CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR
A European Perspective

Now in its seventh edition, Consumer Behaviour: A European Perspective provides the most comprehensive, lively and engaging introduction to the behaviour of consumers in Europe and around the world.

The new slimline edition has 13 chapters, maintaining its breadth of coverage and making it ideal for second- and third-year undergraduates as well as Master’s students.

The book links consumer behaviour theory with the real-life problems faced by practitioners in the following ways:

- Marketing opportunity, Marketing pitfalls and Multicultural dimensions boxes throughout the text illustrate the impact consumer behaviour has on marketing activities.
- Consumer behaviour as I see it boxes feature marketing academics talking about the relevance of consumer behaviour issues to their everyday work.
- Brand new case studies about European companies and topics give deep insights into the world of consumer behaviour.
- New coverage of sustainable consumption, emerging technologies, social media and online behaviour is woven throughout this edition.
- Online materials including multiple-choice questions and links to useful websites are available on the book’s website at www.pearsoned.co.uk/solomon.

About the authors

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CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR
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| Children and their favourite stores | Professor Stefania Borghini  
Bocconi University, Milan | Children are an important target market (as consumers in their own right; as influencers; and as future consumers). This commentary examines patterns of children’s behaviour in retail settings. |
| Touching technology... | Associate Professor Rhonda Hadi  
Said School of Business, Oxford University | Technology is increasingly a multisensory experience. This commentary explores the effects of what is called haptic feedback – the vibrating or similar sensation that technology uses to communicate with us. |
| What makes a real man? | Professor Jacob Östberg  
Stockholm University | Gender is one of the most important dimensions of consumer behaviour. In this commentary, the notion of masculinity and how it forms and is formed by consumption is discussed. |
| Luxury goods and luxury consumers: is status-enhancing consumption compatible with the notion of sustainability? | Professor Benjamin G. Voyer  
ESCP Europe (London) and LSE, London | Are luxury goods compatible with consumer values around sustainability? This commentary describes findings from a study which showed that consumers associated luxury brands with words related to unsustainability (e.g. pollution, greed). A follow-up focus group found that consumers felt that luxury was conceptually the opposite of sustainability. |
| Learning via word of mouth in offline (WOM) and online (eWOM) settings | Professor Peeter Verlegh  
Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, Netherlands | This commentary reports research which has examined brand loyalty in the context of influencing consumer behaviour via online word of mouth (eWOM) and offline word of mouth (WOM) respectively. |
| Compensatory materialism | L.J. Shrum  
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<td>The dark side of the gift</td>
<td>Stephen Brown University of Ulster</td>
<td>Ever received an unwelcome gift? Or given one? Sure, come on! This introspection reflects on the dire consequences of not mastering the subtleties of gift-giving correctly.</td>
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<td>Cultural change as glocalisation</td>
<td>Professor Dannie Kjeldgaard University of Southern Denmark</td>
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Preface

We wrote this book because we’re fascinated by the field of consumer behaviour. We hope that, as consumers and future managers, you find this study to be fascinating as well. Whether you’re a student, manager or professor, we’re sure you can relate to the trials and tribulations associated with last-minute shopping, preparing for a big night out, agonising over a purchase decision, fantasising about a week’s skiing in the Swiss Alps, enjoying a holiday on a Greek island or commemorating a landmark event, such as graduating from university, getting a driver’s licence or (dreaming about) winning the lottery.

Buying, having and being

Our understanding of this field goes beyond looking at the act of buying only, and extends to both having and being as well. Consumer behaviour is about much more than just buying things; it also embraces the study of how having (or not having) things affects our lives, and how our possessions influence the way we feel about ourselves and about each other – our state of being. In addition to understanding why people buy things, we also try to appreciate how products, services and consumption activities contribute to the broader social world we experience.

A European perspective on consumers and marketing strategy

An important objective for this new, seventh edition has been to ensure its continuing relevance to European audiences while retaining the accessibility and contemporary approach established over the last 12 editions of Michael Solomon’s U.S. Consumer Behaviour. The significant level of European material in this latest edition includes extra references to European research, illustrative examples and cases from a European consumer context, as well as a number of European advertisements so that the reader can visualise different elements in the marketing applications of consumer behaviour theory.

The internationalisation of market structures makes it increasingly necessary for business people to acquire a clear understanding of cultural differences and similarities among consumers from various countries. One of the challenges of writing this book has been to develop materials which illustrate local as well as pan-European and global aspects of consumer behaviour. In this spirit, we have kept a number of American and other non-European examples to illustrate various similarities and differences on the global consumer scene. To illustrate the potential of consumer research to inform marketing strategy, the text contains numerous examples of specific applications of consumer behaviour concepts by marketing practitioners.

Digital consumer behaviour

As more of us go online every day, there’s no doubt the world is changing – and consumer behaviour is constantly evolving in response to the Web and social media (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter). The seventh edition continues to highlight the new world of the digital consumer.

One of the most exciting aspects of the new digital world is that consumers can interact directly with other people who live either just down the street or half way across the world.
As a result, we are having to radically redefine the meaning of community. It’s no longer enough to acknowledge that consumers like to talk to each other about products. Now we share opinions and get the up-to-date information about new films, music, cars, clothes . . . in electronic communities that might include a young parent from Aalborg or Aachen, a senior citizen from Odense or Les Moutiers, or a teenager from Amsterdam or Edinburgh. And many of us meet up in computer-mediated environments (CMEs) such as Facebook or Twitter. We have tried to thread material and examples about these new emerging consumer playgrounds throughout the text. These new ways of interacting in the marketplace create bountiful opportunities for marketing managers and consumers alike.

However, is the digital world always a rosy place? Unfortunately, just as in the ‘real world’, so inevitably the digital world comes with its own warnings (e.g. trolling). That said, it is difficult to imagine going back to a world without the Web, and it is changing the field of consumer behaviour all the time – so watch this space.
About the authors

Michael R. Solomon, PhD, is Professor of Marketing in the Haub School of Business at Saint Joseph’s University in Philadelphia. Before joining the Saint Joseph’s faculty in the fall of 2006, he was the Human Sciences Professor of Consumer Behavior at Auburn University. Before moving to Auburn in 1995, he was chair of the Department of Marketing in the School of Business at Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey. Professor Solomon began his academic career in the Graduate School of Business Administration at New York University (NYU), where he also served as Associate Director of NYU’s Institute of Retail Management. He earned his BA degrees in psychology and sociology magna cum laude at Brandeis University and a PhD in social psychology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. In 1996 he was awarded the Fulbright/FLAD Chair in Market Globalization by the US Fulbright Commission and the Government of Portugal, and he served as Distinguished Lecturer in Marketing at the Technical University of Lisbon. He held an appointment as Professor of Consumer Behaviour at the University of Manchester (United Kingdom) from 2007 to 2013.

Professor Solomon’s primary research interests include: consumer behaviour and lifestyle issues; branding strategy; the symbolic aspects of products; the psychology of fashion, decoration and image; services marketing; marketing in virtual worlds; and the development of visually oriented online research methodologies. He has published numerous articles on these and related topics in academic journals, and he has delivered invited lectures on these subjects in Europe, Australia, Asia, and Latin America. His research has been funded by the American Academy of Advertising, the American Marketing Association, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the International Council of Shopping Centers, and the U.S. Department of Commerce. He currently sits on the editorial or advisory boards of The Journal of Consumer Behaviour, Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice, Critical Studies in Fashion and Beauty and Journal for Advancement of Marketing Education, and he served an elected six-year term on the Board of Governors of the Academy of Marketing Science. Professor Solomon has been recognised as one of the 15 most widely cited scholars in the academic behavioural sciences/fashion literature, and as one of the 10 most productive scholars in the field of advertising and marketing communications.

Professor Solomon is a frequent contributor to mass media. His feature articles have appeared in such magazines as Psychology Today, Gentleman’s Quarterly, and Savvy. He has been quoted in numerous national magazines and newspapers, including Advertising Age, Adweek, Allure, Elle, glamour, Mademoiselle, Mirabella, Newsweek, the New York Times, Self, Time, USA Today, and the Wall Street Journal. He frequently appears on television and speaks on radio to comment on consumer behaviour issues, including appearances on The Today Show, Good Morning America, Inside Edition, Newsweek on the Air, the Entrepreneur Sales and Marketing Show, CNBC, Channel One, the Wall Street Journal Radio Network, the WOR Radio Network and National Public Radio. He acts as consultant to numerous companies on consumer behaviour and marketing strategy issues and often speaks to business groups throughout the United States and overseas. In addition to this text, Professor Solomon is co-author of the widely used textbook Marketing: Real People, Real Choices. He has three children, Amanda, Zachary and Alexandra, a son-in-law, Orly and three granddaughters, Rose, Evey and Arya. He lives in Philadelphia with his wife Gail and their ‘other child’ – a pug named Kelbie Rae.
Søren Askegaard is Professor of Consumption Studies at the University of Southern Denmark. He entered the atmosphere the same year as Yuri Gagarin left it. Søren has a postgraduate Diploma in Communication Studies from the Sorbonne University, Paris and PhD in Business Studies from Odense University, 1993.

Professor Askegaard’s research interests generally are in the field of consumer culture theory and commercial symbolism. He is interested in debunking what is known as ‘common sense’, and he likes to act as a ‘Martian’ in his own society (as well as other societies), in order to catch a glimpse of all the funny, little – and not so little – things we do (and consume!), while thinking that it is ‘perfectly normal’.

Professor Askegaard has given invited lectures at universities in Europe, Africa, Asia, North America and Latin America. He has served on a dozen programme committees for scientific conferences and is, among other things, co-organiser of the 2012 Consumer Culture Theory conference at Oxford University. He has been a visiting professor at universities in France, Sweden, Turkey and the USA.

