

Consumers, Policy and the Environment

A Tribute to Folke Ölander

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Edited by

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FOREWORD

Professor Folke Ölander celebrates his 70th birthday the 21st of July 2005. With this "Festschrift", Folke Ölander's colleagues and collaborators over the years want to honour him and to express their appreciation of his life-long contribution to research, especially research within the themes reflected in the title of this volume: Consumers, Policy and the Environment.

Having established close collaboration with European economic psychology's grand old man, Karl-Erik Wärneryd, already during his PhD study, Folke Ölander became an active contributor to the development of economic psychology as a research field in Europe. When the International Association for Research in Economic Psychology (IAREP) was founded in 1982, Folke Ölander was present, and he was president of IAREP in 1989-1991. Folke Ölander has played an equally influential role in European and international consumer policy research. Together with Gerhard Scherhorn and Norbert Reich, he was a founding editor of the *Journal of Consumer Policy* in 1977, a position he has held until 2005. Folke Ölander has also been very active in Nordic consumer policy and in Nordic consumer research since the 70s. He played a crucial part in the Nordic workshop "Consumer and Society" in 1978 and organized the workshop on "Road to consumer influence" in Helsinki in 1986. He has been a member of the Nordic Consumer Committee under the Nordic Council of Ministers since 1994. In this committee he has taken part in the development of a Nordic consumer research programme, and in organising the program since 1996. As the chairperson of an Expert Committee for Consumer Affairs, set down by the Danish Minister of Trade and Industry 1999-2002, he has put additional marks on Danish consumer policy research.

It is a characteristic trait of Folke Ölander that he has never been very eager to get credit for his achievements. What matters to him is furthering knowledge and research. Especially after he got his chair in Economic Psychology at Aarhus School of Business (ASB), Denmark, in 1975, he has been determined in his effort to support the building of viable and thriving research communities and to facilitate and tutor the research of others, especially younger colleagues. In these past 30 years, he has served as member and often chairperson of several research-granting bodies, in Denmark, Norway, and at the Nordic level, including a period as chairperson of the Danish Social Science Research Council. He served as Associate

Dean for Research and Chairman of the Faculty Research Committee at the Faculty of Business Administration at ASB for 14 years. Also, many younger researchers at ASB and elsewhere, among them several of the contributors to this volume, are immensely indebted to Folke Ölander for his competent and empathetic mentoring and tutoring.

Folke Ölander's research can be classified into four broad (and overlapping) phases. In the first phase, Folke Ölander studied psychology at Stockholm University, Department of Psychology where he received his doctoral degree in 1963. In his dissertation work, Folke Ölander focused on the theory and measurement of preferences. His supervisor was the founder of economic psychology in Scandinavia, professor Karl-Erik Wärneryd, Stockholm School of Economics.

After his doctorate, Folke Ölander continued his work in Wärneryd's group at Stockholm School of Economics where he was affiliated until 1972, followed by a couple of years at the International Institute of Management at the Wissenschaftszentrum, Berlin. In this period, Folke Ölander's research focused on core subjects in economic psychology, such as consumer saving, as well as on subjects of interest for the field of marketing, such as consumer reactions to prices, new products, and advertising. He also studied more basic issues of human behaviour, such as reasons why attitudes and behaviour are not always consistent, how to inform the public in an ethically sound and effective way, and various methodological issues. Last but not least he engaged in – and organized a symposium on – consumer action research, a topic which contributed to the first agenda of the *Journal of Consumer Policy*.

Since the mid 1970s, approximately from the time when Folke Ölander moved to Aarhus School of Business and into a Chair in economic psychology, Folke Ölander's main research interest has been consumer policy, though there have been changes in the specific issues he focused on. During the whole period he has been Editor of the *Journal of Consumer Policy*. Among more specific subjects, he produced important contributions to the understanding of consumer satisfaction, dissatisfaction, and complaint behaviour in the late 70s and early 80s. Later in the 1980s, the consumer and consumer policy-relevant aspects of the newly emerging electronic media and electronic means of payment became another important research area for Folke Ölander. His active interest in all these subjects continued well into the 1990s.

However, since the early 1990s, Folke Ölander's main research interest has been problems related to the interplay between consumer behaviour and the natural environment, still very much with a consumer policy angle. Based on the view that consumers have an interest in a non-polluted environment as well as rights and responsibilities in this connection, his research in this period focused on ways to empower

consumers and facilitate their active contribution to conservation and environmental protection. Other signs of his commitment to environmental research are that Folke Ölander served four years as a member of the board of the Centre for Social Science Research on the Environment in the second half of the 1990s and that since 1996 he has been a member of two Programme Committees for Research on Sustainable Development set down by the Norwegian Research Council.

The contributions to this volume are written by people, who feel indebted to Folke Ölander, by people who want to show their respect and appreciation for what he has done to further the field. However, the various chapters are also intended to make scientific contributions to those fields which over the decades have been of interest to Folke Ölander.

The contributions to this volume fall into five loosely defined groups. The first “group” consists of a reprint of one of Folke Ölander’s own articles, where he argues that consumer psychology is not necessarily, and not predominantly, a manipulative science. The empirical basis for this conclusion is a content analysis of a decade of articles published in the *Journal of Consumer Research* and the *Journal of Economic Psychology*, considered leading journals in the field in North America and Europe, respectively. No single publication can do justice to Folke Ölander’s life-long contribution, but this one is in many ways a signature publication reflecting Folke Ölander’s commitment to research and its responsibility to society.

The second group contains five contributions that in different ways put a historical perspective on consumer research. Mathios and Meyer analyse how research on environmental issues has been represented in the *Journal of Consumer Policy*. Wärneryd’s analysis of how the consumer has been portrayed by thinkers over the ages extends the historical analysis even further. Using historical data from Dutch and German households, Brandstätter explores the personality roots of an important economic activity, consumer saving. Neuner, Raab and Reisch also perform a historical and comparative analysis, but this time of what may be considered the reverse of saving, namely compulsive buying, which they analyse as a consumer policy issue in East and West Germany after the reunion. Finally Friedman provides a participant-observer report on the role of behavioural research in the congressional hearings on the “truth bills” (truth-in-packaging and truth-in-lending) in the USA.

