

Consumer behaviour

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Chapter Topics

Introduction	263
Theoretical focus	266
Research paradigms and methods	269
Study populations of interest	271
Marketing applications of consumer research	272
Developing an integrated approach to consumer behaviour	274
Missed opportunities in consumer behaviour theory	277

Introduction

In reflecting on a 30-year career researching and teaching in marketing it seems that the academics who are interested in consumer behaviour often deliberately distinguish themselves as not working in managerial topics. Consumer behaviour research represents an extremely large body of work but one that does not always appear well integrated into other research in marketing. In the last 35 years consumer researchers have generated their own set of specialist journals such as the journals of *Consumer Research*, *Consumer Behaviour*, *Consumer Psychology*, *Customer Behaviour*, *Consumer Affairs*, *Consumer Policy*, *Advances in Consumer Research*, *Psychology and Marketing* and more recently *Consumption*, *Markets and Culture*. There are even examples of well established, but very specialized, publications such as the *Journal of Satisfaction*, *Dissatisfaction and Complaining Behavior*, which has now celebrated over 20 years of publishing. The potential separation of consumer research from other areas of marketing is difficult to understand in terms of the history of research on the topic since my reflections would suggest that historically the stimuli for much research in consumer behaviour were exactly the same as those that brought about the rich growth and development of managerial marketing thought that originated in the 1950s. One possible difference though is that research in consumer behaviour quickly differentiated itself from the economics frameworks that were used for much

managerial marketing by turning to other behavioural disciplines. An understanding of theory in consumer behaviour cannot be grasped without some comprehension of the wider roles of psychology, sociology and anthropology in marketing. These are covered elsewhere in this book and many marketing academics who have researched and published on consumer behaviour received their initial training in one of these behavioural sciences. As we shall see, the dominant discipline of them all in consumer research is psychology, where ideas from cognitive and social psychology have been used extensively in the search to explain aspects of purchasing and consumption.

In the chapter on consumer behaviour in the first edition of *Marketing Theory* three main periods were identified where research on consumer behaviour had highlighted different marketing and consumption issues. Starting in the 1950s there was a 20-year period where research on segmentation was prolific. As noted above, this directly parallels the emergence of the managerial school of thought as identified by Sheth, Gardner and Garrett (1988), and buyer behaviour theory was a logical accompaniment to the development of ideas relating to the different aspects of the marketing mix. This period saw classical papers published on the family life-cycle, personality, social class, lifestyles and psychographics, all testing the efficacy of these constructs for segmentation.

Developing rapidly in the 1960s, and overlapping with the previous research theme, we have a corresponding interest in consumer decision making with key early contributions from authors such as John Howard (1963) and Everett Rogers (1959; 1963). The 1960s saw attempts to develop comprehensive models of consumer decision making by Nicosia (1966), Engel and Blackwell and Howard and Sheth (1969) and the rapid adoption of developments in attitude theory from psychology, especially the idea of multi-attribute approaches following the work of people such as Rosenberg and Fishbein. Working with Ajzen, Fishbein's early work was developed into more general models of human behaviour which are still used extensively by consumer researchers, especially it seems those working in social marketing areas. A summary of the most recent material in this area is offered later in the chapter.

The early 1980s, I suggest, saw something of a switch in consumer behaviour research. It saw the abandonment of attempts to develop comprehensive decision-making models and a diversification of interests. There was more research on affect and emotions as opposed to a concentration on the cognitive dimensions of consumer decision making and, at the same time, a fresh look at actual consumption as opposed to purchasing. Studies in consumption started to use more interpretative methods to examine possessions and their meanings.

A good example of this transition can be seen in the research around the ideas of self concept. Work in the 1970s culminating in Sirgy's 1982 review paper in the *Journal of Consumer Research* (JCR) was linked into traditional psychological frameworks around ideas of actual and ideal selves. This approach has continued in mainstream psychology with similar conceptualizations of the self being cited consistently over the past 20 years but it has received almost no attention in the marketing journals. In contrast, in consumer behaviour, Belk and others took work on the self in a different direction and in particular linked it to symbolic communication as they sought to explain how possessions formed part of a person's identity and were used to communicate meaning to others. In this respect we can

see that authors like Belk and Hirschman were perhaps ahead of influential European sociologists like Giddens (1991) and Chaney (1996) who later focused on identity and possessions as key indicators of delivering status in a postmodern society. Perhaps the key idea here is that in a modern society people are less constrained by traditional elements that define social class. Constructing an identity through consumption patterns in order to display a particular lifestyle becomes the key method of acquiring status and position within society.

