne, 1990). The market is burgeoning with a variety of products to meet our basic needs for food, drink, and protection from the elements. It is not enough to sell sandwiches, orange juice, and umbrellas. Successful marketing strategies must make the case that a particular sandwich will not only satiate hunger but will also improve your character, health, and even your social standing.

Maslow (1964) proposed a need hierarchy that figuratively demonstrates that we have different levels of needs and we slowly move up the need hierarchy (see Figure A.1). For example, if you are starving, that is the need that you will be most intent on meeting, but once food and shelter needs are satiated, we move up the pyramid to the need for safety and security. If we are fed, warm, and secure, then we proceed to fulfill our social needs by affiliating with others. One of the central themes of this book is that humans have a strong need to relate to others. At the topmost tiers of the hierarchy are self-esteem and self-actualization. Our focus shifts among these needs, with the ones closer to the bottom receiving attention and monitoring to ensure we don’t slip back down to starvation levels.

Marketing professionals are clearly aware of Maslow’s ideas. When selling products to populations that are trying to meet higher-order needs, they emphasize how their product might meet more than one need (food and social interaction). One option when selling something a person doesn’t really need is to create the need. The other option is to convince the consumer that the product will fulfill an existing need. Are you lonely? Buy a car, wear this perfume, or try this online dating service. Although the dating service might help a lonely person, the other products probably will not.

If a consumer doesn’t want to purchase a candy bar to satiate a sweet tooth, perhaps the candy bar can at least be used to keep the kids quiet. One ad (as cited by Kilbourne, 1999) asks, “Kids talking too much? Give ’em a Chewy Grand Slam . . . Really, really chewy.” And how have advertisers dealt with the divorce rate and a culture in which men are stereotypically afraid of commitment and women are stereotypically trying to “land a man”? Advertisers sell us sweaters to outlast relationships, or backpacks that men can be “committed” to for years.

Advertising agencies also do not wait until you need the product (or are even old enough to buy it) before they try to get you to like the brand. A 1996 survey by the Center on Alcohol Advertising found that 73% of 9- to 11-year-olds are aware that Frogs say “Budweiser,” compared to 80% who know that Bugs Bunny says “What’s up, Doc?” A 1998 study found that 8- to 12-year-olds could name more brands of beer than they could name U.S. presidents (Kilbourne, 1999). This is also easily demonstrated in most college classrooms. Students can more accurately name a brand given a slogan than a state given its capital. Advertisers are selling the brand, idea, and abstract associations of their product long before they expect you to purchase the product.

The average consumer is surrounded by conflicting messages about what to eat, wear, use, and ultimately buy. Consider how consumers make decisions regarding what they will have for dinner if a typical magazine includes a diet, medical care suggestions, a recipe for chocolate cake with 400 calories per slice, and a cigarette ad on the back
cover. Not only are these messages conflicting, but indulging in the recipe certainly helps create the need for the diet and the magazine promoting the diet. Advertisers are selling much more than one might imagine. They are selling ideas, images, and often stereotypes.

Indeed, commercials not only make use of stereotypical assumptions but also manage to reinforce the stereotypical ways in which men and women are viewed in society. Women in commercials are often shown in segments, each part of her body separated from the whole. Men do a large percentage of the voice-overs suggesting that you purchase certain dinners, perfumes, or phone services, and even that you shop at certain women's apparel stores (Coltrane & Messineo, 2000). A careful review of commercials appearing during prime time found that white men were shown as particularly powerful, white women were most frequently portrayed as sex objects, black men appeared aggressive, black women were deemed inconsequential, and other ethnicity categories were largely absent from commercials (Coltrane & Messineo, 2000). When a character in a commercial is depicted as foolish or incompetent, however, it is almost always a white male (Farrell, 2003). The casual observer can tell you (after a bit of thought) that even pet food commercials that are for overweight pets tend to refer to the pets as female, whereas pet food commercials that are for normal weight pets use neutral pet names and gender references. They are selling not just pet food but also an association between gender and weight control.

Research examining the ways in which women are affected by commercials indicate that women are buying more than the products featured; they are also buying into a societal stereotype about what women “should” be or do (Davies, Spencer, Quinn, & Gerhardstein, 2002). Davies and colleagues found that women who were exposed to commercials portraying women in stereotypical roles (e.g., mother, caretaker, wife, secretary) were more likely than women who had not viewed those commercials to say they would prefer careers that involved less mathematically quantitative knowledge. The women who saw the commercials also chose verbal items over math items more often than women who did not view such commercials. Thus, commercials may encourage not only product purchase but also stereotypical role fulfillment, which in turn may work to the company's benefit by in effect “creating” a consumer who needs the product. Commercials sell (and consumers buy) much more than the product being sold.

Not only do advertisers target consumers, but media sell consumers to advertisers. Most consumers rarely consider that they are being packaged and sold by networks, newspapers, and even radio stations. These media sources place advertising in trade publications that product manufacturers and their marketing teams read. Tripod (a do-it-yourself website server) claims in one of their ads that they can delivery Generation X to the marketers. Radio station advertisements proclaim they have the ears (and thus the mind) of their audience. But it is not enough for a network or radio station to say they have some consumers; they have to show they have the right consumers. The right consumers tend to be middle to upper class, 20 to 40 years old (preferably single and urban), with large disposable incomes. Male homosexual couples tend to have quite large disposable incomes and also have the ear of advertisers, though target marketing is done carefully so as not to upset the mainstream. TV programming that appeals to other, less wealthy demographic groups may be doomed to a short run if advertisers aren’t interested in the viewers the show draws.

Besides advertising, many other things influence marketplace behavior. Location of a store is a good predictor of whether or not you will shop there. The farther away a store is, the less likely a person is to shop at that store (Bruner & Mason, 1968). Since 1968 we have seen bustling downtown areas become ghost towns as people moved to suburbia and their trade dollars went with them to the shopping locations that sprouted up in neighborhoods. In addition, consumers have begun to expect certain types of stores to occur in clusters. For example, if you can find a Barnes and Noble, a Starbucks is likely nearby (or even in the bookstore). This decreases the amount of effort the consumer has to exert to find the products they want for the price they want to pay.

The other major factor that has helped to overcome the location problem is the Internet, which allows us to shop anywhere in the world from our desk or laptop. Recent work has shown that regardless of location, loyalty to store format (layout, pricing, etc.) keeps people from switching between supermarkets (Rhee & Bell, 2002). This loyalty to store format is especially true for those who spend more money per trip and those who shop infrequently. That is not to say that the occasional sale doesn’t cause a visit to a competing store, but a sale will not overwhelm the loyalty most people feel to their primary supermarket.

Store format influences how we shop and even how much we spend. That is, most people shop at the same locations again and again. Even if you live in a town with five grocery stores, chances are that you shop at one of them more often than you do the rest. You know this store's layout well and can easily locate the products you purchase most frequently, even when they are in disparate locations.