Søren Askegaard served as associate editor for *The Journal of Consumer Research* 2008–14 and is currently a member of its editorial review board. He also serves on the editorial boards for four other journals. His research has been published in numerous international journals and anthologies. For his research accomplishment he has received four research awards, including the Danish Marketing Association’s Research Award. In 2008, he received the Danish Academy for Business Research Award for making his and his colleagues’ research beneficial to the business community in Denmark. He also serves as the honorary consul of France in Odense, Denmark.

His research has been widely quoted by the mass media in Denmark, where he is a frequent commentator on consumer and market issues. His research has also been featured in the Swedish media and on BBC Radio 4.

Margaret K. Hogg holds the Chair of Consumer Behaviour and Marketing in the Department of Marketing at Lancaster University Management School (LUMS). She read for an MA (Hons) in Politics and Modern History at Edinburgh University; postgraduate studies in History at the Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam; an MA in Business Analysis at Lancaster University; and a PhD in Consumer Behaviour and Retailing at Manchester Business School. She worked for six years in marketing with ‘K Shoes’ in Kendal and she spent eight years at Manchester School of Management (MSM), UMIST before moving to LUMS in May 2004.

Professor Hogg’s main areas of research interests are around the issues of identity, self and consumption within consumer behaviour. Her work has appeared in refereed journals including the *Journal of Advertising, Journal of Business Research, Journal of Marketing Management, European Journal of Marketing, International Journal of Advertising, Journal of Services Marketing, Journal of Consumer Policy, Marketing Management Journal, Advances in Consumer Research and Consumption, Markets and Culture*. She edited six volumes of papers on consumer behaviour in the Sage Major Works series (2005 and 2006) and has co-authored numerous book chapters. Professor Hogg regularly presents papers at international conferences including US, European and Asia-Pacific meetings of the Association for Consumer Research (ACR), and Consumer Culture Theory. She has given numerous seminar papers as an invited speaker (e.g. in Australia, New
About the authors

Zealand and Europe). She is a regular reviewer for the UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and for the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada; she was an Associate Editor (Buyer Behaviour) for *Journal of Business Research* for five years and she reviews regularly for the *Journal of Consumer Research, European Journal of Marketing, Journal of Marketing Management* and *Marketing Theory*. She has been on the conference programme committees for US and European meetings of the Association for Consumer Research (ACR).

Professor Hogg has taught extensively on consumer behaviour and research methods at undergraduate and postgraduate level and supervised and examined a wide range of PhD students.

**Gary J. Bamossy, PhD**, is Clinical Professor of Marketing at the McDonough School of Business, Georgetown University, in Washington DC. From 1985 to 1999 he was on the Faculty of Business and Economics at the Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, as *Hoogleraar, Marktkunde* (Professor of Marketing), and Director of Business Research for the VU’s participation at the Tinbergen Research Institute. Prior to his appointment at Georgetown, he was Director of the Global Business Program and a member of the marketing faculty at the University of Utah (1999–2005).

Professor Bamossy’s primary research interests are on the global diffusion of material culture, sustainable consumption, and trademark infringement. He has published numerous articles on these and related topics in academic journals and as chapters in research books. He has given invited lectures on materialism and sustainable consumption issues at universities, companies and government agencies in North America, Europe and Asia, and his work has been funded by the Dutch Science Foundation (KNAW), the Marketing Science Institute, the Davidson Institute (University of Michigan) and the Anglo-Dutch Scholar Forum. For the past several years, Dr Bamossy has served as an Invited Member by The Bank of Sweden, to nominate a candidate for the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences.
Authors’ acknowledgements

Søren Askegaard would like to thank Cristiano Smaniotto and Christian Dam for their excellent support in finding new material for a variety of chapters. He would also like to thank Caroline for her patience.

Margaret Hogg would like to say a very sincere ‘thank you’ to her family, Daniel, Robert, Julietta, Becca, Zoe and Elijah and to her late husband, Richard, for their generous, unstinting and loving support since she started this project.

Gary Bamossy would like to thank Anne Marie Parlevliet in Amsterdam for her excellent desk research on developments in the Netherlands and the EU, and Jerome West, for source work and critical discussions on the EU. Both of you have made my revision efforts enjoyable. A special thanks to Janeen, Joost, Lieke and Jason – whose world views and consumption practices continue to amaze, amuse, inspire and enlighten me.

Sandra Awanis thanks Professor Diana Haytko and Dr Charles Cui for their help in constructing the title and refining the ideas behind Case study A.1.
Publisher’s acknowledgements

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Part A
Consumers in the marketplace

This introductory part comprises two chapters. The first chapter gives an overview of the field of consumer behaviour. It examines how the field of marketing is influenced by the actions of consumers, and also how we as consumers are influenced by marketers. It also surveys consumer behaviour as a discipline of enquiry, and describes some of the different approaches that researchers use in order better to understand what makes consumers behave as they do. Next, it addresses contemporary consumer culture and, more particularly, its globalisation tendencies. The second chapter offers a broad overview of the consumer in the marketplace, through its investigation of the modern ritual of the shopping process. It also looks at various contemporary retail environments and the roles they play in consumers’ social lives.
Chapter 1
Consumer behaviour and consumer society

Chapter objectives
When you finish reading this chapter you will understand why:

1.1 We use products to help us define our identities in different settings.
1.2 Consumer behaviour is a process involving many actors.
1.3 Many different types of specialists study consumer behaviour.
1.4 There are basically two differing perspectives (called paradigms) regarding how and what we should understand about consumer behaviour.
1.5 The society we live in today can be described as a consumer society.
1.6 Globalisation is important when trying to understand the consumer society.
1.7 Consumption is not just a private but also a political issue. The ethics of consumption is becoming more and more significant.
1.8 We are witnessing the appearance of new forms of collective consumption formats.

LIANE is working at her computer. It is early autumn and the beginning of a new term at her Higher Professional Nursing School in Amsterdam. Time for getting new books and study materials. As a full-time student in her final year of a full-time practical internship with exams, she is not surprised to find that several of the required books are unavailable at the campus bookshop.

She goes online to check if she can get her books from one of the internet bookshops. She uses her favorite portal www.athenaeum.nl/studieboeken, which she thinks might be able to deliver the books faster than its international competitors, but Athenaeum doesn’t
have all of the books in stock that she needs, and she really feels that she should get all them from the same store. On an impulse, Liane visits a website that sells used books and provides search facilities for a number of online booksellers. She searches for a couple of the titles she needs, but the search function on this site does not seem to be working properly. For a moment, she considers putting some of her used books up for sale on this site, then decides not to let herself be distracted and moves on to the UK version of Amazon. She has heard from friends that prices are a little steeper here (relative to the other internet bookshops), but she knows this site well by now. Besides, the books she wants are in stock and can be delivered in about a week, maybe less. Considering that the chances of the books she needs appearing in the campus bookshop on time seem pretty slim, Liane decides to go ahead and buy them online.

While filling out the Amazon order form, she thinks about what else she needs to get done. She and her friend are looking for an interesting topic for a course project and she wants to look at ideas for a relevant European project, so she clicks on CESSDA’s website (https://www.cessda.eu/) for some inspiration. Also, she wants to visit a few of her favourite sites for news, music and travel. ‘A little information update before meeting my friends this afternoon for coffee’, she thinks to herself. She clicks back to the Amazon tab in her browser, hits ‘OK’ on her textbook order confirmation and is glad to have that out of the way. She navigates her way back to the CESSDA website and starts her search. All the while that she’s getting the textbooks ordered, she is also thinking to herself that she should take a look at her personal performance data, which is logged on her activity tracker, Polar Loop. She finished a great workout and run at the gym the day before . . . now might be a good time to post the results of that impressive effort on her Facebook page! Suddenly Liane remembers that there were a couple of study plans to print out from the university website – and a few emails to answer. She checks her email account and is a little surprised to see that she has received so much mail today – it seems like everybody has just realised that summer is over and wants to get started on new projects. It makes her feel joyful, even invigorated . . .

DIANA STORM, UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN DENMARK

Introduction

This text is about consumer behaviour, written from a European perspective. But what does that mean exactly? Obviously, to write about a ‘European’ consumer or a ‘European’s consumer behaviour’ is problematic. For that matter, one might even ask ‘What and where is Europe’? For it is a concept as well as a continent, and the borders of both oscillate wildly. The most common present-day usage of the term ‘Europe’ seems to be shorthand for (and synonymous with) the European Union. The external borders of this supranational project are movable, having consistently shifted outward until Brexit made it evident that the project can also shrink. And a number of obviously ‘European’ countries have never been members.

Some of the general theory about the psychological or sociological influences on consumer behaviour may be common to all Western cultures. However, some theories may be culturally specific. Certain groups of consumers do show similar kinds of behaviour across national borders, and research on consumers in Europe suggests that we even use our understanding of the consumption environment to make sense of the foreign cultures we are visiting. So, the ways in which people live their consumption life vary greatly from one European country to another, and sometimes even within different regions of the same country. As a student of consumer behaviour, you might also want to ask yourself: ‘In which consumption situations do I seem to have a great deal in common with fellow students from other European countries? And in what ways do I seem to more closely resemble my compatriots? In what ways do
subcultures in my country exert a strong influence on my consumption patterns, and how international are these subcultures? 

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

Consumer behaviour: people in the marketplace

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

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

• As a consumer, Liane can be described and compared to other individuals in a number of ways. For some purposes, marketers might find it useful to categorise Liane in terms of her age, gender, income or occupation. These are some examples of descriptive characteristics of a population, or demographics. In other cases, marketers would rather know something about Liane’s interests in fashion, sports, fitness, music, or the way she spends her leisure time. This sort of information often comes under the category of psychographics, which refers to aspects of a person’s lifestyle and personality. Knowledge of consumer characteristics plays an extremely important role in many marketing applications, such as defining the market for a product or deciding on the appropriate techniques to employ when targeting a certain group of consumers.