The third group consists of two contributions discussing individuals’ dual interest as a consumer and a citizen. Uusitalo discusses consumers as citizens in the light of three approaches to collective consumer problems and Grønmo discusses relationships among consumer interests and other interests and their implications for consumer policy.

The fourth group contains six contributions dealing with the politics of consumption in its broadest sense. Rask Jensen discusses the politization of consump-

tion with reference to the Brent Spar and other similar incidence(s). Julander and Söderlund discuss and investigate whether physically attractive models in advertisements still have the positive effects on attitudes towards the advertised product that they were found to have in the 1960s, in a historical setting where equality between the sexes was a much less dominating value than in present day Scandinavia. Maynes gives a critical account of present day marketing, which he characterizes as a consumer disaster. Imkamp investigates whether “better” companies provide “better” products and services. Hansen discusses the consumer policy problems related to market transparency on the Internet. Finally, Kemp investigates the consumer psychology of what he calls “near-money”, which is another means of facilitating exchanges than money such as points in a barter circle and the miles and bonus points issued by flight companies.

Contributions in the fifth and final group deal with consumers and the environment. In the first of these chapters, Beckmann suggests a macromarketing approach to sustainability issues seen from the perspective of the consumer. Scherhorn proposes a path to joined sustainability of consumption and production, where the market no longer functions as a collective action *against* but *for* sustainability, where consumer sovereignty works as a guideline for producer behaviour, and where sustainability is backed by a differentiated understanding of competition. Thøgersen discusses environmental regulation from an economic psychology perspective arguing that it is important to be aware of possible side effects of the chosen means of regulation. Finally, Stø, Throne-Holst and Vittersø discuss the role of consumers in environmental successes based on four Norwegian cases reflecting different degrees of success.

A lot of people have contributed to making this book possible. First of all we want to express our gratitude to the authors without whom there would be no book. Secondly we want to thank Birgitte Steffensen for her competent and enthusiastic effort with regard to perfecting the language and producing a camera-ready manuscript for the publisher from a quite diverse set of manuscripts. Thirdly, we want to thank the Faculty of Business Administration at Aarhus School of Business for funding the secretarial and technical assistance needed to produce the book. Finally, we want to thank publishing house Kluwer (now part of Springer), long-time publisher of the Journal of Consumer Policy, for enthusiastically agreeing to publish this book.

Together with the authors we want to congratulate Folke Ölander on his 70th birthday and wish him health and happiness in the years to come. We hope and expect to continue to benefit from Folke Ölander’s stimulating inputs also when he has taken on his new position as Emeritus.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Professor Fil.lic., Dr.h.c. Folke Ölander

Personal data: Professor Dr. Folke Ölander, born 1935 in Sweden, married to Marlene Ölander.

ACADEMIC AND PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE

Studied psychology at the University of Stockholm ending with a PhD degree in 1963. Positions at the Stockholm School of Economics and the International Institute of Management at the Wissenschaftszentrum, Berlin until 1975 where he became Professor of Economic Psychology at Department of Marketing, later Department of Marketing, Informatics and Statistics, at Aarhus School of Business, Denmark.

Visiting Foreign Scholar (invited by the Social Science Research Canada), University of Guelph, Ontario, Canada, 1982; Visiting Professor, The Norwegian Fund for Market and Distribution Research, Oslo, 1988; Visiting Scholar, Department of Psychology, University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand, 1999; Visiting Scholar, Ludwigshafen University of Applied Sciences, Germany, 2004.

Former President of the International Association for Research in Economic Psychology (IAREP), 1989-1991.

Editor of Journal of Consumer Policy, published by Springer, from its inception in 1977 to 2005.

ADMINISTRATIVE EXPERIENCE

At Aarhus School of Business, Folke Ölander was Associate Dean for Research and Chairman of the Faculty Research Committee 1989-2003.

Member of the Danish Social Science Research Council, 1976-1984, and Chairman of the Council, 1983-1984.

Chairman of the Expert Committee for Consumer Affairs, set down by the Danish Minister of Trade and Industry 1999-2002.

Member of the Executive Board of the Danish Institute for Social Research (SFI), 1982-1984, and member of the Board of Forskningsinstitut for Human Ernærning, Copenhagen, a Danish government-sponsored multidisciplinary research

unit in the area of human nutrition, 1986 – 1996. Member of the board of the Centre for Social Science Research on the Environment under the Danish Environmental Research Programme 1997 – 2001. Member of the Nordic Consumer Committee under Nordic Council of Ministers since 1994 and a member of two Programme Committees for Research on Sustainable Development set down by the Norwegian Research Council since 1996.

TEACHING AREAS

Consumer behaviour.

Consumers and the environment.

ACADEMIC AWARDS

Honorary doctorate at the Stockholm School of Economics in 1999.

Received the Reinhold W. Jorck Prize for Scientific Research in 1986, and the Danish Industry Prize for Research in Marketing in 1990.

Chapter 1

CONSUMER PSYCHOLOGY: NOT NECESSARILY A MANIPULATIVE SCIENCE

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Aarhus School of Business, Denmark

INTRODUCTION*

Although definitions and discussions of disciplinary borderlines are tedious and often not that useful, it has to be mentioned that in this paper, a distinction is made between *consumer* psychology and *economic* psychology, with the former regarded as a subfield of the latter. Traditionally, economic psychology has indeed to a large extent been identified with consumer behaviour research (for an account of the historical development of economic psychology, see Wärneryd, 1988). But what most writers seem to agree about today is to regard not only consumer behaviour proper, but also the way individuals and households perceive and react to economic phenomena such as taxation and other economic policies, inflation, and economic growth or decline as central topics of economic psychology.¹

* Reprinted with the kind permission of Blackwell Publishing. Appeared in: Ölander, F. (1990) Consumer Psychology: Not necessarily a manipulative science. *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 39 (1), 1990, 105-126.