This view of the evolution of theory in consumer research is of course a very simplified big picture. Shortly we will look in more detail at the type of work published in the last 30 years but before discussing that in detail it is worth reflecting a little more about the early origins of consumer research in marketing. While the emergence of a distinctive body of research on consumers clearly becomes evident in the 1950s, a focus on understanding the consumer can also be seen in some of the earliest publications in marketing which sought to provide working classifications of goods that could be used as a basis for marketing strategies and actions. Of those classifications clearly the most famous and enduring has been Copeland's 1923 *Harvard Business Review* paper suggesting one could classify all products into either convenience, shopping or speciality goods. While these papers are seen to be motivated by the need to provide necessary typologies for an emerging discipline they are clearly based on an analysis of factors in consumer behaviour, such as the extent of information search and levels of perceived risk. Later Aspinwall's (1958) classification of red, orange and yellow goods includes other consumer behaviour factors such as replacement rates, or repeat purchase, replacement. However, a closer comparison with later theory developed in consumer behaviour relating to involvement shows how authors such as Copeland were predicting differences not just in high and low involvement but also in different types of involvement. While convenience goods clearly relate to low involvement situations, the difference between shopping and speciality goods in Copeland's classification primarily relates to changing the focus of involvement from the purchase itself to involvement with the product or brand. Sometimes this is termed the difference between situational involvement around the purchasing decision to enduring involvement with the product and its use.

As mentioned above, there are many specialist journals that deal with consumer behaviour theory and applications. The first of these, established in 1974, and still regarded as the leading specialist journal in the subject, is *the Journal of Consumer Research* (JCR). In 2004 the journal produced a 30-year cumulative index of their articles including a classification by subject. Using this classification as the starting point, the following sections attempt to give a more contemporary overview of the subject. Closely related categories such as affect and emotion have been collapsed and information from keywords and abstracts from 1974 through to 2008 have been coded against the categories below. The results are not claimed as a comprehensive content analysis of the whole subject of consumer research but they are intended to give a feel for the scope of the subject as it has been published upon in the leading specialist journal. Moreover, the information presented is perhaps best viewed as a description of how researchers in consumer behaviour actually describe their work in the search terms and abstracts they use to promote their papers. For example, it is clear that most, if not all, papers mention key theoretical constructs or problem areas but many fewer advertise any area of application to any industry sector or particular population.

Table 12.1 Behavioural research

Consumer behaviours	Number of studies
Acquisition patterns	6
Charity/gift giving	27
Deviant behaviours	12
Possessions	6
Shopping behaviour	10
Situational influences	75
Symbolic consumption	74
Time	12
Variety seeking	52

Theoretical focus

The three tables in this section categorize research papers into broad areas according to whether they mainly deal with actual behaviours, psychological processes or wider sociological issues. In Table 12.1 there are a range of studies that report some aspect of *actual* or *intended* behaviour as a focus for the study. Aspects of symbolic consumption are the most comprehensively discussed behavioural topic. These papers reflect both the kinds of meaning that people communicate through consumption and also the behavioural processes that underlie symbolic consumption. The other two major categories in this area are research which deals with time and situational influences. Both these categories are actually quite diverse and they also cover research that crosses into the psychological area. For example, they may deal with other factors and behaviours impacting on decision making. Even with time and situational factors both classified in this group it is surprising that the total number of studies that identify themselves as dealing with some aspect of behaviour or usage is not larger.