• Liane’s purchase (and boycotting) decisions are heavily influenced by the opinions and behaviours of her friends. A lot of product information, as well as recommendations to use or avoid particular brands, is picked up in conversations among real people, rather than by way of television commercials, magazines or advertising messages. The bonds among Liane’s group of friends are in part cemented by the products they all use, or specifically avoid. The growth of the Web has created thousands of online consumption communities, where members share opinions and recommendations about anything from healthy foods to iPhone apps. Liane forms bonds with fellow group members because they use the same products. There is also pressure on each group member to buy things that will meet with the group’s approval, and often a price to pay in the form of group rejection or embarrassment when one does not conform to others’ conceptions of what is good or bad, ‘in’ or ‘out’.2

• As a member of a large society, people share certain cultural values or strongly held beliefs about the way the world should function. Other values are shared by members of subcultures, or smaller groups within the culture, such as ethnic groups, teens, people from certain parts of the country, even hipsters who listen to Arcade Fire, wear Band of Outsiders clothing and eat vegan tacos. The people who matter to Liane – her reference group – value the idea that women should be innovative, style-conscious, independent and up-front. While many marketers focus on either very young targets or the thirty-somethings, some are recognising that rapidly growing segment of older (50+) people.

• When browsing through the websites, Liane was exposed to many competing ‘brands’. Many offerings did not grab her attention at all; others were noticed but rejected because
they did not fit the ‘image’ with which she identified or to which she aspired. The use of market segmentation strategies means targeting a brand to specific groups of consumers rather than to everybody – even if that means that other consumers will not be interested or may choose to avoid that brand.

- Brands often have clearly defined images or ‘personalities’ created by product advertising, packaging, branding and other marketing strategies that focus on positioning a product a certain way, or by certain groups of consumers adopting the product. Leisure activities, in particular, are very much lifestyle statements: they say a lot about what a person is interested in, as well as something about the type of person they would like to be. People often choose a product offering, a service or a place, or subscribe to a particular idea, because they like its image, or because they feel its ‘personality’ somehow corresponds to their own. Moreover, a consumer may believe that by buying and using the product, its desirable qualities will somehow magically ‘rub off’.

- When a product succeeds in satisfying a consumer’s specific needs or desires, a Amazon did for Liane, it may be rewarded with many years of brand or store loyalty – a bond between product or outlet and consumer that may be very difficult for competitors to break. Often a change in one’s life situation or self-concept is required to weaken this bond and thus create opportunities for competitors.

- Consumers’ evaluations of products are affected by their appearance, taste, texture or smell. We may be influenced by the shape and colour of a package, as well as by more subtle factors such as the symbolism used in a brand name, in an advertisement, or even in the choice of a cover model for a magazine. These judgements are affected by – and often reflect – how a society feels that people should define themselves at that point in time. Liane’s choice of a new hairstyle, for example, says something about the type of image women like her want to project. If asked, Liane might not be able to say exactly why she considered some websites and rejected others. Many product meanings are hidden below the surface of the packaging, the design and advertising, and this book will discuss some of the methods used by marketers and social scientists to discover or apply these meanings.

- Amazon.co.uk has a combined American and international image that appeals to Liane. A product’s image is often influenced by its country of origin, which helps to determine its ‘brand personality’. In addition, our opinions and desires are increasingly shaped by input from around the world, thanks to rapid advancements in communications and transportation systems (witness the internet!). In today’s global culture, consumers often prize products and services that ‘transport’ them to different locations and allow them to experience the diversity of other cultures. While the global/European recession had an impact on many consumer behaviours, young/single European consumers seem to be making use of the internet for another form of ‘shopping’ – with online dating websites reporting revenues of over half a billion euros! In the UK, the Office for National Statistics has added online dating as a category in its basket for measuring goods and services as a cost of living. As the financial analyst for online dating puts it: ‘People don’t cut back on hooking up, but meeting people online is cheaper – you get to sift through potential suitors’.

The field of consumer behaviour covers a lot of ground: it is the study of the processes involved when individuals or groups select, purchase, use or dispose of products, services, ideas or experiences to satisfy needs and desires. Consumers take many forms, ranging from a six-year-old child pleading with her mother for wine gums to an executive in a large corporation deciding on an extremely expensive computer system. The items that are consumed can include anything from tinned beans to a massage, democracy, reggae music and even other people (the images of rock stars, for example). Needs and desires to be satisfied range from hunger and thirst to love, status or spiritual fulfilment. There is a growing
Consumer behaviour and consumer society

interest in consumer behaviour, not only in the field of marketing but from the social sciences
in general. This follows a growing awareness of the increasing importance of consumption in
our daily lives, in our organisation of daily activities, in our identity formation, in politics and
economic development and in the flows of global culture, where consumer culture seems to
spread, albeit in new forms, from North America and Europe to other parts of the world. This
spread of consumer culture via marketing is not always well-received by social critics and
consumers (as we shall see in subsequent chapters). Indeed, consumption can be regarded as
playing such an important role in our social, psychological, economic, political and cultural
lives that today it has become (for better and for worse) the ‘vanguard of history’.

Consumers are actors on the marketplace stage

Consumer identities are not forged mainly from within ourselves. The perspective of role
theory, which this text emphasises, takes the view that much of consumer behaviour
resembles actions in a play, where each consumer has lines, props and costumes that are
necessary for a good performance. Since people act out many different roles, they may modify
their consumption decisions according to the particular ‘play’ they are in at the time. The
criteria that they use to evaluate products and services in one of their roles may be quite
different from those used in another role.

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

Consumer behaviour is a process

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

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

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

Finally, consumers may be organisations or groups in which one person may make the decisions involved in purchasing products that will be used by many, as when a purchasing agent orders the company’s office supplies. In other organisational situations, purchase decisions may be made by a large group of people – for example, company accountants, designers, engineers, sales personnel and others – all of whom will have a say in the various stages of the consumption process. One important organisation is the family, where different family members play pivotal roles in decision-making regarding products and services used by all (see Chapter 10).

Consumer research and marketing strategy

Why should managers, advertisers and other marketing professionals bother to learn about consumer behaviour? Very simply, understanding consumer behaviour is good business. The basic marketing concept states that firms exist to satisfy needs. Marketers can only satisfy
these needs to the extent that they understand the people or organisations who will use the 
products and services they are trying to sell. Voilà! That’s why we study consumer behaviour.

Consumer response is the ultimate test of whether a marketing strategy will succeed. Thus, 
a marketer should incorporate knowledge about consumers into every facet of a successful 
marketing plan. Data about consumers help organisations to define the market and identify 
threats to and opportunities for a brand. And, in the wild and wacky world of marketing, 
nothing is forever: this knowledge also helps to ensure that the product continues to appeal to 
its core market. However, as we have already indicated, from a critical perspective not all is 
necessarily well in the ‘land of happy consumers’. It is obvious, not least from the recent 
scandals concerning abuse of social media-based data, that knowledge about consumers can 
be used for the benefit of the organisations rather than for consumers. Although many 
marketing people would like to consider the marketplace a ‘free site’, where only exchanges 
are made that are considered free choices and beneficial for both parties, this is obviously a 
very naïve way of thinking. There is, therefore, a debate among people studying consumer 
behaviour as to whether these studies only have a purpose to serve the aforementioned 
strategic goals of commercial organisations (which tends to be the classical point of view), or a 
more critical and somewhat nuanced perspective that considers consumers as biologists 
consider fish, and not as fishermen consider fish! Indeed, as it has been underlined, even 
considering people as ‘consumers’ is already situating them in a market-society context where 
the impression might be given that being consumers is our primary mode of being. These 
critical reflections serve to remind us that, as with all knowledge, the knowledge of consumer 
behaviour can be used for good and bad, benevolent and dubious purposes.

Market segmentation: to whom are we marketing?

Whether within or across national boundaries, effective market segmentation delineates 
segments whose members are similar to one another in one or more characteristics and 
different from members of other segments. Depending on its goals and resources, a company 
may choose to focus on just one segment or several, or it may ignore differences among 
segments by pursuing a mass-market strategy. In many cases, it makes a lot of sense to target 
a number of market segments. The likelihood is that no one will fit any given segment 
description exactly, and the issue is whether or not consumers differ from the profile in ways 
that will affect the chances of their adopting the products being offered.

Many segmentation variables form the basis for slicing up a larger market, and a great deal 
of this text is devoted to exploring the ways marketers describe and characterise different 
segments. The segmentation variables listed in Table 1.1 are grouped into four categories, 
which also indicate where in the text these categories are considered in more depth. 
Demographics are statistics that measure observable aspects of a population, such as birth 
rate, age distribution or income. The national statistical agencies of European countries and 
pan-European agencies such as Eurostat are major sources of demographic data on families, 
but many private firms gather additional data on specific population groups. The changes and 
trends revealed in demographic studies are of great interest to marketers, because the data 
can be used to locate and predict the size of markets for many products, ranging from 
mortgages to baby food to health care for senior consumers. However, a word of caution is 
needed here: the last couple of decades have witnessed the growth of new consumer 
segments that are less dependent on demographics and more likely to borrow behavioural 
patterns and fashions across what were formerly more significant borders or barriers. It is now 
not so uncommon to see men and women, or grandparents and granddaughters, having 
similar tastes. Hence, useful as demographic variables might be, marketers should beware of 
using them as the sole predictors of consumer tastes. We’ll also consider other important 
characteristics that are not so easy to measure, which are both psychological and sociological 
in character, as indicated in Table 1.1.
Although people have been consumers for a very long time, it is only recently that consumption per se has been the focus of formal study. In fact, while many business schools now require that marketing students take a consumer behaviour course, most universities and business schools did not even offer such a course until the 1970s. Much of the impetus for the attention now being given to consumer behaviour was the realisation by many business people that the consumer really is the boss.