**Teaching Tip**
You can easily reproduce these findings in class. Some slogans to consider: Really satisfies (Snickers); Hello Moto; Motorola: You can do it, we can help (Home Depot); Just do it (Nike); Maybe she’s born with it, maybe it’s (Maybelline); Please don’t squeeze the (Charmin); When you care enough to send the very best (Hallmark).

**Teaching Tip**
Have students monitor the ads associated with a television show they watch regularly. How are men portrayed? How are women portrayed? Are members of different races depicted? How often do they appear, and how are they portrayed?
One reason store layouts are grouped by product type is to cause consumers to search in the hope that during the search other products may catch their eye. However, most deli counters in grocery stores are now near the front of the store. This was a surprising finding worthy of magazine coverage in 1976, when a grocer found that moving the deli from the back of the store to the more high-traffic front area increased sales 300% ("Store of the Month," 1976).

Babin and Babin (2001) found that potential consumers at female apparel shops felt both discomfort and excitement when learning about a store design, layout, or concept that was incongruent with their expectations for clothing stores. For example, in traditional female apparel stores, formal wear is often located near the lingerie section; professional, casual, and everyday wear is often toward the front of the store; and dressing rooms and sale racks are toward the back. However, newer stores may put the dressing rooms in the middle of the store or even in the middle of the space. The excitement may be good for business at first, but consumer discomfort would need to be eased quickly to ensure repeat business.

**Environmental Influences: Sounds, Sights, Smells**

The environment of the store influences consumer behavior. Music, co-consumers, smells, and even associations between a brand and a specific commercial reminder can play a role. Research found that supermarket sales increased 38% when slower music was played (Milliman, 1982). Another study found that wine shoppers purchased more expensive wines when classical music was playing than when the store played "Top 40" hits (Areni & Kim, 1993). Not only does music pace our shopping, but it also provides a greater context or associative information about what sorts of products, schemas, and ultimately purchases are most appropriate. These associations probably influence consumers by influencing unconscious thought processes. For example, people probably do not consciously think that they should take their sweet time in a store if slow background music is playing. Rather, they probably unconsciously associate slow music with a more relaxed pace.

Co-consumers also affect our shopping, eating, and consuming behavior. Donovan and Rossiter (1982) used an environmental psychology approach to understanding our responses to busy shopping areas. Crowding tends to intensify whatever consumption experience we are already having. That is, if the atmosphere is pleasant and crowded, we may see it as even more pleasant and increase our time in that location, speak with others there, and ultimately consume more. However, if we find ourselves to be uncomfortable or irritated, the crowds are going to intensify that experience, causing us to leave as quickly as possible. Consider shopping during the winter holidays. This may be a fairly pleasant and happy experience, with our positive feelings enhanced by seeing others out also doing their gift shopping. However, anyone who waits until the 24th of December to purchase a major gift may have quite a different perspective on the crowds. The more pleasurable and arousing a store's environment, the more likely we are to

Strip malls are one way in which consumers navigate and learn what to expect in various shopping environments. The similarity in store clusters across nations (and in some cases internationally) allows consumers to feel "at home" with the layout and design of these shopping areas.

**Teaching Tip**

Help students make connections between this module and earlier learning by reminding them of the work by Bargh, Chen, and Burrows (1996) on the automaticity of social behavior.
spend more time (and more money) in the store. However, at heightened levels of arousal, people tend to enact their dominant responses (also see Chapter 14). So if the dominant response is to leave the store, then that is what is most likely to occur when arousal becomes too high (Donovan & Rossiter, 1982).

Our olfactory sense also plays a role in our perceptions of the consumption environment. Scented stores tend to be perceived as having better quality products than unscented stores (Spangenberg, Crowley, & Henderson, 1996). It is important, however, that the scent be congruent with the products available (Mitchell, Kahn, & Knasko, 1995). Further, smell may be more important when the product is being used than when the product is being selected (Schifferstein & Michaut, 2002). Research shows that ambient scents that are present during encoding of brand/product information aid in recall and recognition brand memory tests (Morrin & Ratnewshwar, 2003). This means that product manufacturers and marketing professionals would do well to make sure that the smells that are present when you are learning about the brand are also present when you are choosing the brand. Scratch-and-sniff coupons and advertisements provide one way of achieving this, as long as the smell on the coupon matches the smell in the store.

When illumination is low, noise levels tend to drop, which increases the amount of time patrons will spend in a bar (Sommer, 1969). However, the time and money spent on store atmosphere is directly proportionate to how much of the purchase/consumption process is dependent on the environment. Taco Bell makes a profit by getting many consumers in and out of their establishment, whereas most bars and clubs make more money the longer the people stay in the club. In some cases, the product is good enough to overwhelm a lack of ambience. However, some dining or club experiences have much more to do with the atmosphere than with the products being sold. In the coming years, atmospherics may have to broaden in scope to include website design. The increasing use of the Internet to make purchases in the comfort of one’s own home may make “storefront” atmospherics a largely digital endeavor (Koernig, 2003).

Even the phonetic sounds making up the brand names of the products can influence perceptions of products and subsequently the purchase of these products. For example, Yorkston and Menon (2004) found that the (a) and (i) sounds were perceived differently. The (a) sound in Frosh is associated with perceptions that objects are bigger, heavier, slower, and duller, whereas the (i) in Frish is associated with perceptions that objects are smaller, lighter, livelier, and sharper. Participants in their study were presented with a press release announcing a new brand of ice cream and told that the brand name was either Frosh or Frish. In addition, they were told either that this was in fact the name of the product or that it was a name that was being used only for the test and not the name that would be used when the product was released to the public. The Frosh ice cream (when participants were told it was the actual brand name) was expected to be richer, smoother, and creamier than the Frish ice cream. Just the brand name phonetics can change people’s perceptions of a product and ultimately their purchase decisions and behaviors.

**Brand Allegiance**

Brand loyalty also plays a role in understanding what products you will buy and what products are destined to expire on the shelf. Marketers are well aware of this and design any changes or modernization of logos, trademarks, and packaging with great care. For example, Betty Crocker has evolved over time and now has a more modern haircut, but the changes have occurred so gradually that the average consumer may not have noticed them. Today Betty Crocker products rarely include the woman’s image at all; in fact, the logo has evolved so that the red spoon is now the primary association with the brand. Imagine that Kit Kat bars were all of a sudden packaged in blue instead of orange wrappers. Chances are that people would assume something had changed about the product inside as well, and they might search for the “original” as denoted by packaging color.

Some marketing campaigns fail because a brand is so closely associated with some feature of the product that if it is changed, even the brand loyal consumer may stop buying. New Coke was one example. Coca-Cola came out with New Coke on April 23, 1985. The can changed slightly, and the new Coke formula was preferred in blind taste tests involving 200,000 people. However, people were loyal as much to the idea of Coke (“The Real Thing”) as to the taste of the beverage itself, and by July 11, 1985, Coca-Cola Classic had returned as the “original” recipe Coke product. The New Coke formula can still be found in select markets as Coke II (not to be confused with the low carbohydrate recipe in C2).