Two areas in particular would seem very general and central to the subject – acquisition patterns and shopping behaviour. One would expect that, since most decisions and purchases we make as consumers are clearly not independent of other purchases, acquisition patterns and understanding these inter-relationships might have received more attention. Perhaps it is timely to remember Alderson's (1954) idea regarding 'potency of assortment' which makes it quite clear that the utility or value associated with any particular marketplace exchange is dependent upon its contribution to some total mix, or holding, by the consumer. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that all the papers that identify themselves as dealing with acquisition patterns were published between 1979 and 1987. It is not at all clear why this should be the case but it could be seen as at least consistent with the start of the third general research phase identified in the introduction.

In contrast, all the papers that reference or use the term shopping behaviour have been published since 2000. It is possible that this reflects a change in the use of keywords and referencing within the subject since there are earlier papers that reference retailing but this term is not used after the 1990s.

Table 12.2 presents a summary of the types of essentially psychological constructs that have been identified in articles in JCR. The most obvious feature displayed in

Table 12.2 Psychological research

Consumer psychology	Number of studies
Aesthetics and hedonics	16
Affect, emotion and mood	73
Attention and perception	101
Attitudes and preferences	248
Choice and choice models	106
Cognitive processing	110
Consumer socialization	28
Decision theory and processes	205
Expertise and knowledge	57
Inference	35
Information processing	402
Learning	38
Memory	66
Motivation and involvement	130
Perceived risk	30
Personality	55
Satisfaction and dissatisfaction	46
Self concept and image	68
Values	17

Table 12.2 is the sheer number of papers that deal with these issues compared to those that deal directly with the behavioural aspects of consumption, or indeed the more macro level and societal issues that are presented in Table 12.3. This imbalance is completely consistent with William Wells' critical appraisal of the state of consumer research published in the *Journal of Consumer Research* in 1993. Wells argued how research had been dominated by a concentration of work investigating the pre-purchase aspects of mainly brand choices and how it had largely ignored both post-purchase issues and also 'higher level' consumer decisions that substantially affect life directions. Examples of the latter would be decisions about further education, housing or careers. In other words, research had concentrated on the simpler choices between more equivalent options rather than dealing with the complex situations where choices often have to be made between non-comparable alternatives with abstract attributes. The frequencies certainly endorse Wells' claim about a concentration on the pre-purchase stages of the buying process. Within the list the dominant topics are those that relate to information processing and evaluation in some way. Search and acquisition of information is a significant part of the information processing group and articles on these topics have appeared consistently throughout the history of the journal.

The second major group relates to attitude and preference studies which, as noted above, became popular about the time of the founding of the journal. Similarly publications on decisions process and structures have been constant since the inception of the journal. Other topics, however, do show periods of popularity with more intensive research and much less activity at other times. Satisfaction and dissatisfaction is one example of this with most work in the 1980s and 1990s. Similarly, with the exception of a couple of papers in the early part of

this century, all the papers on values were published in the late 1980s and early 1990s, while papers on learning were not classified until the late 1980s but since that date they have appeared at consistent intervals. One recent topic to emerge is that of cognitive processes and processing which have all been published in the last 10 years. As in the parent discipline of psychology, it would seem that the prevailing ethos in consumer behaviour has moved away from social psychology to cognitive psychology and, if the subject in marketing is to continue to follow the parent discipline, it would seem that this trend will only accelerate. Indeed it is interesting to speculate whether marketing research will perhaps follow the move towards neurological approaches to the analysis of the brain to understand consumer behaviour. The first tentative steps in this direction have already been made with so called neuromarketing which focuses on activation levels in the brain when exposed to stimuli such as products, brands and advertising. In recent mainstream psychology it would seem that memory research for example is now dominated by more clinical studies analysing chemical changes in the brain. As a 'synthetic subject' (Baker, 2000) marketing has always drawn appropriately from other disciplines so it is interesting to speculate whether marketing curricula will have to involve biochemistry and clinical psychology as basic requirements in the future.

