

A photograph of a man with a beard and two young boys in a grocery store. The man is in the foreground, looking to the right. One boy is in the foreground, looking down at a carrot he is holding. Another boy is in the background, looking to the right. They are standing in a shopping cart. The background shows shelves of groceries.

# CONSUMER PSYCHOLOGY

A Life Span Developmental Approach

**BRIAN M. YOUNG**



# Consumer Psychology

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A Life Span Developmental Approach

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*This book is dedicated to Laura and Sadie*

## 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!

Exeter, UK  
April 2018

Brian M. Young

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# 1

## Definitions and Visions of Consumption

### Definition of Consumption

‘Consumption’ and associated terms like ‘consumer’ and ‘consumerism’ are prevalent in both academic literature and more popular discourse and you will find these terms in the pages of newspapers, magazines and their electronic versions without too much difficulty. My original intention was to start with a crisp definition of consumption together with a critical examination of the limitations and possible extensions of this definition and then ‘get on with it’ as I tend to meander and wander through areas in my teaching, or so my students tell me. However I was attracted to a book (Ekström & Brembeck, 2004) as I know one of the authors well and respect her writing. It has the tempting title *Elusive consumption* and a quick browse suggested I should dip into it as the chapter authors had excellent provenance and seemed to enjoy what they were writing about. The results were both rewarding and depressing. Certainly I learnt a lot and the main lesson that consumption was indeed difficult to pin down with a definition and some clear practices and examples of consumption in different contexts. We need other disciplines to contribute to fleshing out consumption as it can be

located and legitimately discussed in many other contexts ranging from strict experimental psychology to the relatively recent approach of consumer culture theory (CCT) (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). That's why I thought it was important for me at the outset in the Preface, to outline where I'm coming from and why I became interested and involved in writing this book.

But I do think we need to define what consumption is and the Oxford English Dictionary has several definitions. The most relevant one for our purposes would be the economic one: "The purchase and use of goods, services, materials, or energy" (Consumption, n.d.) which is often used in opposition to 'production'. It's important to note the pivotal role that buying has in consumption but it's even more important to think of possible counterexamples to this. What about public goods, available to all? Is this an example of consumption that is freed from purchase? Public goods are usually classified on two criteria and Samuelson (1954) defined them as those anyone could access (which are called non-excludable) and everyone could consume (called non-rival). From my vantage point, living in the English countryside where it rains a lot and the wind blows in from the Atlantic then air and water would appear to fit the bill as two major public goods. Air is fresh. Water however needs to be managed and if you are a householder then water bills need to be settled. But these niggling doubts about air and water as public goods *par excellence* fade into insignificance when the problems of living and breathing in Beijing<sup>1</sup> or suffering a drought in Southern Africa are considered. The existence of public goods seems to be a myth.

The tragedy of the commons (Hardin, 1968) is an eloquent way of describing the inevitable loss that a group of consumers suffer when allowed unrestricted use of a common resource. The example usually used is based on the meaning of commons as land providing common grazing rights for an agrarian village or crofting community. This is used as an illustrative context for the expression. The inevitable result is that self-interested individuals will graze their animals *ad libitum* and, as the interests of the group are commonized or spread over a number of individuals then each individual gain will be less than that individual's part-share in the loss incurred by overgrazing the common land. Result? Everyone suffers.

Consumption is often used as complementary to production as the two words go together when considering the role of goods and services in society. Production has a variety of meanings and the one that is most relevant here is production being “the action or process of making goods from components or raw materials; the manufacture of goods for sale and consumption” (Production, n.d.). Now these two roles complement each other in the sense that there is a need or want for a good or service then there should be some arrangement to provide it. Hopefully what you are consuming right now was originally the product of my imagination and labour and after some intermediary stages which we can call ‘process’ ends up in consumption whether as a book or an electronic collection of 1s and 0s. ‘Process’ however is less clear and the stages are often ill-defined. For example digital books and periodicals can be re-arranged and re-produced with little or no process to make a plagiarised product and other collections of 1s and 0s will then be marshalled to detect it and punish the offender. The drift into a digitalised environment makes the already problematic distinction between production and consumption less clear. To what extent is a pair of jeans that are manufactured and mass produced in Cambodia consumed by a young woman in England who then decides to slash them and wear them as personalised fashion garments? Should that be seen as production of a personalised item from a commodity that is available in stores or as consumption by one consumer? Obviously the distance between production and consumption is a concept that is based on moveable end points, apart from the difficulty of interpreting what ‘distance’ could mean. But that does not mean that we can’t try to operationalise this idea and recent developments in what used to be called ‘supply chains’ have adopted a more sophisticated global view by using the idea of commodity chains (Burr, 2015). Although this book is not the place to argue about the theory and practice of analysing the global economy into a network of economic value exchanges, the visual metaphor of a market place populated with international goods and services where each one has a history of links and nodes will enable the reader to appreciate the complexity of the system before we analyse the consumption process in more detail. Also the emphasis on process, where stuff you consume has a history