¹ Nowadays, some authors wish to include also studies of business and entrepreneurial behaviour in economic psychology, although the boundaries are somewhat diffuse. To the extent that the study of manager and employee motivation and productivity is regarded as part of economic psychology it is usually viewed in a macro perspective (van Raaij, 1981; Wärneryd, 1988) or in an individual welfare perspective (Lea, Tarpy & Webley, 1987) rather than as a problem for the firm. The *Annual Review of Psychology* takes a radically different position by classifying “consumer psychol-

These phenomena, however, seem rather to affect the individual in the role of *citizen*, ie, at least as much in the role of worker/producer as in the role of consumer. Thus, although such phenomena are undoubtedly relevant topics of economic psychology, it seems appropriate to restrict the term *consumer psychology*, as a subfield of economic psychology, to studies of the determinants and impacts of (a) saving/spending patterns and credit use, and (b) the purchase, use, and disposal of goods and services, supplied in markets or under market-like conditions. This is the delineation used in the rest of the paper.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF CONSUMER PSYCHOLOGY TO GENERAL PSYCHOLOGY

There are many good reasons why the study of consumer behaviour should be relevant for our understanding of human behaviour in general. We spend a substantial part of our waking lives engaged in it, and it is for most of us a significant part. The events that can be studied are usually highly meaningful to subjects (certainly in comparison with many other areas of behaviour studied by psychologists, especially in their laboratories). In particular, perhaps, consumer behaviour can be seen as providing an ideal testing-ground for the study of how people receive and handle *information* which is meaningful, which is presented through different media and with different structure, and which is usually combined with prior knowledge stored in the memory (Bettman, 1986, Wærneryd, 1988). In addition, consumer *decision making* lends itself to the testing of psychological theories of how choices are made among multiple alternatives on the basis of multiple attributes, with or without the formation of a general evaluation or *attitude* towards the choice objects (K.G. Grunert, 1988).

It is also in these very areas that consumer psychology has to date made its most important contributions to general psychology. Taking models from cognitive psychology, attitude theory (in particular the Fishbein-Ajzen formulation), and decision theory as starting-points, consumer behaviour researchers have not only carried out a substantial number of tests of such models. They have also (as described by K.G. Grunert, 1988) built their own, sometimes even more complex multi-attribute decision models (for a review, see Lutz, 1981, and for some recent contributions, Miniard & Cohen, 1983. Warshaw, Sheppard & Hartwick, 1983). New research

ogy" as a subdivision of "personnel and organisational psychology"; I doubt that many consumer psychologists would agree with that categorisation.

techniques for information processing study have also been invented, such as the information display board (Jacoby, 1977).

The interaction of *memory* with information acquisition and decision making has also been given much, and very qualified, treatment in the consumer psychology literature of the 1980s (see, eg Biehal & Chakravarti, 1986, and the excellent overview by Bettman, 1986). Recently, the relationship between cognition and *affect* has also been the subject of much empirical research and theory building in consumer psychology. It has been maintained, in line with arguments and findings from other branches of psychology, that there are several circumstances (in particular, low involvement in the subject matter of the decision) under which affect can precede cognition, thus restricting the applicability of the traditional models of attitude formation and of choice (Bagozzi, 1982, Batra & Ray, 1986, Derbaix & Vanden Abeele, 1985, Mittal, 1988, Peterson, Hoyer & Wilson, 1986).

The just mentioned, increased emphasis on affect is at the same time a sign of the general reorientation of consumer psychology that seems to take place. As in general psychology, cognitive models may have seen their heyday. Much research and journal space in consumer psychology are today devoted to the measurement of mood and affect; Hirschman and Holbrook (1982) are not alone in their insistence on correcting the neglect of emotive aspects in consumer behaviour research.

Consumer *learning* – and the formation of habits – is also receiving increased attention. While some of this research is still based on a cognitive approach (Bettman, 1986), non-cognitive learning paradigms are also being tested, especially with regard to the role of classical conditioning in reactions to advertising (Allen & Madden, 1985, Stuart, Shimp & Eagle 1987). More generally, a call has been made (both by Derbaix & Vanden Abeele, 1985, and by Grunert, 1988) for increased attention to the presumed importance of “automatic” processing (Schneider & Shiffrin, 1977) in consumer behaviour. Automatic processes – which can be cognitive, affective, or conative – are contrasted with the more changeable and task-related “strategic” processes hitherto dominating the cognitive consumer research paradigm.

Need formation is not of prime interest in consumer research of the cognitive kind since it only triggers the more interesting decision-making processes (Dholakia, McIntyre & Joy, Note 1; Grunert, 1988). It may well be, however, as held by Lea et al. in their review of a number of theories about human motivation (1987, pp. 485-508), that economic behaviour is an important field in which to test motivational theories of wide psychological generality. It is thus unfortunate – as pointed out also by Lea et al. – that so little exists in terms of empirical evidence, on which to base an opinion about the relevance and applicability of these theories to the understanding

of consumer behaviour. Whether this insight will lead to a comeback of the study of economic motivation remains to be seen.

The sophisticated research into consumer information processing and decision making has certainly contributed to the advancement of psychological theory in general. However, Wärneryd (1988) is probably right in asserting that with this exception, the study of consumers has contributed rather little to the development of psychological theories or methods. The direction of influence is usually from general psychology to consumer psychology rather than vice versa. Thus, at present, the main message from consumer psychologists to the community of psychological researchers at large, is that consumer behaviour provides an excellent *arena* for the testing of general psychological theories. It is strongly to be wished that academic psychologists – in fields such as learning, motivation, and cognition – extend their testing-grounds also to consumer behaviour. Some U.S. social psychologists, interested in persuasive communication, have shown that interesting psychological theory can emerge from such attempts; for a recent example, see the forays into the consumer world by Petty and Cacioppo (Petty, Cacioppo & Schumann, 1983, Petty & Cacioppo, 1986).