The absolute dominance of psychological perspectives on consumer behaviour in the *Journal of Consumer Research* becomes very evident when looking at the sociological and macro studies that have been reported in the journal (See Table 12.3). In making this observation one must be careful to recall we are only dealing here with research published in one long-established journal, and that specialist journals such as the *Journal of Consumer Affairs* and the *Journal of Consumer Policy* exist to deal specifically with consumerism issues, while more recently *Culture, Markets and Consumption* has established itself to deal with work involving cultural theory. On the other hand, two other well established journals – *Psychology and Marketing* and the *Journal of Consumer Psychology* – also exist to concentrate on this discipline base.

While not being very extensively researched and published upon in the journal, it is also worth noting that some topics, including lifestyles, social class and the family have received very little attention in recent years. Indeed four of the papers on social class were published in the first three years of the journal's life while the bulk of the lifestyles papers appeared from 1988 to 1993. The family has received virtually no attention at all in the last 10 years. Of all these

Table 12.3 Societal issues in consumer research

Macro/sociological issues	Number of studies
Consumer ethics	2
Culture	18
Family	62
Lifestyles	17
Social and reference groups	66
Social class	12
Welfare/well-being	8
Women in the workforce	22

Table 12.4 Perspectives in consumer research

Theory/philosophy perspectives	Number of studies
Critical theory	13
Economic analysis	78
Feminism	3
Literary theory	5
Marxism	1
Naturalistic inquiry	2
Phenomenology	6
Philosophy of science	35
Positivism	3
Postmodernism and post-structuralism	10
Post-positivism	40
Sociological analysis	73

macro and sociological topics, the one that is clearly receiving most current attention is culture with the bulk of the papers published since the year 2000.

Research paradigms and methods

By no means all papers make reference to the paradigm within which they are based or even explicitly describe aspects of the method within keywords and abstracts. Those papers counted in Table 12.4 that mention a particular philosophy of science, such as naturalistic inquiry or literary theory, tend to be discursive papers on that topic in consumer research. Those articles that make reference to the more general terms of economic and sociological analysis cover many different methods but include the description of the overall orientation of the research paper or the context in which it was set. For example, the term sociological analysis is often used in the early years in the journal in articles that studied aspects of family decision making or reference group influence. It would seem that the need to describe this overall orientation is less common now than in the earlier years of the journal. In both the general categories of economic and sociological analysis about two-thirds of the papers were published in the first 10 years of the journal's history.

The range of research methods mentioned in the review is very extensive but, as with the more general theoretical and philosophical perspectives, it is only a fairly small proportion of papers that explicitly mention methods in their abstracts and keywords. Methods such as causal modelling and choice modelling are referred to consistently throughout the history of the journal while the most referred to method, experimental design, has become more common since the 1980s. Other methods with smaller occurrence levels such as discourse, grounded theory and hermeneutics have also emerged during this same period. This seems to reflect the increasing diversity of research work in consumer theory but the dominant perspective that is also reflected here would still seem to be based very much in cognitive psychology. A significant surprise is the small number of

Table 12.5 Research methods in consumer research

Research methods and issues	Number of studies
Bayesian approaches	4
Causal modelling	29
Choice modelling	27
Content analysis	12
Depth interviews	12
Discourse and literary analysis	4
Econometrics	2
Ethnography	18
Experimental design	55
Grounded theory	2
Hermeneutics	2
Historical methods	5
Interpretative methods	5
Mathematical models	3
Measurement and psychometrics	26
Meta-analysis	6
Multi-method approaches	3
Multivariate methods	7
Network analysis	4
Observation	1
Panel data analysis	3
Physiological research	17
Questionnaire design	2
Sampling	3
Semiotics	8
Simulation	3
Structural analysis	1
Survey methods	10
Validity and reliability	78

published research papers that make reference to common techniques employed in the commercial research on consumers. For example, observation panel data and survey methods are all widely applied in commercial market research but they play little part in the make-up of the methodologies employed by academic researchers of consumer behaviour.