of coming from somewhere and will often end up going somewhere else is a continual theme in the book. The term ‘prosumption’ is used by some theorists (Boesel & Jurgenson, 2015) to describe the simultaneous acts when prosumers consume what they produce or produce what they consume, or both together. They cite various examples such as user-generated web content (so-called Web 2.0) and cite concrete examples (home brewing) to more abstract ones (workers consuming their own identities while at work). We shall return to this blend of consumption and production in the section “[Toward a Theory of Recycling](#)”.

## A Vision of Consumption

So how do we conceptualise consumption in a way that is relevant for psychological approaches to consumption? Let’s start with an individual. Psychology has been thought of as the study of individual behaviour within a cultural and social context, so that seems appropriate. This person is carrying a large bag which is black so we don’t know what’s inside it. We don’t know the person’s gender or whether that attribution is relevant in that particular cultural context, or indeed anything about him or her including where s(he) is apart from somewhere on planet Earth. What do we need to know in order to construct a consumer psychology of this person? Imagine what could be happening. She wants to get rid of some stuff she has accumulated and no longer needs and is on the way to a recycling centre. He is going shopping and this is his bag to carry merchandise and he is looking for a store that’s open. Or she is in the mall and the bag is branded and very collectable and she is about to pay a lot of money for it. All of these activities and many more are consumption related behaviours and we can freeze and locate our hypothetical black bag guy (let’s use the name Guy<sup>2</sup>) in various dimensions. Assuming we are time travellers we can introduce an historical dimension. It’s 1950 in London, England and we see Guy in a long queue outside a butcher’s shop that might just be selling meat. She is wondering if she has enough ration coupons to buy a few ounces (we can predict pretty confidently the gender of Guy in 1950 and that gender is

certainly relevant at that time and in that place). Fast forward 65 years or so and the range of products, the gender of the shopper, the availability of goods, and so on has transformed shopping. But we are not going to cover the history of consumption here, just acknowledging it as our first dimension as it is discussed extensively in other sources (see for example; Trentmann, 2012).

Guy lives somewhere on our planet and this provides me with an opportunity to mention cross-cultural issues, both within a culture and between cultures. There are two styles of research and enquiry that are used in making comparisons between different groups of people. One, known as the *etic* way, attempts to establish certain universal ways of analysing culture and using these generalisations as a tool to compare and contrast. The other (sometimes called the *emic* approach) argues that a valid understanding about a culture can only emerge when researchers get to know the rules and regularities of a culture by immersing themselves as a participant and observer for a prolonged period of time. The former way of observing and analysing cultures tends to be used by experimental psychologists while the latter is more the province of social anthropology. They are not completely mutually exclusive however and each way has its strengths and weaknesses. Within a culture there exist differences in for example socialisation styles and family structures and these provide opportunities to identify patterns of difference and similarity. Culture is a continuum and does not obey the boundaries imposed by nation states or other polities.

There is no way of knowing what Guy is up to and this is deliberate as s(he) is meant to represent all of us and to emphasise that consumption is a process rather than a single event. Even if we did only focus on one such event and imagined a chair being drawn up and a fork spearing food on a plate, that piece of fish being eaten and consumed trails a history of commodity chains with it which it partly shares with the chips now defrosted and ready to eat as they have shared the same shelves and truck side by side in their box. We plug into goods and services with such histories in our vast market places and this has happened in the past and is happening right now across the world in different ways.