THE SCEPTICAL ATTITUDE OF PSYCHOLOGISTS TO THE FIELD OF CONSUMER PSYCHOLOGY

Why is it, then, that the consumer role has attracted so little attention from academic psychologists? This as opposed, say, to the study of our behaviour as workers, a long-standing area of interest among psychologists. One explanation is close at hand: not only do most observers (including many consumer psychologists, as for example K.G. Grunert, 1988) regard consumer psychology as *applied psychology*, they often see the main role of consumer psychology as that of *assisting the marketing advertising industry*.

If perceiving such a link, many psychologists are inclined to stay out of bounds, coupling advertising and marketing with manipulative persuasion of a non-desirable nature. To assist business in perfecting the skills of such persuasion is not seen as a worthy cause for psychologists. And, certainly, there is some ground for such beliefs. Consumer psychology has traditionally had clear links with advertising and marketing research. Much scholarly research in the field is done by professors in business schools and university marketing departments, and several of these professors do a fair bit of consulting in industry. Some of the results of consumer psychology research are published in journals clearly set out to provide guidance for mar-

keters (eg *Journal of Marketing*, *Journal of Marketing Research*, *Psychology and Marketing*). Most textbooks, entitled “Consumer Behaviour” or some such, have a clear marketing orientation.

It is of course also true that *marketing* research investigates consumer reactions from the producer’s viewpoint. The goal is to find ways of influencing the consumer in a direction which is helpful in increasing profits. The consumer and marketing perspectives are indeed different (Wilkie, 1988); the observation made by Tucker (as cited by Anderson, 1983, p. 27) that marketers have a tendency to study the consumer “in the ways fishermen study fish rather than as marine biologists study them” seems quite pertinent.

Note, however, that *consumer* research is certainly *not identical* with marketing research. It would be totally untrue to conclude that most academic consumer behaviour research of recent years has been geared to the solution of concrete management problems. In effect, marketing practitioners often complain about the irrelevance of consumer research as carried out even by people affiliated with departments of marketing (E.C. Hirschman, 1986, pp. 433-434, quotes an especially pointed critic of this sort). A perusal of articles in consumer psychology indicates that direct recommendations to business – or even a business-initiated problem formulation – is the exception rather than the rule (see also the next section of this paper). To the extent that there is an influence from marketing on consumer psychology, it is of a more subtle nature.

Particularly in U.S consumer research, the influence has shown itself in the choice of both *independent* and *dependent* variables in studies conducted. There is more interest in independent variables which are under the seller’s control than in economic, social, and cultural factors often described as “exogeneous” variables. The dependent variable is most often at the level of brand or variant selection, which is central to the individual producer, but not necessarily so to the individual consumer. (For a harsh self-critique in this direction, concluding that consumer researchers have preferred to do studies at the “dog-food level of things”, a phrase borrowed from Saul Bellow, see a recent address by the then president of the U.S. Association of Consumer Research, Belk, 1987). Thus, intricate and sophisticated theories, or so it is held by people like Belk, are built to explain behaviour which from all viewpoints but a seller’s is utterly trivial.

In a later section of the paper, this possible one-sidedness will be further discussed, and some other uses for consumer psychology, and thereby also other research themes, will be sketched. Before that, in the next section a somewhat less impressionistic account of some of the facets of consumer psychology research will be given.

WHAT IS CURRENT CONSUMER PSYCHOLOGY ABOUT?

In this section, a coarse content analysis of articles published in consumer psychology during the 1980s will be presented. Selected for scrutiny were *empirical* research papers in the two leading journals in the U.S. and Europe, *Journal of Consumer Research* (JCR) and *Journal of Economic Psychology* (JEP), respectively. All papers published in JEP from its inception in 1981 to March 1988 were included, whereas JCR, which publishes many more papers in consumer psychology, is represented only by a random sample of issues (one for each year from 1981 to 1988).

All in all, 168 JEP papers and 105 JCR papers were scrutinised. As JEP publishes a large number of papers dealing with matters other than consumers and consumption (ie lying outside consumer psychology as defined at the outset of this paper), only 75 papers in that journal turned out to be of relevance to this investigation (out of the 168), whereas no fewer than 85 (out of the 105) JCR papers were relevant. In addition, eliminating purely theoretical and review papers narrowed down the final selection to 66 papers in JEP and 76 papers in JCR, and these constitute the data base for the simple analyses reported. (In several of the tables, *n* is slightly higher due to multiple classification of single papers.)

As one can see in Table 1, the classic experiment is represented to a larger extent in U.S. consumer research. In the overwhelming majority of these cases we are dealing with laboratory rather than field experiments.

However, non-experimental research dominates in both journals. Quite sophisticated statistical techniques are then often used to disentangle the causal relationships in the survey data collected.

Table 1. Research designs in consumer psychology

	JEP		JCR	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Experimental research	12	18	29	38
Non-experimental research of an <i>explanatory</i> nature	34	52	35	46
Non-experimental research of an <i>exploratory</i> nature	20	30	12	16
Total	66	100	76	100

As can be seen from Table 2, there is in U.S. research a heavy emphasis on *brand and variety choice*. Turning to JEP, one notices that European and other non-American authors (and editors) to a substantially larger degree wish to deal with choices at the level of *product class*. (Included in this category are, eg, choices be-

tween vacation abroad and in a summer house, between going by train or car to work, but also studies of who buys a car and who does not, and of deliberations as to whether to buy a new car now or later.) Fifteen and twenty-five per cent of the papers, respectively, deal with *budget allocation* matters. (This includes how much to spend on a category of goods as compared to another – eg food versus clothing; spending versus saving; the choice among ways of financing purchases; and other purchasing patterns of a more overriding nature.)