If the environment is right and we find the product to fulfill all of our needs and desires, purchase is the next logical step. Some purchase processes are shorter (buying gum) than others (buying guns).

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**dominant response** A behavior that takes very little effort or thought and is frequently the default or habitual response to a specific situation.

**brand loyalty** The degree to which a customer holds a positive attitude toward a brand, has a commitment to it, and intends to continue purchasing it.

**Teaching Tip**
In his book *Blink*, Malcolm Gladwell details the Coke/New Coke period and the research behind it as an example of a time when careful research came to a conclusion opposite to that of the public’s more automatic reaction.
After the failure of “New Coke,” the word classic was added to the can to reassure consumers that “real Coke” was back. However, Coke II products remain on the market for the segment of the population that did enjoy the “New Coke” formula.

Brands such as Betty Crocker must be careful that changes in the images associated with the brand change to reflect the current consumer, without appearing so suddenly different as to be unrecognizable to the brand loyal.
Application Module A: Applying Social Psychology to Consumer Behavior

The Consumption Process
What leads up to the purchase may be a thoughtful considered process, or it may be an automatic one. The consumption process begins long before we choose a product and doesn’t end until well after we have used it. As you can see in Figure A.2, the consumption process is much more elaborate than the typical consumer might imagine. The consumption process involves not only the persuasive attempts of advertisers and the specific purchase decisions of consumers, but also consumer intentions for use and disposal.

Making the Purchase
Cash or Credit?
A situational factor that might influence how much (or if) a consumer spends is whether the purchase will be made with cash or on credit. “Cash or credit?” used to be the question that checkout employees asked right after “Paper or plastic?” Today the question is “Credit or debit?” The difference, of course, is that a debit is taking away from an existing supply of money that you have with a particular financial institution, whereas charging something to a credit card means you are essentially taking out a loan and (unless you pay the bill in full every month) will be charged interest. Norvilitis, Szablacki, and Wilson (2003) found that 75% of college students had at least one credit card with an average balance of $1,518. According to a Gallup poll in 2000, the average American had around $2,800 in credit card debt.

In one study, Boston Celtic basketball tickets were auctioned online (Prelec & Simester, 2001). Half the bidders were informed they would have to pay cash; the other half were allowed to use credit. Participants bidding on the tickets who could pay with a credit card placed bids almost twice as high as the cash-only bidders did.

With the influx of credit availability and the organizations that have sprung up to help people manage their debt, we are encouraged to view debtors as we would somebody who needs help to combat overeating or alcohol consumption—that there is something “wrong” with people who use credit. However, several studies indicate that credit card debt (at least among college students) is unrelated to impulsive buying or financial recklessness (Boddington & Kemp, 1999), general self-destructiveness (Politano & Lester, 1997), or the habitual feeling that one cannot control one’s life (Lea & Webley, 1995). Debt is related to time interest.

Technology Tip
Many students find themselves in significant credit card debt. Some resources and references to share with your students include “Financial Traps for College Students” and “Debt-Free in 60 Seconds” from younmoney.com.
orientation (how long it will take to pay off the debt and a personal disposition to consider the distant future) (Lea & Webley, 1995). That is, the less you think about the future or the more quickly you believe you can pay off the debt, the more likely you are to incur it. Soman and Cheema (2002) conducted a series of studies that demonstrated that participants felt that credit limits on credit cards were indicative of future earning potential and thus supported the belief that more expensive purchases could be easily paid back in the future. Optimistic credit card shoppers are likely to end up spending more than their pessimistic/realistic counterparts.

Of course cash has quickly fallen by the wayside, as it is immeasurably quicker to slide one’s debit card through the machine and key in a pin number than to wait for the cashier to make change or for you to count out your money. If you are buying online, you must have some electronic currency available. Indeed, the machines currently in use at some grocery stores have consumers enter their “club” number (to get the discounts of the day) and then present them with four options for payment—none of them cash. Of course you can pay with cash—you simply have to ignore the screen and speak to the cashier directly.

Using credit seems quicker and less painful than using cash. However, credit purchases may extend the psychological experience of product satisfaction/dissatisfaction if you are still paying for the product perhaps even months or years after you made the decision to buy. The monthly payment serves as a reminder of your purchase decision and the product associations that go along with it. The way in which we pay for our purchases is, in effect, a tradeoff between convenience and being reminded of the purchase price for months.

**Point of Purchase Perceptions**

Once you are at the point of purchase, things quickly begin to change. As soon as you have chosen your product, you begin to like it more than you like its competitors. Beggan (1992) demonstrated that even products that were pretested to be low in desirability (e.g., soda can insulator) were suddenly imbued with a mere ownership effect and liked better once they belonged to the participant (see Chapters 3 and 7 for the related topics of endowment effect and cognitive dissonance, respectively).

Choice is good, or so we believe. In the United States, we have a vast array of brands and products from which to choose. Rarely does one find only one product to fulfill a specific need. Most people probably believe that the more choices people have the better, and the more satisfied they should be. However, the impact of choice on consumer behavior may be more complex than we might at first
A10 Application Module A: Applying Social Psychology to Consumer Behavior

Imagine. Take a moment to consider how post-decision dissonance and cognitive dissonance might play out if you had to choose among many good alternatives. Participants in one study were asked to rate either 6 or 30 different Godiva chocolates (Iyengar & Lepper, 2000). They were then given the opportunity to buy chocolate. Those who had the choice of 30 chocolates reported they enjoyed their chocolate less than those who had only 6 choices. Perhaps participants felt they had a better chance of choosing the “best” available chocolate when there were only 6. Or it could be that they felt they “missed out” on less when there were 6 rather than 30 choices. One explanation that has received considerable attention is how much information people have about the choices before them. For example, it may be fairly straightforward to choose or compare a few options, but a cost/benefit analysis with 30 choices would likely be cognitively taxing.

Making an informed decision seems like a great idea. Historically, a well-informed sales staff ensured that you could ask questions about a variety of products and the salesperson would be able to effectively address your concerns. However, with the advent of “super” stores, the salesperson is often reduced to answering questions about where something is rather than providing information about product features, qualities, or attributes. This is one way in which the Internet makes up for the inability to “touch the product.”

The Internet provides an abundance of information and reports on a wide variety of topics. Lee and Lee (2004) have investigated the amount of information provided by Internet shopping sites. Their findings indicate that if consumers are provided with a great deal of information about a product, they may experience overload and start to feel less confident in their decision, less satisfied, and more confused. The researchers suggest that allowing consumers to choose what specific attribute information to use when comparing products may reduce the potentially negative aspects of this effect. It has also been empirically demonstrated that websites that promote interactivity (activities, links to relevant information, opportunities for feedback/discussion, site maps) increase the potential consumer's comprehension of the material (Macias, 2003). Although it may be important not to overwhelm consumers viewing websites, it may be beneficial to give them an opportunity to “interact” with the site to find the information they do consider important.