### Interdisciplinary influences on the study of consumer behaviour

Where do we find consumer researchers? Just about anywhere we find consumers. Consumer researchers work for manufacturers, retailers, marketing research firms, governments and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Location of discussion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demographics</td>
<td>Age, Gender, Social class, occupation, income, Ethnic group, religion, Stage in life, Purchaser vs user</td>
<td>Chapter 10, 4, 11, 12, 13, 10, 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geographic</td>
<td>Region, Country differences</td>
<td>Chapters 12, 13, All chapters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychographic</td>
<td>Self-concept, personality, Lifestyle</td>
<td>Chapter 4, Chapters 5, 12, 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioural</td>
<td>Brand loyalty, extent of usage, Usage situation, Benefits desired</td>
<td>Chapter 7, 8, 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Marketing opportunity

**New segments**

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

**LGBT communities** are targeted by many organisations these days. The city of Brussels, for example, has made a point of targeting this segment with a campaign focusing on the many events – cultural, musical, sporting and others – that allegedly make Brussels the ‘capital’ of LGBT tourism.13 If Brussels does not seem tempting for the next ‘gaycation’, there are also various sea cruises specifically targeted to this segment, as well as many other commercial resources available.14

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**Table 1.1 Variables for market segmentation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Location of discussion</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Age, Gender, Social class, occupation, income, Ethnic group, religion, Stage in life, Purchaser vs user</td>
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<td>Behavioural</td>
<td>Brand loyalty, extent of usage, Usage situation, Benefits desired</td>
<td>Chapter 7, 8, 5</td>
</tr>
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</table>
non-profit organisations, and, of course, colleges and universities. Professional groups, such as the Association for Consumer Research, have been formed since the mid-1970s, and European academics and practitioners are major contributors to the growing literature on consumer behaviour.

You’ll find researchers doing sophisticated experiments in laboratories that involve advanced neural imaging machinery, or simply interviewing shoppers in malls. They may conduct focus groups or run large-scale polling operations. And researchers work on many types of topic, from everyday household products and high-tech installations to professional services, museum exhibits and public policy issues such as the effect of advertising on children. Indeed, no consumer issue is too sacred: some intrepid investigators bravely explore ‘delicate’ categories such as incontinence products and birth-control devices. The marketing director for Trojan condoms notes that, ‘Unlike laundry, where you can actually sit and watch people do their laundry, we can’t sit and watch them use our product’. For this reason, Trojan relies on clinical psychologists, psychiatrists and cultural anthropologists to understand how men relate to condoms.15

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

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

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**Figure 1.2** The pyramid of consumer behaviour
The issue of strategic focus

Many people regard the field of consumer behaviour as an applied social science. Accordingly, the value of the knowledge generated has traditionally been measured in terms of its ability to improve the effectiveness of marketing practice. Recently, though, some researchers have argued that consumer behaviour should not have a strategic focus at all; the field should not be a ‘handmaiden to business’. It should instead focus on understanding consumption for its own sake, rather than because the knowledge can be applied by marketers. This view is probably not held by most consumer researchers, but it has encouraged many to expand the scope of their work beyond the field’s traditional focus on the purchase of consumer goods. And it has certainly led to some fierce debates among people working in the field! In fact, it can also be argued that business gets better research from non-strategic research projects because they are unbiased by strategic goals. Take a relatively simple and common consumer object, such as a women’s magazine, found in every culture in a variety of versions. How much is there to say about the ‘simple’ act of buying such a magazine? Well, quite a lot. Table 1.2 lists some potential issues relevant for the marketing of or advertising in women’s magazines, which can be researched based on the variety of disciplines influencing consumer research.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disciplinary focus</th>
<th>Magazine usage sample research issues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Experimental Psychology:</strong> product role in perception, learning and memory processes</td>
<td>How specific aspects of magazines, such as their design or layout, are recognised and interpreted; which parts of a magazine are most likely to be read</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Clinical Psychology:</strong> product role in psychological adjustment</td>
<td>How magazines affect readers’ body images (e.g. do thin models make the average woman feel overweight?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Microeconomics/Human Ecology:</strong> product role in allocation of individual or family resources</td>
<td>Factors influencing the amount of money spent on magazines in a household</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social Psychology:</strong> product role in the behaviours of individuals as members of social groups</td>
<td>Ways that ads in a magazine affect readers’ attitudes towards the products depicted; how peer pressure influences a person’s readership decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sociology:</strong> product role in social institutions and groups through a social group relationship</td>
<td>Pattern by which magazine preferences spread and role of magazines in the shaping of social behavior and social roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Macroeconomics:</strong> product role in consumers’ relations with the marketplace</td>
<td>Effects of the price of fashion magazines and expense of items advertised during periods of high unemployment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Semiotics/Literary Criticism:</strong> product role in the verbal and visual communication of meaning</td>
<td>Ways in which underlying messages communicated by models and ads in a magazine are interpreted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Demography:</strong> product role in the measurable characteristics of a population</td>
<td>Effects of age, income and marital status of a magazine’s readers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>History:</strong> product role in societal changes over time</td>
<td>Ways in which our culture’s depictions of ‘femininity’ in magazines have changed over time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cultural Anthropology:</strong> product role in a society’s beliefs and practices</td>
<td>Ways in which fashions and models in a magazine affect readers’ definitions of masculine vs feminine behaviour (e.g. the role of working women, sexual taboos)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This more critical view of consumer research has led to the recognition that not all consumer behaviour and/or marketing activity is necessarily beneficial to individuals or to society. As a result, current consumer research is likely to include attention to the ‘dark side’ of consumer behaviour, such as addiction, prostitution, homelessness, shoplifting or environmental waste. This activity builds upon the earlier work of researchers who, as we have seen, have studied consumer issues related to public policy, ethics and consumerism.

### The issue of two perspectives on consumer research

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

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

The newer paradigm of **interpretivism** questions these assumptions. Proponents of this perspective argue that our society places too much emphasis on science and technology, and that this ordered, rational view of consumers denies the complexity of the social and cultural world in which we live. Interpretivists stress the importance of symbolic, subjective experience, and the idea that meaning is in the mind – that is, we each construct our own meanings based on our unique and shared cultural experiences, so that there are no single right or wrong references. To the value we place on products, because they help us to create order in our lives, is added an appreciation of consumption as a set of diverse experiences. The major differences between these two perspectives are summarised in Table 1.3.

In addition to the cross-cultural differences in consumer behaviour discussed earlier, it is also clear that research styles differ significantly between Europe and North America and also

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

Consumer culture

within European countries. For example, studies have shown that European researchers tend to consider the cultural dimension far more than their American counterparts. A recent and more ‘bridging’ perspective on approaches to the study of consumer research argues that the study of particular consumption contexts are not an end in themselves, but rather that studying human behaviour in a consumption context is useful for generating new constructs and theoretical insights. This approach, known as consumer culture theory (CCT), embraces a variety of methodological approaches and recognises that managers can make use of multiple methods to better understand trends in the marketplace, such as the complexities of lifestyle, multicultural marketing and how consumers use media as part of their lives.

Consumer research is still moving on. From its original emphasis on buying behaviour and the factors influencing the decision-making process, the field gradually widened to become a study of consumer behaviour in a more general sense, also taking into consideration what happened before and after the purchase. After the introduction of the interpretivist approach, a broader research perspective has included many new and non-psychological facets in the increasingly complex portraits of consumers. And it can be argued that the field increasingly looks beyond the single individual and their social background and environment to describe and analyse the complex relationships that have led us to start characterising our present society as a consumer society. The facts of living in a consumer society and being surrounded by consumer culture permeate this text, but will be dealt with in more detail in Chapters 2, 12 and 13.

Consumer culture

In contemporary modern society, it is hard to think of many kinds of social behaviour that do not involve consumption in one form or another. Consumption activities provide both meaning and structure to the way we live. A lot of our everyday imaginations are informed by consumer culture – our imaginations about health, perfect family life or the dream wedding take shape using consumer culture as negative or positive frames of reference.

Many people use the notion of the consumer society in order to describe the current type of social organisation in the economically developed world. This is not only because we live in a world full of things, which we obviously do, but also because the most decisive step in the construction of consumer society is the new role of consumption activities. We used to define ourselves primarily through our role in the production process, i.e. our work. Increasingly, however, how we consume is more decisive for our personal and social identities than what we do for a living. The plethora of goods and their varieties in range and styles allows consumption choices to become clear (or sometimes purposefully ambiguous) statements about our personalities, values, aspirations, sympathies and antipathies, and our way of handling social relations. Furthermore, in times of economic crisis, consumers are time and again called upon to play their crucial part in keeping the economies running. The standard economic logic is that if consumers stop buying, producers will have to stop producing. It is in many ways as simple as that – and is one of the big challenges for a sustainable society. Consumption is, therefore, a matter to be taken seriously – on a personal, social and economic level.

Modern consumer society is thus characterised by consumption-based identities, but related features of a consumer society include many of the other topics discussed in this book: shopping as a leisure activity combined with the variety of shopping possibilities, including shopping centres (the new ‘temples of consumption’); easier access to credit; the growing attention to brand images and the communicative aspects of product and packaging, as well as the pervasiveness of promotion; the increasing political organisation of consumers in groups with a variety of purposes; and the sheer impossibility of trying not to be a consumer and still participating in ordinary social life. ‘Things’ do matter.
Popular culture

When it is said that contemporary culture is a consumer culture, we do not just refer to the central role of consumption in all of our daily activities.24 We also underline the basic relationship between market forces, consumption processes and the basic characteristics of what we normally understand by ‘a culture’. As we shall see, whether we talk about high culture (such as the fine arts, etc.) or popular culture, our contemporary culture is basically something ‘to be consumed’. Whether we talk about our ways of travelling around, our styles of dress, our music, our cultural and sports events, tourism, fashion, or the care for our physical and mental selves, our ways of socialising are all deeply commercialised consumer markets.25 We consume ‘spaces’ and ‘places’, both in our cities when we are enjoying their commercial and/or cultural areas and offerings, and when away on holiday. We are constantly consuming different styles and fashions, not only in clothing but also in food, home appliances, garden and interior design, music and so on. Marketing sometimes seems to exert a self-fulfilling prophecy on popular culture: as commercial influences on popular culture increase, marketer-created symbols make their way into our daily lives to a greater degree. Historical analyses of plays, best-selling novels and the lyrics of hit songs, for example, clearly show large increases over time in the use of brand names.26

Popular culture – the music, films, sports, books and other forms of entertainment consumed by the mass market – is both a product of and an inspiration for marketers. Our lives are also affected in more fundamental ways, ranging from how we acknowledge social events such as marriages, deaths or holidays to how we view societal issues such as global warming, gambling and addiction. The FIFA World Cup, Christmas shopping, tourism, newspaper recycling, cigarette smoking and Barbie dolls are all examples of products and activities that touch many of us in our lives. Marketing’s role in the creation and communication of popular culture is especially emphasised in this text. Its cultural influence is hard to ignore, although many people fail to appreciate the extent to which their view of the world is influenced by the marketing system.