## The Cycle of Consumption

It is essential to emphasise that process is key to understanding the world of consumption and I have used the term 'consumption cycle' to do justice to the temporal and repeated sequence of events that occur continuously everywhere. The 'consumption cycle' has been used in that sense by some authors (most recently by Cross, Leizerovici, & Pirouz, 2017) but many authors in the area of consumer psychology have recognised and acknowledged that buying is not the only part of consumer behaviour. Nevertheless the act of buying, rooted in the psychology of exchange and reciprocity has an established provenance and tends to dominate in discussions of consumer psychology (see for example Herrmann, 1997). Although an early definition of consumer behaviour (Jacoby, Berning & Dietvorst, 1977) emphasised the acquisition, consumption, and disposition of a wide range of 'things' such as goods but also services, time and ideas (op. cit., p. 22), the acknowledgment by a writer that consumer behaviour is more than just buying is often limited to a recognition of other preparatory and subsequent behaviours usually labelled as pre-purchase and post-purchase consumer behaviour (see for example Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard, & Hogg, 2006, p. 7) as if they were parasitic on the main consummatory activity of buying. My argument would be that although buying is the point of the exercise from an economic viewpoint, the behavioural sequence is often driven by social needs to share in a group activity and buying then becomes secondary. McNeal (2007, p. 10) defines consumer behaviour as being constituted by the three phases called pre-purchase, purchase, post-purchase and he also makes the important point that consumer behaviour is often dependent on others. This is an important way of distinguishing different kinds of consumer behaviour and different consumers. Children for example often won't be able to buy but will persuade others like parents to buy for them. They will however play a significant role in post-purchase activities. I would want to extend that and suggest that certain groups will conduct the buying part of the consumption cycle in a different way from others. For example food is often bought in a market place using interpersonal communication.

Or some goods are bought primarily on the Net. Arnould et al. (2002, pp. 5–6) emphasised the acquisition, use and disposal functions and the content of products, services and experiences thus recognising there were later stages that are integral parts of the consumption cycle. Finally in a well-known paper, Arnould and Thompson (2005) used the term ‘consumption cycle’ when referring to consumption in particular contexts, and different ways of consumption. In addition there are identifiable states of acquisition, consumption, possession, and disposition processes which can be analysed at different levels (op. cit., p. 871). Here now is my own contribution of the stages of consumption informed by the authors mentioned above.

## Instigation

I have used this term to cover the beginning of any particular cycle of consumption although the day-to-day reality of consumption can embrace many different cycles for different products and they can be interacting simultaneously in the one individual consumer. As I write this I am consuming energy (the lights are on) coffee (an essential stimulant) and occasionally the chatter of others (information) next door. During the day (and possibly night) we are sampling our environment and noting things that need replenishing or that are missing or need renewing. This often occurs in the home. For example, we notice that a ceiling bulb light has gone out so should we replace it with a more expensive long-life one or try and get a cheaper short-life one? My shirt collar is frayed so I make a mental note to buy a new shirt. Do we write these down and make a list? Do you ignore the worn tyres on your car and don’t renew them yet as they are expensive to buy, so running a risk of a car accident or a fine during a random inspection by police? These are mindful and thoughtful decisions that are part of the routines of the everyday life of consumers and they occur in different situations and settings. But instigating in the sense of thinking ‘I might want/need/ desire this stuff...’ need not be mindful and conscious and could be triggered or primed by other thoughts or what comes through our senses as we experience

our environment. Maybe being in a room with a high ceiling enables you to process information differently (Meyers-Levy & Zhu, 2007) or just seeing an Apple computer without even being able to recall it will cause us to think creatively (Fitzsimons, Chartrand, & Fitzsimons, 2008). Materialism is important as well. If you value and almost worship the goods that define you, you will constantly desire to renew old stuff and your identity will be largely defined by the things you own and display to others. So much of your time will be spent on your possessions, your house, and your car for example. We shall be looking at materialism and frugality in Chapter 12 in the section [“A Quick Primer on Materialism”](#).

## Preparation

This is the stage where the occasional scribbled note or a remembered ‘must get that sorted’ mental note is transformed into preparation for action. For many consumers we have to recognise that digital media, both social media and product browsing platforms will dominate this preparatory stage. But consumers also might think it is appropriate to turn the browsing and buying behaviour into a social event. Then you will need to text or maybe use some form of social media to organise your friends into a group. Are you going to eat or just have coffee? How much money do I have? The amount of preparation depends on the good or service required. So going to the corner shop is a few minutes preparation. Perhaps a quick ‘anyone else wanting anything?’ to other people and a check on keys and phone and out. Holidays however are a product that is marketed immediately after Christmas and into New Year which is a good six months before families usually go on holiday during the school holidays in summer so there’s plenty time for preparation there.

