

Brian M. Young

# Consumer Psychology

A Life Span Developmental Approach

palgrave  
macmillan

## Preface

For many years now I have been interested in the relationship between children and marketing. I have taught it at the University of Exeter as an optional subject to both psychology students and business school students over a period of almost 20 years. I edit a journal called *Young Consumers* that publishes academic papers and the occasional practitioner paper in the area and I have written and contributed to books on the subject. My own background is in psychology and my first experience of research, many years ago was as a research assistant on a project at the University of Edinburgh looking at language and thinking in preschool children. My Ph.D. from the University of Hong Kong was influenced a lot by cross-cultural research into language and thinking. When I returned to England to a lectureship in a Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the University of Salford I read a lot about media analysis and in particular the analysis of advertising and published my first single authored book on *Television Advertising and Children*. When I came to the Psychology Department in the University of Exeter I got involved in a research group involved in economic psychology and we wrote a book collectively that was published as *The Economic Psychology of Everyday Life* which not only looked at what

people thought, felt and did economically in their daily lives but also took an overview that spanned life from childhood to old age. I wrote some of the parts on childhood.

So there were a lot of unfinished threads left hanging there and the temptation was to clip them and start something new. I have always been restless with work and my self-description could be described as eclectic on a good day and dilettante on a bad one. Obviously I haven't yielded to temptation and I hope the book will fill a gap in consumer psychology and be more of a tapestry than a knot. There are several features that hopefully will enable you to go beyond this brief preface and dip into it. When I taught my main consumer psychology courses to psychology students it was relatively easy to incorporate something on children and consumption because they would be familiar with the trajectories of human development and saw consumer psychology in children as a special area different perhaps from children in school or in relationships for example. It was seen by them as a special area of developmental psychology. Teaching the subject to Business School students however was different. Students there saw children and consumption as part of consumer research, consumer behaviour or even consumer psychology and as a problematic area where ethical considerations dominated and one is never sure what sort of skills and abilities the child consumer has when he or she is acquiring stuff or trying to get others to do it. Of course ethics are relevant as are health and well-being concerns. However a life-span approach can integrate childhood as one part of our lives as we progress through from birth to old age. So one of the reasons for doing a book like this was to integrate my own interests in children and marketing into the mainstream of consumer psychology.

Is this a book for psychologists or consumer researchers? The language used and the evidence base I consulted is in the psychology tradition so I have spent some time at the beginning making sure I've covered several key issues in psychology such as the nature of perception and memory. Some of the content and the way I've approached topics has been tuned, tried and tested in my classes to students at Exeter, first in the Psychology Department and now in the Business School. It's a good read for both kinds of student and the content is appropriate for final year students or those at the Masters level.

One final point I'd like to make. When I read books in new areas where the content is not elementary and is evidence-based, I'm continuously tripping over names and dates. These are often left, unopened at the end of sentences and paragraphs and scattered like so much confetti in order to demonstrate the academic credibility of the subject matter. Well you'll get them here but most of them are opened, examined and discussed and the content integrates and also drives the story I'm telling. They're also bang up-to-date, at least at the time of writing. It's a good story and I hope you enjoy it.

This book has been many months in the making and I would like to thank the Business School at the University of Exeter for providing me with an Honorary Fellowship which meant a desk and access to one of the most impressive range of online journals, search engines and journals that I've ever used, and all available at the click of a mouse. But more importantly meeting a bunch of colleagues who were some of the nicest and most interesting people I've ever met. Thanks guys!

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# Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Definitions and Visions of Consumption</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Concepts and Themes</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>How Consumers' Minds Work: An Introduction to the Basics</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>How We Process Information: A Look at Embodied Cognition and Priming</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>One Mind or Two? An Introduction to Dual Process Theories</b>	<b>113</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>Development Through the Lifespan: Is It a Viable Approach?</b>	<b>141</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>Erikson's Stages of Life: Can We Bridge the Gap?</b>	<b>157</b>

<b>8</b>	<b>Childhood and Younger Children: The Gaze from Developmental Psychology</b>	199
<b>9</b>	<b>The Older Child: Becoming a Serious Consumer</b>	229
<b>10</b>	<b>Children, Ownership and Possessions: The Origins</b>	267
<b>11</b>	<b>Ownership and Possessions: The Adult Perspective and into the Future</b>	303
<b>12</b>	<b>And Now the End Is Near...</b>	325
	<b>Index</b>	341