Consider the product characters that marketers use to create a personality for their products and brands. To speak of a brand personality is an example of the degree of anthropomorphism in marketing. From the Michelin Man to Ronald McDonald, popular culture is peopled with fictional heroes. A recent issue of an academic journal is consecrated to the study of such anthropomorphic figures and their impact on consumers and marketing.27 In fact, it is likely that more consumers will recognise characters such as these than can identify former (or present!) prime ministers, captains of industry or artists. These characters may not exist, but many of us feel that we ‘know’ them, and they certainly are effective spokes-characters for the products and brands they promote.

Global consumer culture

Consumer culture is becoming increasingly globalised, and brands have become signs of a global ideology of cultural (and commercial) value and power.28 In fact, the tempting imagery of contemporary consumer culture and marketing, the prime vehicles that bring this imagery about, may be considered some of the most important drivers of globalisation. The process of globalisation has attracted a tremendous amount of interest in the last couple of decades. But learning about the relationship between the global and the local in the practices of other cultures is more than just interesting – it is an essential task for any vww company that wishes to expand its horizons and become part of the international or global marketplace in the new millennium.

Global consumer culture represents an etic perspective, which focuses on commonalities across cultures. An etic approach assumes that there are common, general categories and measurements, which are valid for all cultures under consideration. One such etic study identified four major clusters of consumer styles when it looked at data from the US, the UK,
France and Germany: *price-sensitive consumers, variety seekers, brand-loyal consumers* and *information seekers.* On the other hand, many marketers choose to study and analyse a culture using an emic perspective, which attempts to explain a culture based on the cultural categories and experiences of the insiders. We will take a closer look at this perspective in the discussion of ethnoconsumerism (see Chapter 13), but for now it will be sufficient to remember that, in spite of the fact that technology, media and cultural exchange processes are bringing us closer to each other in many ways, cultural differences continue to prevail. For example, cultures vary sharply in the degree to which references to sex and nudity (and other controversial issues) are permitted. One study analysed responses to advertising for ‘controversial products’, including potentially offensive ads related to sexual behaviour such as ads for condoms, female contraceptives, underwear and (prevention of) sexually transmitted diseases. It was found that results for what was deemed controversial differed highly between the UK and New Zealand on the one hand, and Turkey and Malaysia on the other. While negative reactions to sexual references differed, racist imagery was ranked among the most offensive in all samples. Good that we can agree on something like that!

**A global consumer?**

It is often asserted that global marketing works well with affluent people who are ‘global citizens’ and who are exposed to ideas from around the world through their travels, business contacts and media experiences, and as a result share common tastes. One sector that comes across as inherently ‘global’ is the market for luxury goods, with its highly standardised and aesthetised marketing campaigns and its cosmopolitan target market. Still, one study distinguished between a European type of luxury brands, based more on history, rarity and craftsmanship and an American type of luxury brands based on storytelling, marketing imagery and marketing finesse. The differing business cultures, we can assume, also cover differences in the cultural meaning of luxury products across the Atlantic Ocean. Furthermore, differences in the perception and valorisation of the concept of ‘performance’ (an important notion in many contemporary marketing campaigns) has led to different responses to the same advertisement in countries such as the US, Germany, France, Spain and Thailand.

Another ‘global segment’ that is often referred to is young people, whose tastes in music and fashion are strongly influenced by international pop culture broadcasting many of the same images and sounds to multiple countries. On the other hand, one study of the global youth culture concluded that although similar existential conditions were found, including the search for an identity and the feeling of being a member of a global youth consumer culture, the way these similar existential conditions are lived out in reality varies a lot from context to context.

**Coca-colonisation: exporting Western lifestyles**

The West (and especially the US) is a *net exporter* of popular culture. Western symbols in the form of images, words and products have diffused throughout the world. This influence is eagerly sought by many consumers, who have learned to equate Western lifestyles in general (and the English language in particular) with modernisation and sophistication. As a result, people around the world are being exposed to a blizzard of Western products that are attempting to become part of local lifestyles.

The allure of Western consumer culture has spread as people in other societies slowly but surely fall under the spell of the global presence of consumer brands and practices, of far-reaching advertising campaigns, contact with tourists and the desire to form attachments with other parts of the world. Not least, the internet is becoming a global source of information about consumer culture, and facilitates a virtual intercultural learning process. In the process, however, the meanings of consumer objects and practices are transformed and adapted to local tastes. As one project demonstrates, the local youth culture in Iran is not just emulating
Chapter 1 Consumer behaviour and consumer society

the Western models of a consumer culture, but is reflexively constructing its own local version of a modern consumer culture through its confrontation with similarities and differences in visible lifestyles (‘what people have’). This observation leads to an interpretation of what the ‘other culture’ may be like and a reflexive response to these interpretations in terms of finding out how oneself (and one’s own culture) is different from and similar to the foreign culture, and finally a reflection on how one would like to respond to this difference in terms of individual and cultural change (see Figure 1.3).36

Consequently, the West is no longer the sole model for expanding consumer cultures. In the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), but also in MINT countries (Mexico, Indonesia, Nigeria and Turkey)37 and other places (Korea, Malaysia ...), enormous new middle classes are producing consumer societies that, to some degree, not only emulate what is known from the West but also establish their own particular variant of consumer culture. One of the most evident contemporary showcases for studying the impact of a rapid introduction of consumer culture is in China. In the 1970s, the Chinese strove to attain what they called the ‘three bigs’: bikes, sewing machines and wristwatches. This wish list was later modified to become the ‘new big six’, adding refrigerators, washing machines and televisions. The list was then expanded with colour televisions, cameras and video recorders.38 Today, in spite of huge urban–rural variations, Chinese middle classes constitute a power consumer market – ‘a new generation of brand-conscious individualists’.39

The lure of Western consumption styles and the brands that carry these messages have been some of the most effective tools in spreading Western-style consumer culture across the globe. But these tools are now used in order to maintain a particular cultural identity. Branding strategies are used by increasingly strong Asian managers in order to construct a universe of ‘Asianness’ that can be used to maintain local brand value in the booming Asian markets. The Asia portrayed in these campaigns is not the traditional one of peasants working in rice fields but a modern, booming and bustling, self-confident, transnational (not a priori tied to a specific country) Asian world.

Figure 1.3 The ongoing reflexive process of intercultural learning

The result is a branding style that reinforces pride and self-confidence in the Asian region. Consequently, there is a growth in Chinese luxury brands. Do names such as Chow Tai Fook, Lao Feng Xiang or Chow Sang Sang ring a bell? Well, in China they do – these are all prominent luxury jewellery brands in China, that recently broke the top 25 in a global ranking of luxury brands. Move over, France, Italy, Switzerland... the Chinese are coming.

Advertisement for Chow Tai Fook, indicating the existence of a vibrant Chinese luxury brand scene. The ad combines signs of Chinese culture with classical Western signs of a luxury brand. Bloomberg/Getty Images

Multicultural dimensions

Until 1989, there was an imposed public dress code in the Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan. This dress code has relaxed somewhat since then, and while the traditional clothing of Bhutanese people is still dominant, there is an emerging ‘Bhutanese streetwear’ scene blending the traditional with the modern. Blogs on Bhutanese streetwear have existed since 2010. Even the fashion company Balenciaga has taken inspiration from the traditional Bhutanese clothing and used it in its designs.
Emerging consumer cultures in transitional economies

After the collapse of communism, Eastern Europeans emerged from a long winter of deprivation of consumer goods into a springtime of abundance. The picture is not all rosy, however, since attaining consumer goods is not easy for many in transitional economies, where the economic system is still ‘neither fish nor fowl’, and governments ranging from Vietnam to Romania struggle with the difficult adaptation from a controlled, centralised economy to a free market system. These problems stem from such factors as the unequal distribution of income among citizens, as well as striking rural–urban differences in expectations and values, as is the case in, for example, Turkey, which we already established as a market of rapid growth. One study investigated how poor villagers migrating to a larger Turkish city coped with becoming acculturated to consumer society. The study basically concluded that these consumers-to-be would select one of three coping strategies. They would either shut out the whole modern consumer lifestyle altogether, trying to perpetuate village life in the poor shantytown outside the city, or collectively embrace the dreams proposed by consumer society by adopting ritualised consumption practices to the best of their humble means. A final strategy consists of giving up on both projects, which leads to shattered identities for the consumers involved, being able neither to maintain the traditional identity nor to adopt a consumer identity. Such a transitional process can have heartbreaking consequences. In Turkey, one researcher met a rural consumer – a mother who deprived her child of nutritious milk from the family’s cow and instead sold it in order to be able to buy sweets for her child because ‘what is good for city kids is also good for my child’.