Table 2. Type and scope of phenomena studied

	JEP		JCR	
	<i>n</i>	% of papers	<i>n</i>	% of papers
Budget allocation matters	16	24	11	14
Product class choices	33	50	22	29
Brand/variety choice	12	18	37	49
Store patronage	2	3	2	3
Public Sector goods	1	2	1	1
Objects of “social” marketing	3	5	4	5
Irrelevant classification due to content of paper	5	8	5	7
Total	72		82	

As Table 3 makes evident, the individual consumer or household is emphatically in focus in typical academic research. Organised consumer co-operation is not examined at all. Consumer interaction in neighbourhoods, in the workplace, etc., are equally neglected. Aggregate consumer behaviour is also little used as a source of information, although a bit more common in the European journal. Furthermore, it is clear that even as regards the most common group studied in consumer research, the household or family, *one* person is normally supposed to provide all the information needed about the group’s attitudes and behaviours, and one seldom focuses upon actual interaction or conflict among the members of the household.

Consumers can be studied primarily in their role as *problem solvers*, ie in situations where they actively seek to structure the surrounding world, assiduously gather information, and deliberate upon self-formulated problems. In that process, they may perhaps also interact with other individuals. Consumers can also be studied, however, as *objects*, in the sense that one tries to find out how they react to stimuli which are controlled by other powers, such as sellers, mass media, or legislators.

I find this distinction between *deliberation and action*, on one hand, and *reaction*, on the other, rather important. An attempt has therefore been made to categorise the outlook of the papers in this respect. It is not a very easy classification, in particular as regards the distinction between studies of consumer decision processes, in which the consumer is allowed an active role and to carry out self-initiated behaviour, and those where the emphasis is placed on the impact of actions of others, typically the producer, on the consumer. Information search, eg, has been coded as *deliberation* if the study has tried to establish which of a series of information sources a consumer makes use of, whereas the use and effect of one particular Source of information, eg the response to the introduction of nutrition labels, has been regarded as consumer *reaction*. Studies of the think-aloud type, in which consumer decision processes, eg in the supermarket, are traced, have been regarded as studies of *deliberation*. This is in contrast to the very common investigation of consumer brand images in the form of multi-attribute models and the attitudes' correlation with buying intentions or actual purchasing, which have been regarded as studies of *reaction* because one is here primarily investigating how consumers perceive and react to one or more of the components of the producer's marketing mix: product content, perhaps also price and promotion.

Clearly, these distinctions are debatable and difficult to uphold consistently. I have therefore, in attempting to err on the conservative side, put many studies in the category "neither action/deliberation nor reaction". Even so, the data should be regarded with caution. Table 4 shows the results of the attempted classification.

It can be seen that of the papers that can fairly safely be classified as "action", "deliberation, or reaction", reaction dominates the picture in both journals. And in both journals, one is more interested in reactions to seller initiatives than to other kinds of external information. As a whole, JCR carries a somewhat larger number of papers of the "reaction" type, but at the same time, the study of "deliberation" – decision processes, information acquisition, etc. – is also more common in JCR. Again, studies of actions which entail consumers leaving their private world are very scarce indeed.

Table 3. Subjects studied: Individuals or groups

	JEP		JCR	
	<i>n</i>	% of papers	<i>n</i>	% of papers
Individual subjects representing only themselves	38	58	49	64
Individual subjects representing a whole household	13	20	20	30
Households (more than one member observed, or observation of aggregate output from the household)	11	17	2	3
Consumer organisations organised groups	0	0	0	0
Non-organised groups	1	2	4	5
Aggregate consumer behaviour	8	12	2	3
The study object cannot be determined	0	0	2	3
Total	71		79	

Thus, consumer research, undoubtedly to some extent as a result of the strong dominance of a cognitive approach, means studying the atomised individual or household. Because, in addition, the data seem to indicate that these individuals are most often studied in their reactions to stimuli impinging on them from the outside rather than as individuals solving problems that they themselves define and solve by carrying out a series of actions, ie as actors, Arndt's picture of consumer research as a field neglecting group behaviour and treating the consumer as an input-output machine ("the-experimenter-or-marketer-or-agency-will-do-something-to-the-consumer-and-let-us-now-see-what-happens" view, slightly paraphrased from Arndt, 1977) still seems to carry much validity.

The final coding investigates whether or not the papers contain recommendations to potential users of the research carried out. Clear recommendations to users are the exception in these papers – as Table 5 shows. In certain other cases, however, comments are made in the paper which rather clearly show that the author has a particular *addressee* in mind (example: "Further research of this type could help firms to utilise cross-national bases of segmentation") when designing or, at least, when drawing conclusions from the study.

Table 4. Behaviour examined: Reaction, deliberation action

<i>The study concerns the consumer</i>	<i>JEP</i>		<i>JCR</i>	
	<i>n</i>	<i>% of papers</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>% of papers</i>
<i>reacting to</i>				
consumer information and education	3	5	8	1
legislation (either in planning – then the study deals with conceivable reactions to the law – or effected)	0		1	
producer output with a strong emphasis on product content or product development	9	33	7	3
producer output: strong emphasis on prices	8		5	
producer output: strong emphasis on promotion	4		15	
producer output: strong emphasis on distribution	1		1	
other outside factors	4	6	1	1
<i>deliberating</i>				
by solving problems making decisions, selecting information sources	6	9	20	26
<i>acting</i>				
by taking the initiative to contact the producer (ie sending signals other than “exit”)	4	6	2	3
by getting in touch with fellow consumers in organisations or groups	0		0	
neither of the above (eg studies on describing results of consumption, individual or aggregate; satisfaction ratings; etc)	38	58	27	36
Total	77		87	

Even if such “orientations” are included (second part of Table 5), most papers in both journals do not fall into any of the various user orientation categories, either because no addressee at all is stated, or because such a multi-purpose aim or use is mentioned that no orientation is clearly discernible. When there is a recommendation or user orientation, public agencies are more often the addressee than business.