When does an item become yours? The car is yours once you are off the lot (as anyone who has ever wrecked a brand new car pulling out of the lot is well aware). Food items in the grocery store seem to become the property of the shopper as soon as the items are in the cart, but eating food not yet paid for in the grocery store seems strange to most people. In any case, we do have a sense of ownership of our purchases that when violated we clearly recognize. Suppose you take an empty cart from the front of the store, push it a few aisles away, and then briefly abandon it. If an interloper attempts to make use of "your" cart, you will very likely say something. We often take ownership of public property (such as shopping carts) during consumption processes.

The Internet storefront at first lacked this sense of pre-purchase ownership that physical stores garner as people touch the products they would like to purchase and carry them to the counter. Many Internet storefronts now use online “shopping carts” as a way of giving Internet shoppers a feeling of ownership over the items in “their cart.” By clicking on a link, you put the item in “your shopping cart”; another click allows you to “view the items in your cart.” Using a virtual shopping cart may be a first step toward getting consumers committed to the purchase, giving them a sense of ownership over the products that can’t be handled or touched.

Once the product is in your possession, product evaluation begins. If the product performs as expected, you probably will have neutral feelings regarding your purchase. If the product exceeds your expectations, this will result in feelings of satisfaction with the purchase. On the other hand, if the product does not meet your expectations, you will likely be dissatisfied. This is most readily visible in children, who see a new toy in a commercial but play with it only a little bit and are disappointed when it doesn't work the way it did in the commercial (superhero dolls don't stay airborne as long when you throw them as they do in slow motion commercial footage). The intensity of your post-purchase experiences is directly related to how “big” a purchase it was. If your breath strips taste bitter, you toss them out and think nothing more of it. However, if your new car interior smells “off,” you will likely be heading back to the dealer.

These post-purchase experiences are not the sole predictor of repeat purchase. We are social creatures, and the reactions of our reference groups, friends, family, and even strangers will go a long way to determining whether we purchase the product/brand again. For example, if everyone you know has bought a Dell computer, your purchase of an e-machine will certainly make you unique, but the reactions of your Dell-owning friends will factor into what you purchase the next time. If others seem to support your purchase decision, this increases the likelihood you will buy that product again; nothing guarantees that you will abandon the product line as well as being ostracized for owning
it. Subjective norms (what others believe you should do) are a strong predictor of whether consumers patronize fast-food restaurants (Bagu, Wong, Abe, & Bergami, 2000).

Thus, the co-consumer is powerful not only as an aspect of the environment, but also as someone who sets norms for appropriate product consumption.

What does your purchase say about you? Making a purchase with the express purpose of making others aware of your ownership is called conspicuous consumption. The idea behind this is that you are using the product to communicate something about yourself to others. For example, a Swatch watch can be set to tell the same time as a much less expensive watch, but owning this particular brand communicates something to others about who you are (e.g., that you are cool). Cell phones are an excellent case in point, as they are often seen as status symbols. One study found that men tended to “display” their phones more as the number of men relative to women increased in a bar (“Cell Phone,” 2000). We may have preconceived impressions based on things that people eat, wear, or drive. For example, if you find out that a person drives a pickup truck, you might infer a great deal about that person from ownership of that vehicle.

Some products are strongly associated with stereotypes; other products are closely tied to ritual and have understood meaning. For example, a person wearing a ring on the fourth finger of the left hand is considered to be in a committed relationship (engaged or married); the absence of such a ring is taken to mean greater potential availability. With an increase in the age of first marriage, jewelers discovered a whole new market of women in their 30s with discretionary money and no “significant” jewelry. This led the Diamond Trading Company (a subsidiary of DeBeers) to launch an ad campaign urging women to “Raise your right hand” and buy a diamond ring for the right ring finger. “Your left hand says ‘we;’ your right hand says ‘me’” and “Your left is your heart, your right is your voice” appeared in an advertisement to encourage single women to adorn themselves to show their independence (“Right Hand,” 2003). Conspicuous consumption apparently is not just for the married.

Terror management theory has been used to explain conspicuous consumption (Solomon, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 2004). Terror management theory is essentially the idea that awareness of mortality (knowing we are going to die) led humans to develop cultural worldviews and beliefs about reality that reduce the terror of existentialist thinking (see Chapter 2). Humans strive to remain in existence (even after death) via religious beliefs, reproduction, building lasting monuments, or “making a mark” on the world in some way. In the United States, one way to do this is by amassing wealth that can purchase these “marks,” or at the very least be passed on in your name. Money can even stave off death, as it can be spent on quality medical care, life-sustaining medications, quality healthful foods, and even gym memberships. One of the primary ways Americans, in particular, embrace their culture in the face of death is by spending money to possess material things. Indeed, President George W. Bush made a point of encouraging Americans in the days following the terrorist attacks of 9/11 to go shopping. In part, this was an attempt to keep the American economy going, but it is not quite the same as encouraging WWII era citizens to buy war bonds.

Awareness of death makes us financially optimistic (Kasser & Sheldon, 2000). Participants were asked to think either about their own death or about listening to music; then they completed a questionnaire about their 15-year projections of their financial status. Those participants contemplating death believed they were more likely to have more money (especially to spend on luxury items). Also, most people believe that having a 20% increase in their income would make them happier (Myers, 1993). Believing one is going to have more money in the future (and be happier) is likely to mean that it would be acceptable to spend more money in the present. Credit is based on just this idea: You can spend today and pay tomorrow (albeit with interest). The implication is not necessarily that Visa’s next advertising campaign should include caskets. However, in a culture where conspicuous consumption runs rampant, your self-worth may be closely linked to your fiscal social comparisons.

There is some backlash against overconsumption, with magazines like Real Simple and websites such as www.simpleliving.net encouraging people to value time and life experiences over money or extravagant purchases. While the resources and our perceptions guide what and how much we purchase, the product must meet our expectations for the experience to be satisfactory.

The usage situation refers to the context in which a product is used. For some items, usage situations may vary. Laptops, cell phones, and palm pilots are some examples of products that were adapted specifically for a wide range of usage situations. Other items, such as laundry detergent or toothpaste, have more limited usage situations. Sometimes a usage situation is defined by the function of the product (requires electricity); in other cases, usage situations are limited by the “appropriate time” for the product to be used. Orange juice, for example, is still more popular for breakfast than with other meals or snacks, whereas bottled water has expanded its usage situation far beyond road trips and the gym.