As well as there being a wide variation in the time to prepare for purchase both in structuring the social rituals surrounding shopping and in the scrutiny of the costs and benefits of the different alternatives, this is an area where individual differences can occur. The study of differences between people has been a theme in the history of

psychology from the earliest origins of the discipline (Revelle, Wilt, & Condon, 2011) and psychologists have established various ways of assessing these differences ranging from multiple choice questionnaires to in-depth interview schedules. One such difference is called 'Need for cognition' (Cacioppo & Petty, 1982) which is measured using items like 'finding satisfaction by deliberating hard and for long hours' and 'preferring a life to be filled with puzzles to be solved' and asking respondents how much they agree or disagree with them. Need for cognition would appear to be a likely candidate to identify those consumers who spend much time and mental energy browsing different consumer options for products from those who make rapid choices on limited information.

The late Herbert Simon argued that we are not always rational and thought that our irrationality took specific forms and was worth exploring. He coined the term 'satisficing', a hybrid of 'satisfy' and 'suffice' to describe how we make up our minds in real life. He also referred to rationality as bounded i.e. limited by the fact we are human and cannot mentally take into account all available information when selecting the best course of action. Imagine a consumer facing a major decision of which house to buy. There are a range of sources to browse through: local estate agents shops, local newspapers, dedicated web sites like *Zoopla* in the UK. So the potential buyer will have a good idea of how much he or she needs to spend to get what she wants and will settle for a 'good enough' choice. The decision making tree has many branches and not all of them will be explored. In his original paper Simon (1955) laid out the mathematical specification for rational choice. This usually consists of systematic evaluation of the utilities of all the different possible courses of action and he then argued that there is no evidence that human decision makers ever adhere to this or could possibly do so. Consequently at some point in exploring all the possible alternatives of buying this or that the consumer needs to stop and decide what would be a satisfactory price to pay and which one to choose. Simon argued that 'level of aspiration' would be a suitable candidate from 'psychological theory' (op. cit., p. 104) but with the benefit of over 60 years of hindsight we could consider other candidates such as need for cognition.

## Consummation

This is buying; purchasing goods and services. I have called it consummation because the consumption cycle bears a close resemblance in my opinion to a behavioral sequence with buying as the consummatory act. This does not imply that a behaviorist approach will dominate theorizing in the book and I shall adopt an eclectic stance to theory. Consummation is closure where the preceding stages lead to this final stage and it's usually used in English as descriptive of eating or sex. I have extended the meaning to include shopping behaviour. The literature on shopping is extensive even if we restrict it to the underlying consumer psychology of shopping so in this section I shall only cover a fraction of the available literature.

There is a large area of research on sex differences in shopping that demonstrate women differ from men in several ways. For example, women's store loyalty is more influenced by their satisfaction obtained from interaction with store employees, while for men loyalty is more influenced by satisfaction with impersonal dimensions and the store chain rather than the individual store (Audrain-Pontevia & Vanhuele, 2016). In another study (Tifferet & Herstein, 2012) women showed higher levels of brand commitment and higher levels of impulse buying than men, although there is a caveat that these differences are product dependent. In grocery shopping men (in comparison to women) considered price attributes of products as being significantly lower in importance, displayed lower levels of price involvement, reported referencing shelf price to a lesser extent, gave lesser consideration to promotional tactics focusing on low price, and bought on average fewer items but spent more money for each item they bought (Mortimer & Weeks, 2011). Some of these may confirm stereotypes of gender as High Street shopping is a public display and theatrical to some extent but the recent rise and rise of online purchasing might produce different results on gender differences. In a valuable study Phang, Kankanhalli, Ramakrishnan, and Raman (2010) investigated the role of demographic variables, including gender, on online searching a virtual store using 'clickstream data' which reflects the individual's own steps as a

consumer while visiting an online store (op. cit., p. 345) and so enables the researcher to distinguish and identify the different visit strategies used by consumers. It is already known that women seek leisure and enjoyment through shopping whereas men see it more as a job that has to be done (Bergadaa & Perrien, 1995). However online shopping does not have the same social milieu as High Street shopping as it is usually a solitary activity so would women still show different patterns of clickstreams compared with men? Not so. The analysis of over 1000 respondents and over 25,000 URL clicks showed no gender differences in the click patterns.