Table 5. Addressees of research in consumer psychology

	JEP		JCR	
	<i>n</i>	<i>% of papers</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>% of papers</i>
Recommendations directed at				
business	6	9	8	11
consumer organisations or groups	0	0	1	1
individual consumers	0	0	2	3
public agencies	8	12	12	16
No recommendation but paper oriented towards				
business	5	8	8	11
consumer organisations or groups	0	0	0	0
individual consumers	0	0	2	3
public agencies	7	11	9	12
No discernible recommendation or orientation	41	62	39	51
Total	77	0	81	

GENERAL IMPRESSIONS FROM THE CONTENT ANALYSIS

If I try to paint with a very broad brush a global picture of consumer psychology research, as revealed here, it would appear thus. Consumer psychology is partly an experimental, partly a non-experimental science, but, in both cases, it usually shows a high degree of sophistication in design and data analysis. As practised up to now, consumer psychology means, by and large, studying the isolated consumer or household. Much emphasis is put on choices among brands and other varieties of homogenous goods, but as mirrored in JEP, research outside the U.S. focuses, to a considerably larger extent, also on product class and budget allocation matters.

Consumer psychology is, however, perhaps in contrast to what one might believe, seldom normatively oriented and does not very often provide recommendations for action (either by business management or by any other decision maker). The content analysis clearly bears this out. This observation seems to support the earlier contention that if there is a seller-oriented bias in consumer psychology, it is mainly of an indirect nature affecting the subject matter that is scrutinised rather than by its results being directly applicable in the decision making of sellers.

Finally, although not evidenced by the tables presented, Anderson's characterisation of *marketing* research as "relationship studies" (Anderson, 1983) seems to hold also for *consumer psychology* research. With this term, Anderson refers to research where one attempts to determine whether or not an independent and a dependent variable are related, but where there is little effort to link the results to an established research programme or body of theory. This, I am afraid, is a weakness that consumer psychology shares with many other branches of psychological research.

OTHER ORIENTATIONS OF CONSUMER RESEARCH ARE POSSIBLE – AND NEEDED

If we accept the – not absolutely self-evident – position that consumer psychology is to be regarded as an *applied* science, it is clear that it can be of use to others than sellers and marketers. There is no doubt that understanding the psychological principles underlying consumer behaviour are of importance to: (1) those active in consumer education, protection, and information; (2) those interested in organising consumer co-operatives and other consumer self-help organisations; and (3) those who wish to advise or influence consumer decisions with a macroeconomic impact (broad consumption patterns; the impact of consumption on the environment; the inclination to consume versus to save; consumer credits). This requires, however, a change of focus away from the concentration on the study of simple choices among varieties of homogenous goods.

If we place the *consumer* in focus – rather than the marketing manager – a host of different research questions arises. It is my contention that these questions, although put forward here mainly because of their importance for an applied consumer psychology in the *consumer interest*, also involve several processes and research issues of interest to psychologists at large. Thus, the change of focus does not imply that the potential contributions from consumer psychology to general psychology must be diminished – if anything, I believe the opposite to be the case.

Space does not permit other than brief hints at the questions that a reorientation of consumer psychology entails. A simple taxonomy, similar to the one used in the content analysis of journal articles, distinguishes three areas: (1) consumer *reaction* to events in the external world (or lack of such reactions); (2) consumer *deliberation* on the basis of internal and external inputs (or lack of such deliberation); (3) consumer *action* by the sending of signals to, and self-initiated interaction with, the external world (or lack of such action).

Consumer reaction

From the viewpoint of consumer protection agencies and organisations, an extremely important question is how one can increase the consumer *knowledge* about the consumption objects available and about the consequences incurred by purchasing, consuming, and disposing of the same objects. Consumer information and education has always been the main task for most consumer organisations, but the effects of these efforts are often much smaller than hoped for. Intensified research could certainly help in making consumer information and education more effective. This may be the topic where one finds the closest links to consumer psychology of the kind described earlier in this paper. It is, among other things, a question of finding efficient ways of conveying large amounts of information about prices and qualities of goods and services without overburdening the receiver, avoiding the risk of information overload as well as the miscomprehension that often takes place (Jacoby & Hoyer, 1982, 1989). One is of course also interested in long-term effects (“consumer education”), ie in conveying more general principles of decision making and information search, in building up price consciousness, and so on.

There may, however, be an even more important prerequisite for successful consumer education than easing the consumer’s processing and memorising of relevant information. I am, of course, referring to the *motivation* of consumers to seek and use information. As pointed out by Wilkie (1988), this is often the Achilles heel in attempts at consumer information and education. Current research into the determinants of consumer information search, both of an empirical (eg Beatty & Smith, 1987, Bloch, Sherrell & Ridgway, 1986) and theoretical (Russo, 1988) nature, may turn out to shed new light on the consumer’s motivation and willingness to learn.

There are other issues related to consumer information that have so far received less attention from both consumer organisations and consumer psychologists. If we accept the idea that some household economic decisions are more important and central to consumers than others, such as the choice of a place to live and the form of housing, saving versus spending and choosing among various forms of investing savings, the choice between levels of education, leisure versus work decisions, etc, then the question arises: is it at all possible for consumers to procure reliable information about the consequences of their choices at this “strategic” level? Is the future today less *predictable* than it used to be (more stochastic and more dependent on factors outside the individual’s control such as international economic trends, repeated changes of taxation rules, more frequent changes in other political and economic conditions, larger risks of environmental catastrophes, etc)? Irrespective of whether this is the case or not, do today’s consumers *perceive* the future as less pre-

dictable – and if so, what repercussions follow for their decisions related to spending and saving? To what extent do consumers *understand* the implications, for their private economy and for the economy at large, of their own choices at this level?