**conspicuous consumption** The purchase and prominent display of luxury goods to provide evidence of a consumer’s ability to afford them

**usage situation** The context in which a product is used
In the case of gifts, a product must serve two usage situations. First, the product (together with appropriate wrappings) is to be used as a gift for the situation in which it is given and received (e.g., a party, in the mail). Second, the product is to be used by the recipient in other appropriate usage situations (e.g., wearing the gifted necklace to an appropriate function at a later date). Gift purchases are predicted by recipient reactions, not just buyer reactions. Certainly what makes something a good product may not necessarily make it a good gift. In gift purchasing, the recipient’s demographics and attitudes play as much of a role as the purchaser’s. Research shows that both men and women feel more comfortable giving gifts to same-sex others, but have more intense feelings when giving gifts to members of the other sex (Gould & Weil, 1991). Both givers and recipients experience “gifting anxiety,” which sales staff can help to alleviate if they have a full understanding of the psychological processes underlying the gifting situation (Wooten, 2000).

Consumer behavior (and repeat purchasing) is concerned with the entire relationship and interaction that a person has with the product and brand, from the moment the need is present until the product used to satiate the need is out of the consumer’s possession. Consumer needs have changed over time, and the consumption process and the ways consumers fulfill their needs have also evolved.

### Quiz Yourself  
**Making the Purchase**

1. George is on a tight budget, but has saved up just enough money to buy a new flash drive for his computer. If you want to ensure George isn’t asking you for lunch money next week, what would you encourage him to do?  
   (a) Put the flash drive on his credit card  
   (b) Use his debit card to buy the flash drive  
   (c) Withdraw cash at an ATM and then pay cash for the flash drive  

2. Mindi and Mandi are identical twins, and their mother has bought them identical outfits for their birthday. Mindi insists that her mother write their names on the tags so that they can tell them apart, even though they are identical. What effect explains this?  
   (a) Mere exposure effect  
   (b) Cognitive dissonance  
   (c) Mere ownership effect  

3. College students are often inundated with credit card applications that promise free T-shirts for applying. What about college students might draw creditors to seek applications in this population?  
   (a) Optimism and future time orientation  
   (b) Past time orientation  
   (c) Cyclical time orientation  
   (d) Realism and linear time orientation

4. What theory has been used to explain conspicuous consumption?  
   (a) Cognitive dissonance theory  
   (b) Psychological reactance theory  
   (c) Self-awareness theory  
   (d) Terror management theory

**Consuming Today**

Fifteen years ago the Internet was primarily an academic endeavor, and “unlimited” and “free” were not associated with telecommunications. The home was a comfortable retreat, a safe environment in which one could easily separate work from home life. Today, the home is a technological utopia with wireless networks, laptops, gaming systems, and cell phones connecting to a world that can come into any room of your home, your car, or your yard, removing the feasibility of separating work and home life by changing your location. Consumers can shop worldwide online and appear to have increasing needs to do more tasks in less and less time.

### E-Commerce

It is now possible (especially in urban areas) to do all of one’s shopping through an Internet connection. Groceries can be ordered online and delivered to keyed freezers in your driveway. Pizza can be ordered online and delivered within 30 minutes. Clothes, shoes, music, books, condoms, shampoo, jewelry, and even cars can be ordered online and delivered to your home. Tse and Yim (2001) conducted a study in Hong Kong interviewing book buyers regarding their choice to purchase a book online or at the store. The only factor they found that encouraged a visit to the physical bookstore was being able to “see” the item (in the tactile sense).
San Francisco holds the lead for Internet purchases, with 22.3% of survey respondents indicating they had purchased online in the last 30 days (Fetto, 2002). Although this may not seem like a huge number, consider that most online purchases are made by people who have at least some expendable income. Consumers with expendable income are the ones most carefully targeted by marketing and advertising agencies.

Consumers use the Internet not only to make purchases but to comparison shop, gather information about the product from a variety of sources, read the opinions or reviews of the product posted by other consumers, and so on. The days of going store to store to find the best price have largely been replaced by comparison shopping sites such as www.mysimon.com, www.shopper.com, and www.bizrate.com. Choosing to shop online means trading hands-on product inspection and demonstrations for the variety offered online. Although companies are always trying to give consumers the sense that they can “have it all,” online consumption, like many other behaviors, has tradeoffs.

McKinney (2004) has proposed that there are five Internet consumer segments: confident/convenience-oriented/comparison, store preferred, highly involved, apathetic, and apprehensive. These segments represent five basic attitudes that consumers have toward Internet shopping. Interestingly, most of the respondents in the study were in the first segment (3 C’s); they were confident in using the Internet, felt it was convenient, and provided a good way to comparison shop. The smallest consumer segment was the store preferred segment—individuals who preferred traditional mortar-and-bricks shopping to online shopping. However, even this segment did report shopping online occasionally. Thus, the Internet is pervasive in consumer culture, and this is likely to increase over time. The advent of wireless networking may mean that eventually someone standing in a store could use the Internet to comparison shop the same item they are seeing on the store shelf.

When considering the impact of the Internet on consumer behavior, it is important to consider the new “world brand” or global community implications of Internet advertising and buying. Though not everyone has an outlet for a particular store in their vicinity, if they have Internet access they can still buy the product. Does this present special issues? Sure. Language doesn’t always translate directly, such as when Chevrolet tried to sell its Nova automobile in the South American market only to realize later that in Spanish the word means “It doesn’t run.” Colors have different meanings across various cultures. Even U.S. high sugar preferences must be significantly cut for the Japanese consumer, for whom Nabisco created Petit Oreo Non-Cream cookies (“Some Kids,” 1991).

Global mass marketing has moved beyond Coca-Cola, which sells essentially the same product worldwide. Ordering a Coke in Japan will get you the same formula you get in the United States. However, other corporations market globally in much the way that Nabisco markets Oreos. In Saudi Arabia, McDonald’s closes five times a day for Muslim prayers. In India, McDonald’s opened its first beefless outlet serving vegetable nuggets (instead of chicken) (Frith & Mueller, 2003). It took more than 100 years for Coca-Cola to establish a global presence, but Starbucks went from 17 stores in the United States to 4,700 locations worldwide in a decade. The increase in the number of online consumers is likely to expand worldwide and make global brand presence almost instantaneous.

**Buying Time: Cell Phones—Case in Point**

One marketing strategy that has been increasingly used is to sell time. Discussion of the deadline technique in Chapter 13 showed how “limited time offers” can be used to encourage consumers to spend quickly. However, there is more to the interaction between situational time and consumer behavior than this advertising technique. Many consumers today are feeling time compression, or time poverty, leading them to select products that will alleviate time pressure. As both adults and children continue to fill their days with more and more activities, they have less and less time to do things. As a result, speed, time, and products that allow for multitasking are in demand. Until the 1980s, it was common for someone to sit down, dial a phone with a rotary dial, and seek silence and solitude for making a phone call. However, the development of the cordless phone (and even more recently the phone headset) have made it possible for a person to have that telephone conversation while roaming his or her own home doing a variety of chores.

