



# **Consumer Psychology**

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Open University Press



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# Preface

This book sets out to provide readers with aspects of Consumer Psychology that are essential to understanding consumer behaviour. To date, there have not been many books with the words 'Consumer Psychology' in their titles. Those that have included them have often been more marketing-oriented than focused on psychology. However, this book focuses on the psychology of consumers and additionally draws upon marketing-related research that can aid the understanding of how consumers think and behave.

Because there has not been one 'typical' or 'standard' type of textbook used universally by consumer psychologists in their teaching around the world, lecturers have often 'made up' their own Consumer Psychology modules. This has been particularly evident in Europe where modules vary greatly in their contents even though the name is the same. Therefore, it is likely that some lecturers may feel that the contents of this book do not cover all the topics that they would like it to. However, this book incorporates the topics that are most commonly included in Consumer Psychology courses around the world, so it will appeal equally to readers in different countries.

New and exciting research within the discipline of Consumer Psychology is constantly emerging. Consequently, the field of Consumer Psychology is moving very quickly, meaning that individuals with a particular interest in this area should make use of research journals in addition to this textbook. Even though this book includes some up-to-date research, it is more about presenting an overall rounded view of Consumer Psychology, which comprises new as well as older 'traditional' theories and perspectives.

The book consists of thirteen chapters that are all structured in the same way. Each chapter covers a different subject area. First, an introductory paragraph briefly outlines what the reader can expect from the chapter. Throughout the chapter, key concepts are highlighted in bold, so that the reader knows what they ought to familiarize themselves with. The key concepts are fully explained in the glossary at the end of the chapter. Also at the end is a short summary followed by either a class exercise or five discussion questions. Both the class exercises and the questions are intended to stimulate further thinking and debate.

Chapter 1 briefly introduces Consumer Psychology and how its foundation is grounded in scientific methods. Additionally, there is also an outline of how Consumer Psychology has grown as a scientific discipline in parallel with the development of the consumer society in which we live today. The history focuses on the period between the mid-seventeenth century and the mid-twentieth century. What is particularly interesting is that psychological investigations into specific aspects of consumption are nothing new. Furthermore, it also reveals that some very

well-known psychologists who are commonly studied in psychology undergraduate degrees, have conducted consumer-related research.

Chapter 2 introduces memory and learning. It outlines key aspects of memory such as short-term and long-term memory, as well as how consumers remember and forget information. Moreover, it delineates behavioural, cognitive and social learning approaches. It is essential for a consumer psychologist to have a good understanding of both the areas of memory and learning.

Just like Chapter 2, the third chapter also covers cognitive aspects of psychology. In this chapter perception and attention are discussed. You will become familiar with how humans perceive stimuli, how perception is linked to attention and what can be done to capture consumers' attention.

Chapter 4 discusses how people can define who they are (or try to define who they are) through consumption. It explores how people form their identity and whether or not this can be done through the use of goods that have symbolic meaning.

How emotions can guide consumer behaviour is looked at in Chapter 5. Most aspects of consumption are guided in one way or another by how people feel. It is simply impossible for consumers to detach themselves from how they feel. The effects of emotions are often subconscious and it can therefore be difficult to establish when they play a part in consumer behaviours. Chapter 5 looks at how emotions impact upon cognitive processes such as attention and recall, as well as how they affect decision-making. Additionally, the chapter also deals with persuasive theories of emotion that shed some light on whether or not consumers may be persuaded by factors they encounter in a consumer environment.

Chapter 6 explores the area of attitudes. It looks at how they are formed and why people change them. An outline of whether or not attitudes can predict behaviour is also included. Furthermore, the chapter finishes with an outline of how the mass media can influence people's attitudes.

Chapter 7 introduces the psychology of advertising. A lot has been written about advertising and it is therefore beyond the scope of this chapter to look at all the possible angles of how to make an advert effective. The chapter focuses on how the Elaboration Likelihood Model can be used to explain when advertising is at its most persuasive and, as a result, can favourably alter consumers' attitudes. Moreover, the role of humour, sex, music, fear and shock tactics is also presented.

What motivates consumers to purchase products and services is covered in Chapter 8. This chapter explores motivation as well as looking at common theories of motivation.

Decision-making and brand loyalty are the topics of Chapter 9. It explains how decision-making is affected by different types of heuristics and looks at whether or not consumers can and do make rational decisions. The chapter also outlines what brand loyalty means as well as why consumers become loyal to brands.

Chapter 10 elaborates upon the Internet and how it has become incredibly popular since it first emerged. Naturally, the chapter looks at Internet consumption. This includes how consumers conduct searches on the web and how they make

decisions online. Because using the Internet is a consumer activity in itself, the chapter also looks at aspects that may seem less obviously linked to consumption, namely, how it is used as a social tool.

How children differ from adult consumers is covered in Chapter 11. A wide range of other consumer aspects are also covered in this chapter, including how mainstream media (e.g. television) can affect children's thoughts and behaviour, the use of computers, and how well children understand advertising. A lot has been written about children as consumers, especially about the influence of television upon aggressive behaviour. This chapter introduces some key aspects of this subject area. For particularly keen students, it would be highly recommended that they conduct additional reading as it is simply impossible to cover all angles in one chapter.

Chapter 12 examines whether or not there is a link between consumption and happiness. It starts by defining what happiness is and how it can be measured. The chapter then continues by outlining how consumption can be disadvantageous by looking at people who are highly materialistic and those who become addicted to gathering possessions. In the latter part of the chapter a more positive side to consumption is presented. Then the chapter reveals how different types of consumption can make people feel happier overall.

In the final chapter, Chapter 13, the topic of how consumption affects our environment is explored. This chapter looks at how consumers view environmentally friendly products, and whether or not it is possible to reduce consumption of goods and services that are detrimental to our environment.

The thirteen chapters of this book present and review essential topics of Consumer Psychology, by revisiting old key studies as well as discussing recently conducted research. Generally, the book draws on multiple areas of psychology but focuses mainly on the traditional ones such as cognitive, behavioural and social approaches. Some areas of research do not feature extensively in this book, for example, cognitive neuropsychological studies.

Recently, cognitive neuroscience studies have also been applied to Consumer Psychology. This is a very new and exciting development of Consumer Psychology that often makes use of fMRI (functional magnetic resonance imaging). Aspects of cognitive neuroscience studies are briefly mentioned. The reason for not including extensive amounts of such research is partially due to the fact that it is not yet commonly taught in a consumer psychological context. However, it is worth acknowledging that such research is on the rise and is likely to contribute to a better understanding of consumer behaviour in the future. But until this happens it is more practical for students to focus their time and energy on subject areas that are currently deemed to be essential to Consumer Psychology.



# Acknowledgements

I thank Nigel Marlow for introducing me to the field of Consumer Psychology. He was a very inspirational lecturer while I studied for my undergraduate course. Without his enthusiasm I doubt that I would have continued my career as a psychologist.

Thank you also to Nigel, Peter Bright, Clare Mackie and Alexander for providing me with feedback on some of the chapters.

Several companies have very kindly granted me permission to reprint images that demonstrate certain aspects of Consumer Psychology. For that I am very grateful, the companies are: Cosmos Communications, Ogilvy & Mather, United Colors of Benetton, Citigroup, Peta, NBC Universal, Mercedes-Benz, and Northern Foods.

The team at McGraw-Hill deserve to be acknowledged. Ruben Hale, Katy Hamilton and Monika Lee, thank you for your support throughout this project.

My final acknowledgements have to be to the two most important people in my life, Alex and Oscar. Without you, my life would be incomplete.