Household budget counselling as now set up by many both public and private institutions may be part of the answer to the issues raised here. But again, it can only solve certain “technical” problems – by providing information and decision aids. If consumers see *no point* in making long-term financial plans (for reasons just hinted at), then they will hardly seek expert advice.

At a more fundamental level, there is a great need for increased attention to the *socialisation* of children and adolescents into the consumer society and the consumer role. In spite of certain research efforts (for a review, see Lea et al., 1987, Ch. 14), little is known about the social and cultural forces that shape our consumer selves (including gender roles in purchasing and consumption). The call of Lea et al. for a truly *developmental* economic psychology should be strongly supported.

Related to the previous point, we need to know much more about those factors that turn some people into less reactive, more *intrinsically* motivated (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 1987) or *autonomous* (Scherhorn, 1985, 1988) consumers than others. As Scherhorn insists, we need to know the correlates of autonomous consumer behaviour and to explore ways of increasing consumer autonomy. At the single decision level, this will be equal to studying the conditions under which people can avoid falling prey to persuasive sales messages and to the development of techniques of immunisation against persuasion. But what Scherhorn has in mind are more basic behavioural tendencies, causing some people to be less controlled by extrinsic rewards than others. Autonomous consumers may, for instance, show fewer signs of compulsive and addictive consumption, be less interested in positional goods (Hirsch, 1977), and be less prone to “free-riding” in matters of environmental protection (Scherhorn, 1988).

Inoculation against persuasive attempts by sellers of consumer goods and services (or other marketers) was mentioned earlier as a relevant research topic when placing the *recipient* rather than the *sender* of commercial messages in focus. In this connection, I would like to draw attention to the interesting suggestion by Wright (1986) that we need to study the receiver/consumer’s intuitive theories about the tactics that are used in the game of marketplace selling-and-buying. Wright calls such an intuitive theory a *schemer schema*. After all, marketing persuasion frequently fails. It could be due to the existence – among some or many consumers – of such schemer schemas. As pointed out by Wright, they could be at play in the “market signalling” between sellers and buyers that economists, interested in the economics of information (Calfee & Ford, 1988), have also begun to study rather exten-

sively. The schemer schemas may thus make the consumer able to “see through” the tactics used by the marketer.

Consumer deliberation

The interest in decision making in consumer psychology has focused much more on the gathering and processing of information about well-defined alternatives and the rules for choosing among these than on how a decision situation “emerges” and how decision alternatives are recognised in the first place. Some consumer behaviour models apply concepts such as “evoked set”, but there are not too many empirical studies of such sets, and these are mainly concerned with “sets of brands”. How do consumers more generally define and structure their alternative actions? To what extent do people see consumption choices as *separate* decisions and to what extent as *strings of* decisions (“packages”) where one decision more or less unavoidably leads to the need for other decisions later (which should be taken into account now) or to the narrowing down of future choice options? The latter could happen, for instance, because of the long-term binding of resources implied in the first decision, something that will often be the case in the purchase of “strategic items” (Arndt, 1976) such as cars and houses. And which alternatives are seen as commensurable and therefore become set in relation to one another and compared?

Such questions are seldom put by today’s consumer researchers. Morgan (1988) is very emphatic on this point: “Ignorance of alternatives is crucial. All our theories speak of choices and the costs of foregone alternative opportunities. Unhappily, there is almost no research documenting the alternatives people have and know about. . . . The sheer lack of attention to the alternatives people face is appalling, and should be embarrassing” (p. 284).

In contrast to psychologists, economists focus their interest not so much on the choice of single products and services but primarily on the *consumption patterns* of households – the amount spent on food, on clothing, etc – and on the saving/spending ratio. Also from a consumer point of view such behavioural patterns must surely be the most relevant ones to describe and explain, because they will have the most far-reaching consequences for consumer welfare. Marital happiness, for example, may partly depend on processes and outcomes related to spending patterns (Kirchler, 1989, Schaninger & Buss, 1986). However, little is known about the extent to which the decision-making models of behaviour, so far employed in consumer psychology, can also be used to account for such “macro” behaviour. One could surmise that consumption patterns, in contrast to the purchase of a car or a bottle of whisky, cannot be reasonably depicted as a conscious process at *one* point

in time, the point at which *the* decision is taken. For example, most households do not make firm allocations in advance of their monthly or weekly income (so much for food, so much for transport, etc). On the contrary, allocation of resources to broadly defined budget posts is the result of a never-ending chain of small choices, the consumer presumably often not being aware of their gross effect (unless it is brought home by the depletion of discretionary funds and credit facilities) (van Raaij, 1979). We actually have no good models even for reasoning about these matters. Not only consumer psychology, but also psychological decision theory in general, needs to take a much closer look at how such chains of semi-autonomous decisions emerge, and at how much of the overall consequences of the ever so common “small” decisions are taken into consideration.

If *no* consideration is given to the overall financial impact of a single purchase, then, of course, the consequences of very many such “small” decisions can be catastrophic for the consumer’s economy. The credit facilities available in today’s affluent societies make such “irresponsible” behaviour feasible – and not too infrequent. Heavy indebtedness and psychological problems often go together. Thus, from a consumer welfare point of view, and in order to devise systems for teaching, or otherwise preventing consumers from falling into unmanageable debt, we need to know about the factors predisposing some consumers to behave in this way. Surely there must be a relationship with the general problem of deferring gratification, so extensively studied in other branches of psychology (eg Mischel, Ebbesen & Zeiss, 1972), and all psychologists interested in delay of gratification phenomena could do well to study real life spending and saving behaviour.

Likewise, those psychologists interested in *addictive* tendencies could benefit from studies of the most extreme form of addictive or compulsive consumption, when purchasing often takes place although the buyer never uses the products bought. Quite recently, the first attempts to study such addictive purchasing have been made by consumer researchers (Faber & O’Guinn, 1988, Scherhorn, 1990, Valence, d’Astous & Fortier, 1988).