The largest single grouping in the methods and issues table (Table 12.5) are those papers identifying themselves as concerned with either or both of validity and reliability. Studies referencing these issues became popular in the 1980s and continue to the present. It is probable that a similar examination of publications in other areas of marketing would reveal a similar growth in research papers referencing these topics. Although there is some recent revision of thinking regarding measurement in marketing with interest in alternative approaches such as formative measures, COARSE procedures (Rossiter (2002)) (Ewing, Salzerger and Sinclovics (2000)) and Rasch methods, it is hard to underestimate the influence of Churchill's 1979 paper on measurement in marketing. This was a paper that raised awareness of these problems and provided a

template for aspects of the research process which is still followed. A check on GoogleScholar on 20 March 2009 revealed 3,425 citations for Churchill's paper. As a comparison, this is approximately three times the citations received by Levitt's classic paper on 'Marketing myopia'. While the early attitude scaling theorists like Guttman and Thurstone have always been acknowledged in marketing, what Churchill did was to tie much research in marketing, especially in consumer behaviour, to those particular reflective psychological scaling methods as the standard way of approaching the development of theory and knowledge.

Study populations of interest

There are relatively few research papers in JCR that mention a particular demographic as the focal point of their research and most that do concentrate on a particular age group, with more research on children and adolescents than on older people. This is slightly surprising given both the increasing proportion of elderly people within most Western populations and also the concentration of discretionary expenditure that resides in that part of the population. In terms of changes over time, studies on children and adolescents appear to be more common in the earlier years of the journal than in later decades, while the reverse is true for cross-cultural studies. Only five cross-cultural studies appear in the first 10 years of the journal and since 1985 they occur regularly at a rate of about two a year.

One other feature remains hidden in the reported study populations that are summarized in Table 12.6. This is the quantity of research in consumer behaviour that uses student samples. It would be a mistake to assume that all, or even the majority of the remaining papers published in the journal were research studies that investigated consumer behaviour and purchasing amongst the general population. As noted in the table on research methods (Table 12.5) experimental formats are the most frequently reported method. A more detailed sampling of one randomly chosen issue from each of the past five years shows that approximately three-quarters of the papers in those issues were experimental studies using student samples. For example, the February 2009 edition of the journal has 12 full papers. Nine of these are experimental studies, primarily around some aspect of information processing using student samples. The

Table 12.6 Target population

Sample/population of interest	Number of studies
Adolescents and children	55
Older consumers	20
Sex and sex roles	25
Cross-cultural comparisons	51

remaining three papers include a qualitative study with a population of 30 gamblers, a participant observation study on illicit pleasure and, very unusually for consumer research, a meta-analysis on consumer knowledge. It is arguable whether any of the studies using student samples actually investigated a topic specifically and only relevant to that cohort of the population. Hence, while new relationships are tested and useful insights are contained in all the papers, only the meta-analysis has any real pretence at producing conclusions that have any generalizability. It would seem that consumer research has really continued to emphasize internal validity, at the expense of external validity, and once more Wells' (1993) conclusion about the imbalance in consumer research, in at least its leading journal, is supported. Findings from experimental work, using student samples on the pre-purchase aspects of decision making dominate what we know about consumer behaviour.

Marketing applications of consumer research

Table 12.7 describes the areas of marketing applications that are referred to in JCR papers. The frequencies in this table related to advertising and communication research support the previous conclusion about the overwhelming dominance of enquiries on pre-purchase behaviour. These two areas, together with research on product and brand choice have dominated throughout the 35-year history of JCR. Amongst the other categories, it is interesting to note that the branding literature is more recent, with most papers being published since the mid-1990s, while most of the segmentation work was carried out during the 1980s. The lack of work on market segmentation is somewhat surprising considering the importance of the concept in marketing and the need to understand heterogeneity amongst consumers. However, since segmentation work normally requires larger scale survey work with samples drawn from the general population it is clearly not regarded as a priority by consumer researchers where the major conversations take place around developing and testing theory for different aspects of information processing.