Some of the consequences of the transition to a market economy thus include a loss of confidence and pride in the local culture, as well as alienation, frustration and an increase in stress as leisure time is sacrificed to work ever harder to buy consumer goods. The yearning for the trappings of Western material culture is perhaps most evident in parts of Eastern Europe, where citizens who threw off the shackles of communism now have direct access to coveted consumer goods from the US and Europe – if they can afford them. One analyst observed, ‘. . . as former subjects of the Soviet empire dream it, the American dream has very little to do with liberty and justice for all and a great deal to do with soap operas and the Sears Catalogue’. A recent huge analysis of the acceptance of brands and advertisements in social media among 57,000 consumers in 60 countries demonstrated a profound difference: whereas 57 per cent of consumers in the Western countries dislike commercial content in social media, this figure is much lower in emerging market economies such as China, India, Mexico or Vietnam.
Glocalisation

Based on these discussions, we are now able to reflect a little more on the character of the globalisation process. The conclusion we can safely draw is that globalisation is always inevitably a glocalisation, since all global phenomena exist and become meaningful in a local context. Even completely similar McDonald’s restaurants, just to take one obvious example, have different meanings and play different roles for consumers when placed in Chicago, Bordeaux, Moscow or Middlesbrough. Yoga is popular in many parts of the world, now also in India! Yes, you read correctly. Not least due to its popularity in the West and modernised lifestyles including stressful work lives and fitness values, Indians are rediscovering the virtues of yoga. Given the popularity of yoga in the West in the last century, today it is indeed difficult to say whether yoga is more Indian or more Western. In France, renowned for its sophisticated food culture, one of the regular top three national dishes in terms of popularity is couscous, a dish migrated to France from North Africa, but today immensely popular throughout the French population. Likewise, an introspective account of a Thai consumer researcher’s experience of a paradoxical glocal consumer identity, reflecting both differences within the Thai culture’s upper and lower classes as well as her experiences of being an expatriate during her studies in the UK, witness the extent to which many of us (maybe, in particular, migrants) are today glocalised.

Globalisation may even engender an increased focus on the local. An anthropological study of developments in the British food culture revealed four different types of food consumption that are all consequences of globalisation. The first is the global food culture, represented mainly by the ubiquitous fast food of burgers and pizzas and convenience products such as instant coffee that are found everywhere and belong nowhere in particular. Secondly, expatriate food refers to the search for authentic meals and products from other cultures – ‘Indian’, ‘Mexican’, ‘Thai’, etc. Thirdly, nostalgia food represents a search for local authenticity – in Britain, for example, Stilton cheese and sticky toffee puddings – from the local cultural heritage that is under pressure from globalisation. Finally, creolisation of food involves blending various traditions into new ones, such as Chinese dishes omitting ingredients considered unappetising in Western culture, spiced-down Indonesian food in the Netherlands, or Indianised versions of sandwiches. Similar processes are found in all European cultures.

It is interesting to note that all four are related to globalisation trends, but only global food leads to a tendency to standardise consumption patterns. We may consider these tendencies as relevant for all types of consumption, not just for consumption of food. So, whether we look at retailing, interior decoration, tourism or musical tastes, we may find at least these four tendencies, taking the notion of globalisation beyond the interpretation of it as homogenisation. Glocalisation also includes the increasing awareness of other styles and tastes, and the search for ‘exotic authenticity’, as well as the incorporation of this ‘exotism’ into local habits and consumption styles. And finally, the exposure to all this ‘otherness’ often makes consumers more aware of their own cultural roots, and the tastes and consumption styles that they would define as ‘our own’. All these offers of old and new, strange and familiar, authentic and creolised tend to coexist in the marketplace. Therefore, it is not so strange that some authors discuss globalisation more in terms of fragmentation than in terms of homogenisation.

The politics of consumption

Public policy and consumerism

The ethics of consumption are becoming more and more significant. Public concern for the welfare of consumers has been an issue since at least the beginning of the twentieth century. This is normally referred to as consumer policy. The general purpose of such consumer policy...
Chapter 1 Consumer behaviour and consumer society

measures and legislation is to protect consumers against the worst and most fraudulent abuses of marketing techniques. Partly as a result of consumers’ efforts, many national and international agencies have been established to oversee consumer-related activities. Consumers themselves continue to have a lively interest in consumer-related issues, ranging from environmental concerns such as pollution caused by oil spills or toxic waste, the use of additives and genetically manipulated material in food, to excessive violence and sex on television. In a globalised world, corporations increasingly are held responsible for the entire production chain behind their products. 

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

Marketing pitfall
Women for s@le!

The charge against abuse of marketing techniques has taken on new dimensions with the rise of the internet. Would you like to buy a Latvian girl for escort service? Or a Russian bride by mail order? The trade in women from Eastern Europe, Asia or Latin America has reached new heights with the easier contact made possible by the internet. Obvious problems are created by the difficulty of distinguishing between serious marriage bureaux or au pair agencies on the one side, and organised traders of women for various kinds of prostitution services on the other. According to human rights organisations, many women who believe that they are going to marry the prince of their dreams end up as ‘sexual services workers’, sometimes under slavery-like conditions. Do a search for ‘mail-order brides’ on Reddit (which positions itself as ‘the front page of the internet’) and follow some of those discussion threads.

Dark sides of consumer culture

There is a growing concern that not all is well in consumer society, and the globalisation of consumer culture makes these problems even clearer because we can, so to speak, ‘study the problems as they aggravate’. Many critics have attacked consumer society for a variety of reasons: that it erodes cultural differences; that it creates superficial and inauthentic forms of social interaction; and that it inspires competition and individualism rather than solidarity and community. While many of these assertions may or may not bear close scrutiny, consumer society in general does represent some serious challenges for our future development, not least in terms of the pressure on the environment, so it may not be so strange that current times are characterised by a hefty public and scientific debate about the ethics and moralities of consumption.

The central role of consumption in today’s society has therefore led to an increasing interest in the social and political consequences of consumer society. The aggravating environmental crisis, the linkages between overconsumption and climate change, the unsustainability of many consumption practices and a feeling that a consumer orientation has turned politics into marketing and branding – all these factors contribute to the feeling that consumer society is not a care- and risk-free lifestyle. There have been several investigations of various types of anti-consumption practices and movements. Some critics have coined the term ‘affluenza’ to account for the negative sides of a society over-focused on its consumption. The successful
The politics of consumption

animated movie from Pixar, Wall-E, is based on a grim projection of a future world as a victim of affluenza. On the other hand, as pointed out by a very influential consumer researcher, it might be wiser to analyse the pros and cons of consumer society in more detail concerning the variety of ways in which consumers can also make a positive difference, rather than making such sweeping ‘consumption is bad’ conclusions as indicated by the affluenza term.

It has been suggested that we live in a risk society, where our ways of manufacturing goods are increasingly producing just as many, and even more, ‘bads’ or risks – risks that the consumer will have to take into account in their decision-making. Lots of these risks are linked to our consumption processes, whether they concern something we eat or drink, chemicals in the paint and surface coating of various construction materials or the content of phthalates (plasticisers) in toys and so on. The sense of risks is compounded by recurring food scandals such as the addition of melanine in Chinese milk products, which has severely lowered consumer confidence in many foods ‘made in China’, or the many scandals surrounding meat (for example the BSE scandal), or fake classifications of wine or olive oil.

One example of a product type where such risks have made consumers sceptical about the benefits suggested to them by the industry is that of genetically manipulated organisms (GMO). One fear, expressed by consumers in a study of acceptance or rejection of GMO foods in Sweden and Denmark, was of too great a concentration of power in a few giant corporations dominating both research and industry. Similar results were found for several European countries in a cross-national study. Testing consumer attitudes and purchase intentions regarding GMO foods, it was concluded that an overall rejection of the technology, as such, was found in Denmark, Germany, the UK and Italy. In connection with this study, various types of information material were also tested, some more informative, some more emotional, in order to estimate the potential of informational campaigns in changing negative attitudes. But whatever data were given to the consumers, it only made their attitude more negative – something that points to the deep-seated nature of this scepticism among European consumers. Instead, the demand for organic produce has increased tremendously in several European countries over the last few years. Although the economic crisis may have led to a temporary setback in this demand in, for example, the UK in the years between 2008 and 2013, European organic producers are still trying to catch up with the growing demand for organic produce experienced across European markets. Other ways of eating sustainably, for example observing seasonality, avoiding excessive packaging and buying local produce, are also on the increase in a number of European countries, as testified by a study in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden.

The ethical consumer

The discussion above points to an increasing awareness of the political and moral consequences of consumption choices among many consumers. Consumers are not just individuals responsible solely for the private outcomes of their choices, they are also social citizens with social responsibilities. How consumers feel these responsibilities and act upon them depends largely on how they perceive the robustness of nature in the face of so many consumers who intervene and use resources, but also on their beliefs regarding technology and its role for society. This social and moral consciousness means that what started out predominantly as a ‘green’ consumer is gradually being followed by, or perhaps is turning into, a ‘political’ or ‘ethical’ consumer (as they’re increasingly known). The ethical consumers use their buying pattern as a weapon against companies they don’t like, and in support of the companies that reflect values similar to their own. This consumer type selects products according to the company’s ethical behaviour, which includes respect for human rights, animal protection, environmental friendliness and support for various benevolent causes.