Naturally, there are also several specific *types* of consumption patterns that are particularly important fields of study as seen from both an individual and a societal welfare point of view, and where a *lack* of deliberation appears to be characteristic of much behaviour. One need only mention the consumption of alcohol or tobacco. More specific but likewise socially consequential product types are birth control devices (population control, AIDS) and war toys. Let me just single out two areas where psychological research is needed, but where little has been forthcoming.

One is the area of *nutrition*. As documented by S.C. Grunert (1989), there has been surprisingly little psychological study of *normal* eating behaviour (as distinct

from research on eating disorders). One wonders why psychologists have shown so little interest in this enormously frequent, usually manifest, and to all of us – from both a health and a hedonist perspective – extremely important behaviour. Again, the difficulty of modelling larger behavioural *patterns* (as distinct from single choices) may be one of the reasons.

Another area which deserves more attention is the *disposal/disuse* of products. How people go about the disposal of consumer goods is obviously often relevant from an environmental protection point of view (as are consumers' choices of goods in the first place) (Antonides, 1988, Uusitalo, 1986). Again, the *pattern* of consumption – and the (lack of) deliberation that underlies it – will be more important than the way the individual product is disposed of. But as Belk (1987) has stressed, there are also many other aspects of product disposal and disuse that are worthy of study, such as re-selling, for example through flea markets and car boot sales, giving away used products as gifts or to welfare organisations, upgrading some objects to 'collectable' items, etc, aspects that seller-oriented psychologists were never interested in. Buyers of used merchandise – often the less well-to-do – may need to develop better purchasing skills. From both a societal and an individual economic welfare point of view, it would also be interesting to know more about the frequency with which perfectly usable consumer goods of various kinds are just never used again, ie become stored or thrown away due to changing fashions or, perhaps, simple ennui.

Consumer action

In the process of solving problems of purchasing and consumption, consumers might not only actively gather information and deliberate on the problem they have identified, they may also take initiatives to interact with – or even change – the surrounding world. Consumers might, for instance, try to voice their opinions to fellow consumers or to producers, or enter into a dialogue with them. They may also try to organise or become members of a consumer collective, be it of an economic nature, such as a co-op, or one which has the aim of providing consumers with information and protection, such as the typical western voluntary consumer association or local group.

We know that such activities take place, but, as indicated by the content analysis, they have by and large been neglected by consumer psychologists. The only exception – apart from some early studies of the "word-of-mouth" phenomenon, ie consumers talking to each other about products and sellers – is the fairly extensive research on *consumer complaints* that has emerged during the last decade, both in the U.S.A. and in Europe (Andreasen, 1988, Ölander, 1988). Progress has been made in

identifying the circumstances under which, and the kinds of persons from whom, one can expect that steps are taken to alleviate dissatisfaction and problems with purchased goods and services by contacting the seller or another, neutral, party. But apart from that, consumers are still regarded as passive receivers of goods – and information/persuasion about these goods – from the seller side. As already noted, today not even well-documented word-of-mouth communication among consumers attracts much research interest. And the interest is even less in studying the “emancipated”, socially conscious consumer who tries to change the conditions of the marketplace in a more substantive way, by forming groups or organisations, acting politically, and so on.

Admittedly, consumer activism of this sort is not widespread (and cannot at all be compared with the frequency of labour/employee or, for that matter, environmental activism). In my view, this makes it only more imperative to study the *prerequisites* for an increased and more efficient consumer mobilisation and activism, ie to study the blockages that prevent consumers, individually or collectively, from trying to correct the *imbalance* between seller and buyer power in mass markets that most observers concede exists. In such research, it should be possible to draw on theories and findings from the fields of labour relations and organisational psychology as well as from social and motivational psychology. Passivity is not the least important phenomenon for psychologists to study!

THE MORAL

By these examples, I hope to have shown that applied consumer psychology need not necessarily be a seller-dominated manipulative science. By making it more social, increasing its coverage of the consumer’s self-initiated contacts with other consumers and the rest of the world, it can become an emancipatory force. It means taking seriously the feedback loops from consumer behaviour and consumer well-being to the economic environment that van Raaij (1981) posits in his model of economic psychology, but which have attracted little research attention. It can be surmised that by doing so, consumer research can also become of more interest to the science of economics. As Lea et al. point out, an economic psychology that restricts itself to finding the psychological mechanisms of economic behaviours is not economic enough. We have to understand how these different behaviours fit together to make up the economy, and have to recognise that there is a “dual causality”, ie that individuals influence the economy as well as vice versa (Lea et al., 1987, pp. 535, 538).

By focusing on how consumption affects the rest of life, rather than on how certain arrangements in life affect consumption, as Belk (1987) puts it, I believe that consumer research will also become more challenging to psychologists and other social scientists interested in affecting the human condition for the better. A refocusing of consumer psychology, as indicated in this paper, will throw off a number of new problems that in all likelihood will be more interesting to general psychology than the ones consumer psychologists study at present. We may simply learn more about the principles that govern human behaviour *in vivo*. That is in itself enough reason to get involved in consumer psychology research.

But to my mind, the emancipatory, or moral, aspect does not detract from the importance of such a reorientation. Indeed, we could do worse than attempt to follow Albert O. Hirschman (1977, pp. 305-306) in his vision of the conduct and aim of social science:

...once we have become fully aware of our intellectual tradition with its deep split between head and heart and its not always beneficial consequences, the first step toward overcoming that tradition and toward healing that split has already been taken. Down the road, it is then possible to visualize a kind of social science that would be very different from the one most of us have been practicing: a moral-social science where moral considerations are not repressed or kept apart, but are systematically commingled with analytic argument, without guilt feelings over any lack of integration; where the transition from preaching to proving and back again is performed frequently and with ease; and where moral considerations need no longer be smuggled in surreptitiously, nor expressed unconsciously, but are displayed openly and disarmingly.

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