Table 12.7 Marketing applications of consumer research

Marketing application	Number of studies
Advertising and advertising effects	222
Bargaining and negotiation	24
Branding	17
Communication and persuasion	180
Innovation and diffusion	36
New products	25
Pricing	71
Product/brand choice	144
Segmentation	23

Table 12.8 Area of economic activity

Industry or economic sector	Number of studies
Alcohol and drugs	17
Consumer credit	9
Consumer education and information	25
E-consumption	10
Energy	31
Health care and related issues	30
Industrial and organizational buying	8
Leisure and recreation	19
Public and not-for profit	13
Retailing	22
Services	11
Voting behaviour	7

The other interesting facet of Table 12.7 is the lack of research that deals with the distribution element of the marketing mix. While some research relating to this element is perhaps described in Table 12.8 in the few studies that relate to retailing or services, there are no mentions at all of research that deals with issues such as after-sales service, guarantees, dissatisfaction or complaint behaviour. Clearly, research has been conducted on all these topics but it is not promoted in an obvious way in the main consumer research journal. Actual purchasing and the continued involvement of consumers in market relationships have generated very little research in consumer behaviour in contrast to organizational and business relationships. While it is now much more common for papers in the *Journal of Consumer Research* to contain the results of several related studies in order to give depth and reliability to the conclusions, there are very few studies that involve investigation over consumer problems over time. Nearly all knowledge on consumer behaviour is based upon cross-sectional studies which are necessarily limited in the kinds of problems that they can address.

Some research is motivated by particular problems that occur within particular industries or sectors. Table 12.8 provides a summary of where this research is located. The spread of contexts covered in the table is quite broad but the overall number of papers specifying an industry area is quite small. It is not surprising to see areas such as alcohol, drugs and health listed since they present particular problems to groups of consumers. Similarly, energy and credit became major issues even before global warming and the current recession made them items of general news. Indeed since credit is such an integral part of many major consumption decisions it is amazing how little investigation has taken place on this topic in the last 30 years.

In Table 12.1 it was noted how few studies in consumer behaviour actually referred to shopping. In a similar way it is surprising how few consumer research papers actually specify any relevance to retailing or retail services, and considering the pervasiveness of the internet there are also very few that deal with e-consumption.

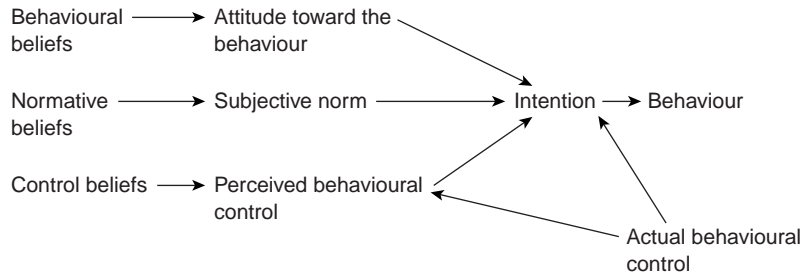


Figure 12.1 The Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 2009)

Source: Ajzen I. Theory of Planned Behavior home page (2006). Available at: <http://www.people.unless.edu/ajzen/tpb.html>. Accessed 21 March 2009.

Developing an integrated approach to consumer behaviour

Drawing together the information presented in the previous tables I am reminded of a recent description of marketing by Cova (2005: 205) 'that it is an increasingly dispersed sum of constituent parts'. While there is a clear dominant paradigm that has dominated consumer behaviour research over the last 30 years there have been very few attempts to produce any integrative models that provide any general theories equivalent to those guiding the earlier development of the subject, such as the Theory of Reasoned Action as it was developed in the 1970s and later extended to the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Interestingly, while the Theory of Planned Behavior is now infrequently referenced in marketing journals it does remain a popular framework in consumer research published in areas like health, physical activity and leisure. The theory is based on three central components as predictors of intentions, as shown in Figure 12.1. The principles are straightforward and suggest that our behaviour as consumers is goal orientated and determined by three fundamental forces:

1. Our attitude towards the activity or object. This measures the appeal of the item or behaviour under investigation.
2. Our view of social norms around the consumer behaviour under consideration and our desire to comply with those social norms.
3. Our ability to be able to control the situation and act in the way we wish. Ability to control may be conditioned by outside factors such as prices or internal aspects such as addiction if we were trying to model a behaviour such as cessation of smoking or drinking.