Large numbers of consumers are trying to reduce their reliance on possessions by downshifting. This means learning to get by with less, avoiding the use of credit cards and, in extreme cases, living totally ‘off the grid’ without using commercial services. Other evidence of the disenchantment among some people with a culture dominated by materialist values and
big corporations shows up in events that promote uniqueness and anti-corporate statements. Some of the more prominent examples are the ‘Occupy’ and ‘We are the 99%’ movements, but also the annual Burning Man project. This is a week-long annual anti-market event, where thousands of people gather at Black Rock Desert in Nevada to express themselves and proclaim their emancipation from corporate America. The highlight of the festival involves the burning of a huge figure of a man made out of wood that symbolises the freedom from market domination. Ironically, some critics point out that even this high-profile anti-market event is being commercialised as it becomes more popular each year.74

For ethical consumers, one big challenge is the uncertainty that consumers who would like to shop consciously may face. One study isolated four dimensions that contribute to this uncertainty: (1) complexity, i.e. the involvement of several factors such as fair trade, organic produce, animal welfare and so on; (2) ambiguity, i.e. uncertainty about what an ethical claim actually means; (3) conflict, i.e. trade-off between supporting trade with poor countries vs local produce; and (4) credibility, i.e. the trustworthiness of information provided by labels or claims.75 For example, there has been a tremendous increase in the use of environmental labelling programmes throughout the world, and that is of course good. The problem is that many of these labels are not very transparent, so it is difficult for the consumer to actually know what kind of environmental responsibility is behind the label, and cases of ‘greenwashing’ may undermine the confidence in all labels, even the more serious ones.76

Although consumer boycott of, for example, South African produce during the apartheid regime has been known for some time, the term ‘the political consumer’ was first coined in Denmark in the 1990s following consumer protests against the dumping of a drilling platform in the North Sea and against France for its nuclear testing in the Pacific.77 Today, political or ethical consumers are found in all countries, but significant differences are also found. One EU-based study concluded that Norwegian food consumers could generally be framed as trusting, Danish as complex, Italian as quality conscious and Portuguese as unprotected. Some results from that study are reproduced in Table 1.4.
The politics of consumption

The ethical consumer is supported by such agencies as the Vancouver-based Adbusters, which engages in twisting campaigns from major companies that, for some reason, have come under their spotlight for immoral or harmful behaviour. For example, they made a spoof on the well-known Coca-Cola polar bear campaign by depicting a family of bears on a tiny ice floe, with the sign ‘Enjoy Climate Change’ written in that well-known type from the Coca-Cola logo, thereby protesting against the company’s use of ozone-harming gases in its vending machines. This kind of ‘peaceful’ rebelliousness against what is seen as control over our minds and imagination by major companies is called ‘culture jamming’. Vigilante marketing is also emerging, where new ads and ideas for campaigns appear without either client or agency involvement. These are often generated by freelancers, fans or agencies looking for work.

The global brands are generally the target of such consumer activism. One study examined consumers’ experiences of the global coffee shop chain Starbucks. The authors concluded that although Starbucks has created a lot of followers in and outside the US who see Starbucks as the quintessential cool café environment, it has also produced significant consumer resistance among consumers who perceive Starbucks as inauthentic and no better in terms of the café culture than McDonald’s is for the global food culture. As such, they must fight a negative shadow of their own brand image, a so-called doppelgänger brand-image.

However, not all organisations are on the defensive. Companies such as The Body Shop are founded on the idea of natural and non-animal-tested products and a maximum of environmental concern. But their concerns are becoming directed towards a broader array of social values. They took up the debate over beauty ideals by introducing ‘Ruby’, a Barbie-lookalike doll but one with considerably rounder forms, in order to fight the tyranny of thinness and the impossible body ideal of the supermodels that is also endorsed by Barbie’s shape (see Chapter 4). The reaction was predictable: Mattel Inc., the producers of Barbie, took out an injunction against The Body Shop because Ruby’s face was too like the original Barbie’s.

### Consumer boycotts

As we have seen, we live in a period where many consumers are becoming increasingly aware that their consumption pattern is part of a global political and economic system, to the extent that they become ethical consumers. Sometimes a negative experience can trigger an organised and devastating response, as when a consumer group organises a boycott of a company’s products. These efforts can include protests against everything from investing in a politically undesirable country (as when Carlsberg and Heineken both withdrew their

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**Table 1.4** Political consumption activities among food consumers in four European countries (percentage of population) (all result: $p = < 0.0001$)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Norway N = 1000</th>
<th>Denmark N = 1005</th>
<th>Italy N = 2006</th>
<th>Portugal N = 1000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Refused to buy food types or brands to express opinion about a political or social issue</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bought particular food to support their sale</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participated in organised consumer boycott</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Adapted from Bente Halkier et al., ‘Trusting, complex, quality conscious or unprotected? Constructing the food consumer in different European national contexts’, *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 7(3), 2007: 379–402.*
investments from Myanmar following protests against their support of a repressive regime), to efforts to discourage consumption of products from certain companies or countries (as during the boycott of French wines and other products during the nuclear testing in the Pacific in 1996 – an action that was implemented especially strongly in the Netherlands and in the Scandinavian countries). Four factors are found to predict boycott participation:

1. The desire to make a difference.
2. The scope for self-enhancement.
3. Counterarguments that inhibit boycotting.
4. The cost to the boycotter of constrained consumption.

Boycotts are not always effective – studies show that normally only a limited percentage of a country’s consumers participate in them. However, those who do are disproportionately vocal and well educated, so they are a group that companies especially do not want to alienate. One increasingly popular solution used by marketers is to set up a joint task force with the boycotting organisation, to try to iron out the problem. In the US, following yet another school shooting in early 2018, various companies (airlines, rental car agencies, hotel chains) followed consumer petitions and, following the dialogue, ended their relationships (membership advantages, screening of TV channel) with the NRA (National Rifle Association). Companies such as Apple, however, refrained from reacting to the call for consumer boycotting by referring to the importance of freedom of speech. What do you think?

**Multicultural dimensions**

People are beginning to realise the power of consumer boycotts outside the Western world. In Morocco, what was initially a protest organised on Facebook, against what was considered unfair and unjustified price levels on dairy products, petrol and mineral water, has turned into a major protest action against the country’s elite. The boycott against three of Morocco’s companies evolved into a larger manifestation of discontent with the poverty, corruption and lack of interest of the ruling elite in ‘ordinary people’s life situations’ as a sort of consumer-based ‘Arab Spring’, and has resulted in major falls in share value. While the protest boycotts are thus effective (and far more difficult to crack down on than demonstrations and unrest in the streets), there is of course the downside – that the boycott first and foremost harms local companies and hence workers, inducing workers from the targeted companies to organise counter-demonstrations. It is guessed that the protest will lead to lower prices, but most importantly the boycott is interpreted as a sign of a strengthened civil society in Morocco that may act again against other exploitative actions from the political and economic elite.

**Transformative consumer research (TCR)**

Some consumer researchers are themselves organising not only to study, but also to rectify what they see as pressing social problems in the marketplace. This perspective is called transformative consumer research (TCR). It promotes research projects that include the goal of helping people or encouraging social change. Scientists who subscribe to this perspective view consumers as collaborators who work with them to realise this change, rather than as a ‘phenomenon’ upon which to conduct research. As a consequence, they often use participatory action research methods – that is, research methods where the researcher actively works with a population in order to bring about the desired social change.

Adherents of TCR typically work with at-risk populations, such as children, the disadvantaged and the disabled, or other types of stigmatised or underprivileged consumer groups. In that respect, it is linked to social marketing processes. Researchers typically take a critical stance towards the various ways in which marketplace offerings that ‘look all right’ may be detrimental to consumer well-being, For example, consumers use products that claim a
New forms of consumption: sharing stuff

‘high fibre content’ or other types of so-called functional foods as quick solutions to improve their diet, but ultimately fail – first because the health benefits of these products may be dubious and secondly because there are no ‘miracle foods’ that provide short cuts to a healthy diet.\textsuperscript{88} Other issues addressed by TCR researchers include the ways families confront various types of risk (economic, social, emotional),\textsuperscript{89} how we can conceive of the tricky relationship between marketing and development in poorer parts of the world\textsuperscript{90} or how poverty plays a role in the lives of consumers. In the case of poverty, one team of researchers has suggested that four dimensions characterise the way it is represented in society:

- social exclusion (based on individual incapacity rather than social factors);
- vulnerability (mainly defined from an economic perspective);
- pleasure (that poor people waste their money on excessive consumption of things they don’t need); and
- contentment (something the poor should not be able to obtain).

The researchers argue that these representations easily lead us to apply a ‘them and us’ logic when considering poor populations, but they also show how an alternative more transformative view might be helpful in providing a better understanding of what it is like to be poor.\textsuperscript{91}

One of the problems with TCR is that it may be linked to social marketing – that is, marketing for good social causes rather than for profit. But marketing, with its simplifying tendencies and persuasive techniques, may in and by itself be seen as a dubious practice, regardless of the cause, and as such it may not be embraced by consumers.\textsuperscript{92} Another issue, which is particularly evident in the numerous TCR projects on health and nutrition, is that TCR researchers run the risk of imposing their own moral judgements on the types of consumption they study, which may be counter-productive to consumer well-being. To take one example, one may ask whether the many projects aimed at encouraging people to eat healthier food in order to prevent obesity do not, in fact, contribute to an overall anxiety about excess weight among people (especially girls) who may perceive themselves as too fat but who have no medical conditions whatsoever.\textsuperscript{93}

Marketing pitfall

The name Rana Plaza, a building in Dhaka, capital of Bangladesh, will for a long time to come be connected with scandalous production conditions in the clothing industry. On 24 April 2013, Rana Plaza (which contained five factories producing garments for a large number of world-renowned fashion brands) collapsed, killing more than 1,000 workers and injuring an even larger number. At the time of writing, the owner of the building, as well as 40 other people, face severe punishment in the court in Dhaka.\textsuperscript{94} But what about the companies that placed their orders with this cheap production site with such inadequate safety standards? According to one consumer activist site, even if some of the brands that bought clothes from Rana Plaza have contributed to a fund that will pay compensation to the families of the victims, this fund is still waiting for the full compensation amount to be paid by all implicated companies.\textsuperscript{95} What about the clothes you are wearing? Do you know where and how they were produced?