Bargains are sought by consumers and often these are driven not only by economic necessity to get the best value for money but by other needs as well. In an extensively referenced paper O'Donnell, Strebel, and Mortimer (2015) coined the phrase 'Sport Shopper' to describe those shoppers who view bargain shopping as achievement. These are people who already enjoy shopping as a recreational activity and also enjoy and celebrate obtaining the best bargains going. The authors did this research in the USA and hopefully future research will emerge in other cultures such as China where retail consumption is growing.

But the shopping basket, or collection of branded collectable store bags swung over one arm, or the delivery truck from Amazon that inconveniently arrives when you are out; these are not quite the end of the shopping expedition, sprint, or marathon. Because there is a price to pay for all this fun online or excited browsing in the mall. Paying often involves waiting in line and the store will have a policy of minimizing the time between finishing shopping and paying so ensuring that there are plenty tills and they are all staffed. The shop manager will ensure that. So the line between goods-in-the-basket/trolley and payment is also usually filled with distractors like sweets for families shopping and is designed to get you out as soon as possible. Why? Once a decision to consummate i.e. purchase is made, there is a discomfort which is often called post-purchase conflict resolution or cognitive dissonance because you will have inevitably rejected some alternative brands that you liked to some extent in favour of the one you decided on. Other words used are 'purchase regret' and 'buyer's remorse'. We'll discuss this in more detail when we look at the next stage.

## Exploration

You have arrived home, put the bags down, switched the kettle on and sat down. Or you ordered online and there is a very large cardboard box for not such a big purchase waiting for you at home. “Well, let’s see what we bought!” This stage in the consumption cycle is a relatively under-researched area although I shall give you some analyses and descriptions from psychology and social science that can explain some of it. Firstly the box is opened, the layers of paper and plastic are removed and there is what you have spent your money on. There are several things that have happened. The purchase has changed location. It is no longer in the store or in the catalogue—it is here in the everyday, ordinary setting of your home. You now own it—it belongs to you. If someone else had bought it for you and it was seen as a gift then there is some more in the way of rituals and the psychology of gift giving will be explored in Chapter 10 in a section on “[Gift-Giving](#)”. The purchase has been made and no doubt if you chose it there were other similar possible purchases in the store or on the website that you also liked but didn’t select. You then are in a position of rejecting something you also liked and your mood might change slightly. You feel regret after your choice.

Now it’s time to look at these important changes in more detail. The changes in mood are often due to cognitive dissonance and we’ll look at that in the next paragraph. The changes in the role of the purchase from being on show and in public to being in the house and home could be described as a shift from sacred to profane, a term used by Durkheim and discussed later in Chapter 2 in section called “[Émile Durkheim and Sacred/Profane](#)”. You now own the purchase. The change in value simply as a consequence of ownership is called the endowment effect. It occurs when you own the purchase and it becomes part of you. Trading it later can occur of course but it is often perceived by you as a loss which you are averse to. Consequently you will value it more when you try and sell it and will often want more money than you originally gave for it.

Cognitive dissonance can occur when two thoughts in our minds contradict each other. In the context of consumer choice one might be

the knowledge that I didn't buy that smartphone and the other could be the belief that the smartphone I rejected was one that I liked and had many good points, although not as many as the one I chose. These two thoughts about what I did (reject one brand in favour of another, chosen one) and what I thought (the rejected one was still a good option) because they are in a dissonant state create a state of mental discomfort which itself drives certain changes in one's mind. Research on cognitive dissonance is extensive and it would not be appropriate to summarise the various summaries that are available (e.g. Harmon-Jones & Harmon-Jones, 2007) so I have selected the most recent (at the time of writing) and relevant summary at least for consumer psychology i.e. Hinojosa et al. (2017). I have taken the key concepts as laid out in their Table 1 and applied them to the situation called exploration in the consumer cycle. The dissonance is found in a free consumer choice and we are assuming that the choice made is not perfect and there is some dissonance between the linked cognitions described as 'I bought *Apple* smartphone', 'I didn't buy *Samsung*' and 'I liked *Samsung*'. This state of dissonance acts as a driver or motivation to change one's thoughts in a direction where the dissonance is reduced. If for example *Apple* as a brand is firmly embedded in the consumer's mind with other associated concepts like 'innovative', 'cool', 'sophisticated' and so on whereas *Samsung* does not have this privileged branding and is less linked and in that sense a weaker brand then the easiest way to reduce dissonance is to devalue *Samsung* on the lines of 'I never really liked *Samsung* anyway' to enhance one's choice of *Apple*. Devaluing *Apple* requires more mental work. If both the mental representations in the mind of the consumer of *Apple* and *Samsung* are difficult to change then another dissonance reduction strategy might be to trivialize the decision on the lines of 'why bother thinking this matters? Surely there are more important things in life than deciding between different makes of phones!' These and other strategies and theories involve the self-construct for example and go far beyond the simple theory put forward by Leon Festinger in the 1950s but can be found in Hinojosa et al. (op. cit.).