The cell phone has furthered our abilities to roam while talking on the phone so that we do not lose a moment of productivity while driving, shopping, or even “relaxing” at home. In 1997, there were just fewer than 50 million cell users in the United States; today the estimate is over 219 million cell subscribers (CTIA.org, 2006). In the United States, cell phone users are averaging 726 minutes per month, with 18- to 24-year-olds using 1,304 minutes and sending/receiving 126 text messages per month. Individuals over age 56 are using the fewest minutes and are still at 441 minutes per month (Telephia.com, 2006). Indeed, our increasingly wireless lives have certainly made us busier and better able to multitask; in some respect, we are “buying time.”

Indeed, time is a precious, nonrefundable resource. Consumers are often most dissatisfied with service or products that have cost them time. Having a flight delayed several

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time poverty A feeling of having less time available than is required to meet the demands of everyday living

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Teaching Tip

Have students self-select into one of these groups, standing in different areas of the room depending on which group they feel best describes them. Ask members of each group to explain their thoughts and perspectives on Internet shopping.
hours is usually much more dissatisfying than having a rough takeoff or landing. Products that manage to be complementary with other activities will have a larger market share than products that must be substituted for other products. For example, if a person uses Tide laundry detergent, he or she will not also use Era laundry detergent in the same load. Thus Tide and Era are in direct competition for your laundry time. However, Febreze laundry additive is a product that is positioned to be complementary to laundry detergent and thus does not have to compete for your laundry time.

As consumers have become increasingly mobile, food product manufacturers decided that too much time was being spent in the car where food could be consumed only if it came in the proper packaging. Campbell's Soup at Hand was designed to enable drivers to drink their soup from a disposable, single-serving, insulated, lidded container that fits nicely into any vehicle cup holder; when there is “No time for a meal,” Yoplait encourages us to drink a Nouriche Yogurt Smoothie, which also fits into vehicle cup holders. If we can’t find time to sit down to eat, we can certainly find time to drink a meal while driving. When cell phone companies found themselves competing for driving time, cell phone manufacturers came out with the headphone/microphone to allow cell phone use to be complementary with driving (or doing anything else you might need to do).

Companies aware of time poverty are essentially eliminating the need for consumers to make tradeoff choices. That is, you don’t have to choose whether you want to spend your time driving or eating; you can have both. The result, however, may be that you enjoy neither the drive nor the food as much as you might if you could find the time to do each separately. Tide now includes Downy or Febreze in their liquid detergent, so you don’t even have to choose—you can have both at once. Eliminating the perception that you are trading one thing for another has been quite a successful marketing tactic, especially in the United States where “having it all” is paramount to achieving the “American Dream.” Eliminating tradeoffs seems like an effective sales strategy.

Consider all of the products we now rely on to save time: Microwave ovens, garbage disposals, even cable Internet instead of dial-up service, all depend on consumers valuing the irreplaceable, nonrefundable resource of time. Drive-through windows have appeared at banks, fast-food restaurants, and even some packaged liquor stores. ATMs and online banking make sure your “workday” time does not have to be devoted to banking. Digital cameras mean that we have instant images and no longer need the one-hour photo processing that saved us the days we spent waiting for photos only a few years ago. Indeed, the only thing worse than a waste of money is a waste of time.

**Polychronic activity** refers to being able to do more than one activity or task at a time. Many products are geared toward allowing us to do more than one thing at a time. Hair shampoo/conditioner formulas are meant to allow us to skip the second “conditioning” step by doing it all in one step; body washes allow us to wash our hair and our skin using a single product. Job ads often call for employees who can “multitask.” The number of open windows on a computer desktop is often a good indicator of a person’s multitasking skills; computer manufacturers play to this by building faster and more capable machines that allow you to do “more at once.” If we were all using only one or two programs at a time, we wouldn’t need 1GB of RAM to keep our computers running. It is also becoming more common not to have just one monitor, but to have a second video card installed so that one can have dual monitors; certainly, this is not the configuration for one-program-at-a-time users.

If we can’t save time by doing more than one thing at once, we’d rather be in charge of our own time. Self-service has extended beyond gasoline pumps to checkout lanes where customers scan and bag their own items and then pay with a credit or debit card via an ATM-like interface. When first installed, these self-service lanes were intimidating (especially to market segments that are still suspicious of the computer), but those who use them once often feel as though they spent less time in line than those who had to stand idly by while someone else scanned their purchases. Self-checkout has been present in many library systems for some time. In addition to the “time-saving” feature, self-check also increases the privacy of one’s selections. Certainly scanning your own condoms or that book on the joys of witchcraft will be less intimidating without the salesperson calling for a price check or asking if your priest knows what you are reading.

Technological advances have made us feel that our lives are full because they are busier and our time is more precious because there is more to do. Products and marketing campaigns that keep up with our perception that our lives are fast paced will likely prove most successful.

**Consuming: The Dark Side**

It is clear that cigarettes and other tobacco products are addictive. However, these are not the only “addictive” products being sold. To this point we’ve assumed that consumer behavior takes place on the up and up, in well-lit corporate-run stores. However, a great deal of consumption occurs on the street corner, in the local club, or even online across international borders. From prostitutes selling sexual gratification on the corner to the company selling growth hormones over the Internet to 13-year-old boys, consumer

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**polychronic activity** Doing more than one activity or behavior at a time

**product misuse** Using a product for an unintended purpose or without regard for instructions or usage suggestions

**shrinkage** The loss of money or inventory from shoplifting and/or employee theft
behavior goes well beyond your local Wal-Mart or shopping mall. These transactions, for ethical reasons, tend to go unstudied by psychologists and certainly aren’t reliably tracked by government agencies.

Internet addiction, wherein one’s virtual life (be it gaming, chatting, or just surfing) takes precedence over the life one has in the real world, has also made headlines (“Psychologist Warns,” 1997). However, more recently it has been suggested that, rather than an addition to the Internet itself, other addictions (e.g., pornographic or sexual addictions) are often being played out online. If a person is losing sleep, work productivity, or relationships as a result of time spent online, this may be a sign that there is a problem, but the term addiction should be used carefully. Playing a game online with friends late into the night instead of going out to the local hangout for a beverage or two does not necessarily qualify as addiction.

Not all of the “dark side” of consumer behavior involves addiction. Product misuse occurs when a product is not used for its intended purpose or in the intended way. Using a microwave to dry tennis shoes would be an example of product misuse. Although this might not be good for the shoes or the microwave, it’s hardly on the same plane as huffing spray paint or using cold medicine to manufacture illegal narcotics. Another example of product misuse is overconsumption. This occurs when consumers purchase items to meet needs the product was not intended to fill. For example, eating an entire chocolate cake when one is depressed would be a misuse of the product, which has a much smaller suggested serving size. Overdosing on cough syrup for the intoxicating effects is yet another example of product misuse.