New forms of consumption: sharing stuff

Most of us have experienced situations where, for example, ‘pay and-display’ tickets for parking spaces are handed over from consumer to consumer, as the original buyer did not make use of the full parking time.\textsuperscript{96} This practice of sharing what one has already bought but cannot use, or cannot use fully or all the time, is spreading rapidly both globally and to different types of consumption. We’re witnessing the rise of the sharing economy,\textsuperscript{97} where...
consumers want to share, lend each other or rent to each other what they already possess. Thus, the concept of the sharing economy actually comprises far more than simply sharing. Furthermore, the notion of sharing fails to acknowledge the element of reciprocity that is always part of social communities formed around circulation of goods and services, which is why some researchers have suggested the alternative term of ‘mutuality’ to account for this new type of economy. When one adds the rise of new consumer-to-consumer internet-based short-term renting services, the sharing economy is more appropriately called access-based consumption, since what consumers are really doing is securing temporary access to resources rather than buying them for ownership.

Need to use a car? Go to Zipcar and rent one by the hour. Need to send something somewhere? Go to Nimber and get it shipped with someone going there anyway. Need accommodation in a different city, maybe even in a different country? Go to Airbnb and search for a friendly host located where you want to go. The access-based economy is revolutionising industries including taxis (Uber and Lyft), hospitality (Airbnb), music (Spotify), even errand running (TaskRabbit) and an increasing number of other consumption domains.

What is fuelling this revolution? Primarily, technology that dramatically lowers transaction costs, so that it’s much easier to share assets and track them across large numbers of people. Online payment systems make it easy to exchange money. Social networks create communities and build trust among strangers who can access each other’s histories. Sellers can make money from assets they don’t use very much – think about how many hours a typical owner actually uses an electric drill compared to how much it costs to buy one. Many of us only use our cars a few hours per week, but we still pay a monthly loan, maintenance, insurance and so on.

Chapter 1 Consumer behaviour and consumer society

Giving and getting access . . .

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Did you use Airbnb rather than a hotel the last time you travelled? Or did you use Uber to get home rather than take a taxi? Or decide to rely on Zipcar instead of bringing your car to campus? If the answer is yes, you are a part of the Sharing Economy, heralded by sources ranging from Fortune magazine to President Obama as a major growth sector. The sharing economy represents a major shift in lifestyle for consumers: consumers no longer want to own, but prefer to access goods and services. That way, they do not have the obligations and burdens of ownership, such as finding a space to park their car or having to deal with the upkeep of their bicycle, when a bike-sharing service is more convenient. But what is sharing? Sharing is a form of social exchange that takes place among people known to each other, without any profit. Sharing is an established practice, and dominates particular aspects of our life, such as within the family. By sharing and collectively consuming the household space of the home, family members establish a communal identity, for example.

My colleague Fleura Bardhi and I are interested in whether the form of exchange happening in the ‘sharing economy’ is really sharing. We have found that when sharing is market-mediated – when a company is an intermediary between consumers who don’t know each other – it is no longer sharing at all. Rather, consumers are paying to access someone else’s goods or services for a particular period of time. It is an economic exchange, and we have labelled this ‘access-based consumption’.

Our research on Zipcar, the world’s leading car-sharing company, illustrates some of the characteristics of access-based consumption. Consumers don’t feel any
However, it’s not just convenience that explains the rise of the sharing economy. We can also point to changes in attitudes towards ownership, especially among younger consumers. A global survey that interviewed more than 10,000 respondents reported that one-third of millennials already use a sharing service, or expect to join one soon. Many people believe that overconsumption is putting our planet at risk, and half of the respondents say they could happily live without most of the items they own. This is consistent with discussions about the weak relationship researchers find between owning more ‘stuff’ and happiness. A major study of Zipcar users did not reveal ethical and environmental concerns as the most important drivers of access-based consumption but highlighted economic advantages and daily conveniences as most important, whereas other researchers studying, for example, access-based consumption in nursery and baby equipment did find concern about sustainability to be important.

It is important to highlight the benefits that access provides in contrast to the disadvantages of ownership and sharing. These consist of convenient and cost-effective access to valued resources, flexibility, and freedom from the financial, social, and psychological sense of ownership over the cars, nor do they feel a sense of reciprocal obligations that arise when sharing with one another. They experience Zipcar in the anonymous way one experiences a hotel; they know others have used the cars, but have no desire to interact with them. They don’t view other ‘Zipsters’ as co-sharers of the cars, but rather are mistrustful of them, and rely on the company to police the sharing system so that it’s equitable for everyone. Finally, consumers do not want to be a part of a community, either with other Zipsters or with the company itself. Thus, our research challenges the romanticized view of the sharing economy as being collaborative and altruistically motivated.

It is important to highlight the benefits that access provides in contrast to the disadvantages of ownership and sharing. These consist of convenient and cost-effective access to valued resources, flexibility, and freedom from the financial, social, and emotional obligations embedded in ownership and sharing. There is still a lot to learn about sharing, access and ownership, though, and we are currently researching how these concepts may vary across generations, across cultures, and across social classes.

Question
Uber, the sharing economy alternative to taxis, that allows consumers to call the car via an app and choose a driver based on past user’s ratings, positions itself squarely around its pricing, reliability, and convenience. This is encapsulated in its tagline, ‘Better, faster and cheaper than a taxi’. In comparison, Lyft, which offers an almost identical service, positions itself as friendly (‘We’re your friend with a car’), and as a community (‘Greet your driver with a fistbump’). Which positioning is more likely to be successful? Why? Use other examples from the sharing economy to support your answer.

Giana Eckhardt

Chapter summary

Now that you have finished reading this chapter you should understand why:

1.1 We use products to help us define our identities in different settings. Consumption, private or collective, is part and parcel of most of the activities we engage in on a daily basis. If it is shallow to say that we are what we have (even though there is a truth to it), we might like ‘we are what we do’ better. But in a market and consumer culture such as ours, most activities are related to some form of consumption.

1.2 Consumer behaviour is a process involving many actors. Consumer behaviour is the study of the processes involved when individuals or groups select, purchase, use or dispose of products, services, ideas or experiences to satisfy needs and desires. A consumer may purchase, use and dispose of a product, but different people may perform these functions. In addition, we can think of consumers as role players who need different products to help them play their various parts.
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1.3 Many different types of specialist study consumer behaviour. The field of consumer behaviour is interdisciplinary; it is composed of researchers from many different fields who share an interest in how people interact with the marketplace. We can categorise these disciplines by the degree to which their focus is micro (the individual consumer) or macro (the consumer as a member of groups or of the larger society).

1.4 There are basically two differing perspectives (called paradigms) regarding how and what we should understand about consumer behaviour. The positivist perspective emphasises the objectivity of science, and the consumer as a rational decision-maker. The interpretivist (or CCT) perspective, in contrast, stresses the subjective meaning of the consumer’s individual experience and its insertion in a cultural context.

1.5 The society we live in today can be described as a consumer society. As was underlined in this chapter, most of the things we do involve some form of market consumption. Most of the resources we have access to are (for better or worse) mediated through the market, either directly with us as purchasers or indirectly with us as users. The consumer role is becoming increasingly important in many social relationships (again for better or worse).

1.6 Globalisation is important when trying to understand the consumer society. Consumer society and its characteristics are spreading on a global scale, and often go hand in hand with processes of development and modernisation. Globalisation does not necessarily mean that we are becoming one big homogenous mass; on the contrary – the process of glocalisation may contribute to produce new cultural differences.

1.7 Consumption is not just a private but also a political issue. The ethics of consumption are becoming more and more significant. Being a consumer is not a value-free position. Our choices as consumers relate in powerful ways to the rest of our lives and marketing activities exert an enormous impact on individuals. Consumer behaviour is relevant to our understanding of both public policy issues and the dynamics of popular culture. Global problems such as sustainability, climate change and inequality are deeply inscribed in consumer culture and its processes. Both consumers and organisations are discovering that ethical issues are at the core of the production and consumption processes.

1.8 We are witnessing the appearance of new forms of collective consumption formats. The internet has made consumer-to-consumer communications and offerings far easier, and we have therefore witnessed new formats of consumption emerging, based on either sharing or mutual usage, or on private marketisation of resources – so-called ‘access-based consumption’.

Key terms

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Consumer behaviour challenge

1. This chapter states that people play different roles and that their consumption behaviours may differ depending on the particular role they are playing. State whether you agree or disagree with this perspective, giving examples from your own life.

2. Some researchers believe that the field of consumer behaviour should be a pure, rather than an applied, science. That is, research issues should be framed in terms of their scientific interest rather than their applicability to immediate marketing problems. Do you agree?

3. In recent years there has been a large debate about the influence that internet shopping will have on our consumer lives. Try listing the changes that you personally have made in your buying and consumption patterns due to e-commerce. Compare these changes with experiences by other people from various social groups, e.g. somebody from your parents’ generation, an IT geek or somebody with a lower educational background.

4. Name some products or services that are widely used by your social group. State whether you agree or disagree with the notion that these products help to form bonds within the group, and support your argument with examples from your list of products used by the group.

5. Some people believe that the sale of data on customers’ social media habits, likes, buying habits and so on constitutes an invasion of privacy and should be banned. The recent scandal around Facebook and Cambridge Analytica only accentuates this. Comment on this issue from both a consumer’s and a marketer’s point of view.

6. List the three stages in the consumption process. Describe the issues that you considered in each of these stages when you made a recent important purchase.

7. State the differences between the positivist and interpretivist approaches to consumer research. For each type of inquiry, give examples of product dimensions that would be more usefully explored using that type of research over the other.

8. What aspects of consumer behaviour are likely to be of interest to a financial planner? To a university administrator? To a graphic arts designer? To a social worker in a government agency? To a nursing instructor?

9. Select a product and brand that you use frequently and list what you consider to be the brand’s determinant attributes. Without revealing your list, ask a friend who is approximately the same age but of the opposite sex to make a similar list for the same product (the brand may be different). Compare and contrast the identified attributes and report your findings.

10. Collect ads for five different brands of the same product. Report on the segmentation variables, target markets and emphasised product attributes in each ad.

For additional material see the companion website at www.pearsoned.co.uk/solomon

Notes


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37. ‘After the BRICS are the MINTs, but can you make any money from them?’ Forbes International [1 June 2014], http://www.forbes.com/sites/chriswright/2014/01/06/