Is that the end of the cycle? Purchase has been made and the product enters the environment of the home. It doesn't stop there and the history of what we own and how we use these possessions forms a

large and essential part of this book. I need though to include in the rest of the consumption cycle not just the process of how goods that we acquire seep into the fabric of our life at home, at work or at leisure but also how they become part of our mental equipment. Because that is consumer psychology and although psychologists have been quick to advocate the importance of people in our lives and how that is an important factor for both mental health and happiness, less attention has been devoted to the world of stuff. Some things that we buy are consumed quickly and then replenished while others are more permanent and might sit there in the various rooms that we call home.<sup>3</sup> They acquire extra meaning and sometimes can become part of lives and become wrapped up in that peculiar mixture of nostalgia for memories from the past and desire to renew that constitutes home.

Two processes then can occur and I have called them dissolution and appreciation. The latter will be dealt with when we look at ownership and possession in detail in Chapter 10 although I have included a section here also and will mention usage and maintenance as two important ways we treat our purchases and gifts. Dissolution will be looked at in the last section here. These two pathways diverge in that one is where we try and get rid of things and the other is where we keep them. In both cases we transform and change them although where this is obvious in dissolution it is less obvious and needs some explaining in the appreciation phase. One final comment and that is the goods that we receive for ourselves and our home are not necessarily bought and we need to deal with the psychology of gift giving and receiving in Chapter 10 as the structure of these rituals underwrites so much of the theory of exchange which is the lynch pin of much consumer behaviour.<sup>4</sup>

## **Ownership and Possession: Routines and Renewal**

This is the first part of how we look after our goods (and services, although this is intangible and less obvious). A more thorough psychological analysis of ownership and possession will be given later in Chapters 10 and 11. However for many items we buy, we need to

maintain them and also to refresh them. This does not just mean keeping up with fashion and buying a new dress, suit, or trainers<sup>5</sup> but it also means a more regular, routine based ritual called family shopping. This will take place once a week depending on the size of the family, often on Sunday and we'll look at that shortly.

For some major items like homes,<sup>6</sup> purchase can also be an investment. Buying 'off plan' can see the value of the property increase when the plans are transformed into bricks and mortar. In a market where demand outstrips supply, a 10% deposit at the off plan stage can see a profit of 10% taken at the full price purchase stage although property markets at the time of writing are quite volatile depending on which region of the UK is being looked at. On the other hand cars, another major item for many families, if bought new, slump in value and the AA (2017) estimate 20% of the new car value (bought new) is lost each year of ownership. Even for big ticket items for some people the fact that no-one has lived in this place before or no-one has driven this car before me could have high perceived value and needs to be factored into the consumer psychology behind purchase. 'Second-hand' could be anathema for some people and although there is some work done on this in psychology relating it to basic emotions such as disgust and prejudice based on fear of contamination (see Hodson & Costello, 2007), there is little consumer research in this specific area of dislike for second-hand goods. There is however research into 'brand new' or rather 'unspoilt' in the context of leisure tourism and the appeal of the wild. For example Vistad and Vorkinn (2012) have established that the concept of purism, a concept characterised by high expectations of and sensitivity to variations in the quality of something, was relevant to the wilderness experience where pristine and untouched would be the words that immediately come to mind as desirable end states. There is a parallel here with the 'nose against the shop window' approach one gets in videos on TV or the internet about the lives of the ultra-rich and famous where the bar is raised to a ridiculous level concerning the quality of hotel rooms, private yachts, jets or hide-away secret islands. Contamination or any indication that other people have been there or used any of the facilities is forbidden. Maintenance is often necessary to maintain the value of the purchase and if they are on public display they

might need to be cleaned, polished, ironed, or scrubbed. Although with present day materials this is not quite the chore it was in previous generations and today's family can wear no-iron clothes or else hang them up damp in centrally heated rooms, and order meals online and have them delivered by *Deliveroo*.