Another aspect of the “dark side” of consumer behavior is that the consumers themselves are sometimes the product. This goes far beyond networks and magazines selling consumer audiences to advertisers; here we are discussing the actual marketing and selling of consumers physically. Frozen sperm (and artificial insemination supplies) can be purchased online for around $200 and delivered to your home within approximately three days (www.nwcryobank.com). People can also sell their hair, sperm, and surrogate wombs. If you think you aren’t for sale, you may be surprised that there are companies selling your personal information (e-mail address, phone, credit history, and so on) to anyone who is willing to purchase this information—and the irony is you aren’t even profiting.

Shrinkage refers to a company’s loss of money or inventory as a result of shoplifting and/or employee theft. This is particularly a problem for those in the retail business. Choosing to shoplift at a local store “shrinks” the inventory of that store. If you are curious as to what items are most frequently pocketed without paying, look behind the counter of your local convenience store or in the keyed cases along the store walls. Items such as condoms, cigarettes, and some cold medicines containing ingredients used to manufacture illicit drugs are often guarded by store personnel. These are the items most at risk for being stolen. They aren’t necessarily the most expensive items in the store, but they have the combined qualities of being small enough to conceal and somewhat taboo. The more embarrassed or ashamed you are to need/want the item, the more likely it is that you are going to have to ask the clerk to hand it to you.

### Quiz Yourself

**Consuming Today**

1. _____ has increasingly become an important nonrefundable resource.  
   (a) Money  
   (b) Education  
   (c) Technology  
   (d) Time

2. Margaret, who is part of the 3 C’s market segment, is considering purchasing a new couch. If she is like the average American consumer, how will she include the Internet in this purchase?  
   (a) Complete the entire process online  
   (b) Search for information and comparison shop online, but then go to some stores to feel the product  
   (c) Complete the entire search and purchase process by going from store to store  
   (d) Not make use of the Internet at all

3. Which of the following matches the consumer activity with the appropriate label?  
   (a) Margaret is engaging in shrinkage when she uses nail polish to stop a run in her hose.  
   (b) Fred is causing shrinkage for his employer by eating donuts he isn’t paying for.  
   (c) Joe is engaging in product misuse by purchasing growth hormones on the Internet.  
   (d) Kimberly is engaging in shrinkage by spending her downtime at work reorganizing shelves in the warehouse.

4. Polychronic activity refers to  
   (a) being able to do psychomotor tasks accurately  
   (b) being able to do psychomotor tasks quickly  
   (c) being able to do a sequence of consecutive tasks  
   (d) being able to do more than one activity or task at a time

**Answers:** 1=d, 2=b, 3=b, 4=d
**The Social Side of Sex**

**Sex for Sale**

This chapter is primarily concerned with how consumers are increasingly meeting their needs (basic, social, and self-actualizing) through the purchase of products and services. Prostitution has been touted as the oldest profession in the world; however, the typical U.S. consumer no longer has to risk a jaunt to a red light district to exchange money for sexual gratification. The Internet provides a means of selling images, stories, and even live video interaction with a variety of individuals who are willing to play their part in sexually gratifying the consumer (in exchange for a fee payable by credit card). The anonymity with which sex can be bought on the Internet has removed the limitations on what sort of “new and exciting” sexual behavior might interest someone. In addition, the pool of potential online sexual partners is not limited geographically or even to realistic images; cartoon and computer-generated images/avatars also draw a considerable paying audience. Before the Internet, if you were curious about some “edgier” sexual behavior, you might have to go to an erotic shop or purchase magazines and peruse the advertisements in the back to find someone else who shared your interest. However, Internet access means you do not have to endure a public pornography purchase or even be seen by anyone else as you search for your particular interest on the web.

Some consumers become addicted to sex on the Internet; indeed, this new sexual outlet often means that couples must discuss exactly what will be considered cheating in their marriage. Most couples seem to agree that viewing images of others in various stages of copulation would not be considered an act of infidelity, but it is unclear for some couples whether chatting (via typing or voice chat) is off limits. Witter (2003) surveyed 1,117 participants about their attitudes regarding online versus offline infidelity. The results indicated that online sexual activity was indeed an ambiguous behavior; participants showed little agreement about what specific online activities (if any) would constitute a betrayal.

It is also interesting to note that most cybersex media coverage focuses on males who become addicted. Women are often omitted from discussions of cybersex activity, yet women are overrepresented among those who are rated as cybersex compulsive (Ferree, 2003). When women become addicted to cybersex, it is often seen as in line with a healthy libido, whereas men making the same sorts of purchases are seen as addicted and in need of treatment.

Griffiths (2001) points out that although the term *Internet addiction* is widely used, it is more often the case that the Internet provides a medium for those addicted to sex (or shopping or gambling) to engage in these addictive behaviors anonymously and at relatively low cost. Some have estimated that online pornography is a $366 million industry (Sprenger, 1999); others suggest that globally it is worth $1 billion, with more than half of all online spending being related in some way to sexual activity (“Blue Money,” 1999). According to Griffiths, sexually related Internet activity includes the conventional (e.g., Internet versions of widely available magazines like *Playboy*), the not so conventional (e.g., Internet versions of hardcore pornographic magazines), and what can only be described as the bizarre (e.g., discussion groups on almost any sexual paraphernalia, perversion, and deviation). There are also pornographic picture libraries (commercial and free access), videos and video clips, live strip shows, live sex shows, and voyeurestic web-cam sites (Griffiths, 2000a).

There have always been sex addicts; the Internet has simply provided a new medium for the addictive behavior. Going online for sexual gratification does not, in and of itself, merit the addiction label. However, the availability of this new product certainly has an impact on the ways in which we view sexuality, how children and young adults learn about sexuality, and even how we define our real-life relationships.

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**Post-Consumption Processes**

What happens when a consumer is done with a product? There are several options: sell it, give it away, throw it away, or keep it with modifications.

*Lateral cycling* includes selling, giving, or trading an item to someone else to be used for its intended purpose.

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*lateral cycling* Selling or giving a previously purchased product to someone else to use for its intended purpose.

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Purchasing a table at a garage sale that you intend to use as a table would be an example of lateral cycling. However, we wouldn’t use this term if you took the table home and turned it into mulch. Flea markets are a great place to see lateral cycling at work. A suitcase purchased at an Australian flea market for $36 in July 2004 reportedly con-
tained unreleased Beatles recordings and other Beatles memorabilia, so even lateral cycling shopping can be quite lucrative for the lucky. eBay is the perfect example of how the Internet has changed our consumer disposal process. Recently, I was out with friends at a nightclub where a marketing firm had sent surveyors with electronic notebooks and free Zippo cigarette lighters. Even though several people at the table did not smoke, they completed the survey and took the lighters, saying they would sell them on eBay. Thinking they were kidding, a few days later I looked up Zippos on eBay, and there they were being auctioned.