## Brand Loyalty Revisited

Many families will go shopping to supermarkets and repeat purchases are made over the weeks and months as brand loyalty builds up and one's supermarket checkout bill becomes more predictable, providing a signature for marketers to identify and classify your patterns of consumption. The usual scenario of brand loyalty however for repeat purchase goods (known as **F**ast **M**oving **C**onsumer **G**oods or FMCGs) is a simple one where there is a cycle of initial purchase leading to consumer satisfaction then repeat purchase and so on. It involves some psychology and the model can be modified by replacing the goal of 'repeat purchase' with achieving the goal of getting on the mental shortlist of those brands or generic products that might be ranked according to their substitutability should the most preferred brand not be available. The marketer then might aim to get on to the shortlist of customers' likely purchases of, for example lunch box items for their children.

However the metaphor of customers being loyal to brands is in my opinion looking rather limited and stale and needs some refreshing. Hollebeek (2011) uses the term engagement that seems to have greater potential for linking into a variety of consumer psychological processes relevant for consumption (op. cit., Table 2). So engagement can operate behaviorally, cognitively and emotionally; it can vary in intensity; it can invade various identities that constitute the self<sup>7</sup> and so on. In addition FMCG shopping is a recurring activity that for large families can occur twice a week with the occasional forays to corner shops and branded supermarket city centre retail outlets such as *Tesco Metro*. So we have a complex environment and a simple model of purchasing certain FMCGs during the main family shop can be replaced with engagement with both brands and site whether it's *Waitrose*, *Lidl*, or *Tesco*. Shopping

strategy could be for example using two sites, say *Waitrose* for perceived quality and service and *Lidl* for cheapness and one can end up choosing different, less familiar brands of chocolate and wine at *Lidl* because of the ambience<sup>8</sup> of the place. And then a farm shop<sup>9</sup> for fresh vegetables.

In summary from renewing and refreshing household stock with supermarket shopping, to buying and looking after major investments like a house or a car both of which will last for years are all everyday consumer activities. Not all of us will have invested in these, and we might rent and use public transport, but at some stage in the life cycle there's a chance that house and car maintenance will form part of our lives as consumers.

## Dissolution

Getting rid of the waste products from daily consumption in the household is a well-defined activity in the UK although there are regional variations. In many households a regular output of bottles, cans, plastic, and paper are sorted inside the home into recycling or landfill and placed in the appropriate bins in the street where they are emptied by the local authorities at regular intervals. At the time of writing local town and regional councils in the UK are trying to operate with shrinking budgets and cutting back landfill collections is one such economy councils can make although at the time of writing recycling services are still operating at regular weekly intervals. In other poorer parts of the world such as Freetown, Sierra Leone trash dumps are scavenged by young children (Action Aid, 2015) with the consequent risks of disease.

That's the simplest way of ridding ourselves of things we don't want but there are other ways of enabling these unwanted products to re-enter the world of goods and services in different forms. Starting immediately after the exploration phase then if you don't like or want what you bought, maybe it doesn't fit properly or it looks hideous on, then take it back and get your money back. Shops compete with each other for customers so expect to be given that facility and use it. It can be abused where some customers who don't want to try on different clothes in the shop buy three or four and take back the ones they don't want and get fully refunded.

Goods that enter the household are often redistributed within the family when the owner has finished with them. For example 60 years ago in the UK as children got older and outgrew their clothes these were then transferred to younger family members. This has fallen out of use now and children's clothes are sold cheaply in supermarkets such as *Asda* in the UK with their line of *George* clothes. However redistribution of possessions in the family is an interesting solution which is economically useful and reminds us that any discussion of individual consumer behaviour and the underlying psychology should not neglect decision making at a collective level by the household or family for example. The direction of redistribution need not just be from older to younger and ownership can be collective where sisters share clothes and cosmetics. In my case as an older member of my family I get a smart-phone when my daughter upgrades! Little research has been done on the traffic of goods within families, especially larger more extended families.

Often clothes and other stuff will 'disappear into the closet' which means 'out of sight—out of mind'. You can't see it so your home is 'tidy' but it's not gone and you can always get it as it's still part of your home. But the problem of how to get rid of stuff hasn't gone away. Hoarding in the sense of being unable to let go of possessions has a pathological aspect and has now entered the standard diagnostic manual (DSM-V) for psychiatrists and clinical psychologists (see Mataix-Cols et al., 2010). However for many people the need to 'clear out' unwanted stuff that's been 'cluttering up' parts of the home becomes urgent.<sup>10</sup> There are various solutions to this problem of too much stuff. Town and regional Councils will often offer to remove unwanted goods, given enough notice and for a small fee (see Brosius, Fernandez, & Cherrier, 2013, p. 290, Table 1 for an international perspective). Also, what used to be known as 'the tip' has been resurrected as a recycling centre and upgraded with drive-in bays for different categories of recyclable goods. This resource is often offered free, with charges for certain materials and some offer re-sale facilities with good bargains, although this is by no means consistent across the UK. A recent TV series on the BBC (BBC, 2018) called *Money for Nothing*, involved entrepreneurial presenter Sarah Moore getting items for free from users of a recycling

centre, renovating them and putting them up for sale or in some cases constructing a new object. This morality tale means that value can still be found from objects that the user doesn't want and encourages repairing as an option on the agenda. There's another story though which is that items that appear to be at the end of their life are not just to be disposed of in an environmentally more acceptable way but can be used as raw material to construct better, more aesthetic and desirable objects. Brosius et al. (2013) used the term 'lateral recycling' to describe this process of reusing; the example cited by the authors is one which many of us will recognise as it's using a bottle for a lamp base. Add *Chianti* as the brand name with some melted candle tallow on the glass and we have contributed the dubious added value of iconic kitsch. When Sarah Moore asks customers to give her their unwanted items at the recycling centre she will use these scavenged fragments to construct tables for example which retail for three and four figure sums. Time will tell whether this will be tomorrow's kitsch. Brosius et al. (op. cit.) borrows the term 'inorganic collection'<sup>11</sup> to cover foraging usable material from skips (dumpsters). For example renovation can increase value and dismantling and reconstruction can produce a different more up-to-date product. Here is another example of the blurring of the role of production and consumption.

## Toward a Theory of Recycling

Before we leave this topic it might be worthwhile putting together the elements of a theory that can cover repair, renovation, disposal, re-use, 'prosumption',<sup>12</sup> consumption, production, recycling and variations on that theme. These terms (and I'm sure there are others) are used frequently. Let's say you've bought a mid-range product/brand e.g. a new steam cleaner that sprays steam over the floor with a cloth attachment that wipes it up or it can be used to clean stoves, showers, bathroom surfaces etc. It works, it's new, and you are learning so it has a life in the ecology of the household where it lives in a cupboard in the kitchen and is used frequently. You reorder some fresh cloths through Amazon as the original one gets worn and then you blow a fuse in the plug and

have to replace the fuse so you have repaired it to that extent. Gradually you become less interested and the appliance ceases to having a privileged existence in the kitchen cupboard and is relegated to the shed out back. You are now (a year or so later) looking for a high end version that produces proper steam as you noticed the old one (that's what you call it) is only producing a thin jet and it's something to do with hard water but you don't want to know.<sup>13</sup> Many purchases for the household have a limited performance time on the front line as it were and soon drift to places of rest. I suppose you will have a place where these objects lie whether it's the cupboard under the stairs, the shed/garage, or simply migration to the unreachable and untouched recesses of closets, drawers, cupboards or shelves.<sup>14</sup> The days of purchase, excited unwrapping, assembly and trying out your toys for grown-ups from a new car to a *NutriBullet* are in the past.

Its time has come. Spring is here and the indulgence and consumption of the various winter festivals are firmly in the past and growth and newness is all around. It's time to get rid of all that stuff gathering dust in parts of the home. There are various ways of doing this and they all involve various degrees of transformation. We've already described 'disappear' which is an 'out of sight, out of mind' change and the next would be repair and restore where needle and thread are used on clothes (an increasingly rare and uncommon activity), walls are given a layer of paint<sup>15</sup> and even stripped pine dressers and tables get the cool grey treatment. But for some stuff banishment is the only solution. The most radical (and illegal) of these is fly-tipping which, as councils cut back on spending for essential services related to disposal is becoming a serious problem in the UK. For many of us though some variation on the theme of constructive transformation of our junk, garbage, rubbish<sup>16</sup> is *de rigueur* these days. It is premised on the assumption there is worth and value there, if we can transform it. Sometimes the value is intrinsic and intangible and within the act itself. I am learning something about my life as a consumer when I religiously separate packaging into landfill, plastic, glass, paper etc. It's a background part of many consumers' lives these days and incidental learning<sup>17</sup> occurs. I know that my life spent sorting stuff at home into different bins is a tiny ineffective contribution to the world's problems