In the land of the automobile, how we recycle our cars is quite interesting. Different usage strategies often determine how our newest auto will make its way to the junkyard. Some people purchase a car with the intent of driving it only until they can trade it in for a newer model (at which point their car becomes someone else’s problem). Others are inclined to drive their vehicle until it simply cannot make it one more inch down the road, then sell it for scrap to whatever junkyard is willing to haul it away. According to the EPA (U.S. Geological Survey, 2006), each year 27 million cars around the world (including 10.5 million in the United States) reach the end of their useful lives and must be recycled, packed, or abandoned. At the same time, about 10 million new cars are put on the road each year in the United States.

The few items that are not thrown out, laterally cycled, or recycled have traditionally been bought by others after we die: caskets, funeral sprays, tombstones. However, funeral homes have quickly stepped up to allow you to preselect your casket, tombstone, flowers, and service details while you are still among the living. The interesting thing about these purchases is that it would be hard to report dissatisfaction with them. It appears that the few items we buy that we take with us when we die are the ones we are least likely to complain about. Thus far, it is rare to hear of lateral cycling or recycling of most funeral items.

If you believe that lateral cycling is a reasonable thing to do with one’s body, you will find that many research institutions, medical schools, and car manufacturers would be happy to make good use of your physical body. Donating one’s body to science can involve a range of activities (Roach, 2004). Automobile manufacturers use cadavers to determine what safety standards can be improved; medical school gross anatomy courses always need more cadavers; surgeons learning new procedures often need some part of a body to practice on; and even ER interns can hone their medical procedure skills. There is not a “for profit” market for cadavers, and transporting cadavers requires many local and state licenses (not to mention if you are posthumously transported across national borders), but this sort of donation would in effect be your last consumer behavior decision.

Having a better understanding of the consumer behavior process in its totality can be a great boon to one’s own pocketbook as well as to a career in marketing, sales, business, or even as a professional shopper. Understanding how social psychology can be used to understand our consumer-focused social world is beneficial to our personal finances, economy, health, and environment.

Quiz Yourself

**Post-Consumption Processes**

1. Environmentally conscious people often do much more than recycle. Their consumer behavior process might include
   (a) reusing and disposing
   (b) recycling, reusing, and lateral cycling
   (c) recycling and disposing
   (d) lateral cycling and product misuse

2. Which of the following is an example of lateral cycling?
   (a) Melting a box of old crayons to make candles
   (b) Buying a coffee table at a flea market to use as a child’s bench in your home
   (c) Using old T-shirts as dust rags
   (d) Giving your younger brother your old shoes to wear

3. Which of the following is the best estimate of the number of cars per year in the United States that can no longer be laterally cycled?
   (a) 20 million
   (b) 30 million
   (c) 10.5 million
   (d) 50,000

4. What type of cycling includes selling, giving, or trading an item to someone else to be used for its intended purpose?
   (a) hierarchical cycling
   (b) lateral cycling
   (c) repetitive cycling
   (d) vertical cycling

*Answers: 1=b, 2=d, 3=c, 4=b*
What Makes Us Human? Putting the Cultural Animal in Perspective

Being a consumer is one of the things that makes human beings unique. This may sound odd, because all animals need to consume certain things, such as food and water, in order to survive. But as this module has shown, consumer psychology focuses less on the consumption than on the purchasing of goods and services. A consumer participates in an economic system, a marketplace, and such systems are essentially unknown outside of humans. To human beings, however, the economy and marketplace are vitally important aspects of our culture, and they shape every day of our lives.

Consumer psychology incorporates many of this book’s central themes. One theme is putting people first. It is via the marketplace that we get what we need from other people and, more generally, from the cultural system, rather than directly from nature. As Chapter 2 pointed out, hardly any modern individuals get their food directly from nature. Instead, they get it from the system: restaurants, grocery stores, room service. Consumers are hooked into the system in fundamental ways.

Another theme is that nature says go and culture says stop. People are naturally built to enjoy acquiring things, and so in a sense we are born to be consumers. The main “stop” signal is via money: We are held back by the limits of our purchasing power. But modern cultures have begun to join with nature in saying “go” (in this case, “buy!”) rather than stop. Credit cards allow people to continue purchasing when they are out of money. More broadly, the economy booms when people buy, and so the culture has developed many features to encourage more buying and more consumption. Advertising, for example, is a huge, multibillion-dollar industry that encourages people to buy. When both nature and culture say “go!” it is no wonder that people have difficulty stopping, which is why many people end up deeply in debt or even bankrupt.

Tradeoffs, another theme of this book, are central to consumer decisions. Almost all purchasing decisions involve a tradeoff between keeping your money and acquiring something new. Choosing between products often invokes a tradeoff between price and quality, so that the consumer must balance the desire to avoid paying a high price against the desire to get something good.

Yet another theme is the long road to social acceptance, and in modern life at least, people travel big parts of this road as consumers. Homemade clothes may be inexpensive and practical but will not impress potential friends, lovers, or employers. If you do not watch the right shows or listen to popular music, you may not know what others are talking about. This module pointed out that advertisers often struggle to convince you that buying a product is a way to acquire and display your identity, but they are not entirely wrong. People do judge you by your possessions.

Module Summary

Learning, Knowing, and Deciding What to Buy

- The consumer behavior process begins at the point when a consumer recognizes a need and does not end until the product or service purchased to fulfill that need has expired.
- Advertisers and media corporations have symbiotic relationships whereby the media draw consumers in and deliver them to the advertiser and advertisements are delivered via the media to consumers.
- Products are often marketed and bought because they fulfill social, status, esteem needs in addition to practical needs such as warmth.
- Store layout, co-consumers, smells, sights, and sounds all make up the consumption environment and affect what people buy, how much they spend, and how much time and energy they devote to the process.
- The loyalty that consumers feel toward brands and products is robust and must be dealt with carefully by marketers to avoid alienating the consumer base associated with the product.

Making the Purchase

- Once people have taken ownership of a product, they feel more positively toward it as part of the mere ownership effect and see alternative products as less valuable or appropriate.
- Paying with a credit card often means that consumers will spend more money. This is especially true if they are feeling optimistic about their future earning potential.

Consuming Today

- The Internet is quickly changing the marketplace into a global endeavor and increasing the availability of products without geographical limitations.
- Today’s consumer faces special issues with regard to time poverty and the increased need to engage in poly-chronic activities.
- The Internet has also become a venue for shopping, gambling, and sexual addictions as it provides a ready access point with the added bonus of anonymity.
Post-Consumption Processes

- Increasingly, consumers are beginning to see that their purchases need to be disposed of in ways that conserve resources and are environmentally friendly. In the future, more and more consumers will likely reuse, recycle, or laterally cycle before they dispose of their possessions.

What Makes Us Human? Putting The Cultural Animal In Perspective

- To human beings, the economy and marketplace are vitally important aspects of our culture, and they shape every day of our lives.

References