Together these drivers are seen to determine our intentions, which allowing for situational factors, for example a stockout at the store, predict our final behaviour. Ajzen clearly argues that with appropriate and precise specification of the behaviour, the

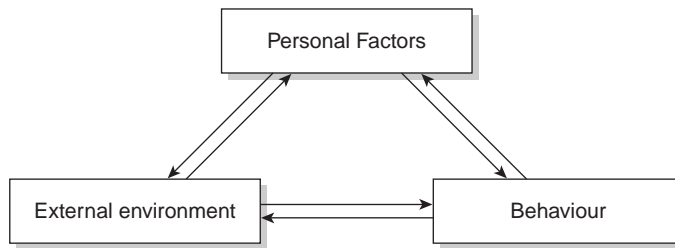


Figure 12.2 A social cognitive model of behaviour (Bandura, 1986)

Planned Behavior model will give useful predictions. Examples where it is less successful and greater discrepancies arise between attitudes and behaviours are usually in cases where there is less precision or more abstraction in the definition of the behaviour. Thus, it may not be a good predictor of how many alcoholic drinks you are likely to have in the next week or month, but will be more successful in explaining how much wine you are likely to drink at your birthday dinner.

Also widely used in the social marketing arena is an alternative comprehensive approach to considering consumer behaviour known as social cognitive theory. This approach was developed primarily by Bandura in the 1980s building on earlier ideas of social learning theory. Social learning theory emphasized humans learning by imitation and stresses how we learn to cope with our environment by watching others cope with similar situations. Bandura developed this idea by introducing personal characteristics, especially motivation and self-efficacy as mediating effects. As a construct self-efficacy refers to the belief that one can master a particular behaviour and adopt it as a regular practice, so it has a close association with Ajzen's idea regarding perceived behavioural control. Bandura shows the three elements of the person, the environment and the behaviour interacting in a reciprocal triangle as shown in Figure 12.2.

Social cognitive theory has many elements that are similar to Planned Behavior. For example, there are roles for social norms and support, sets of beliefs about the outcomes of the behaviour (e.g. improved health from eating your daily quota of fruit and vegetables), tastes and preferences, and perceptions of the environment which can include factors such as price which determine accessibility. However, there is a fundamental difference in approach between the two models. While Planned Behavior sees behaviour as more goal orientated and moderated by the environment, social cognitive theory tends to emphasize 'environmental' influences but then allows for them to be mediated by an individual's level of motivation and self-efficacy. In this model the emphasis for encouraging behavioural change lies as much, or more, on changing the environment in order to encourage the desired response, as it does on persuasive advertising or education in order to try to raise levels of individual motivation.

Although they are not linked in the literature, it seems that the principles of social cognitive theory accord well with the work of Bettman, Luce and Payne (1998) who have tried to provide an integrated framework for understanding decision-making. They present a complex view of decision-making processes and

strategies that are heavily influenced by the environment. In essence they argue that consumers construct the decision framework they use, including the choice of the appropriate heuristic according to the particular context. Hence environmental factors, such as the number and type of both attributes and alternatives under consideration and the amount of time available, structure how the decision is made as well as the individual's own goals and abilities.

In some respects then, social cognitive theory can be seen as a step towards the behaviourist tradition in psychology which was not mentioned at all in the earlier discussion of the contents of the *Journal of Consumer Research*. This is surprising since although cognitive psychology clearly holds the ascendancy, there have been some strong advocates of this approach, including Gordon Foxall, who has arguably been the UK's leading consumer behaviour theorist for the last 30 years (Foxall, 1990). Evidence to support basic behaviourist theories as potentially important in explaining consumer behaviour can also be garnered from the work of Andrew Ehrenberg and his colleagues. For over 30 years Ehrenberg has been primarily looking at aggregate forms of consumer behaviour with panel data and showing consistent patterns of consumer responses to matters such as repeat purchasing and loyalty irrespective of the precise particulars of the market. For example, his work on double jeopardy (Ehrenberg et al., 1990) shows quite clearly that market share is closely linked to behavioural measures of loyalty, so that the idea of specialist niche products controlling a small but secure part of the market and protected by high levels of loyalty is potentially misleading. The implications of this type of finding in Ehrenberg's work for consumer behaviour are quite simple. It suggests that, as an aggregate body, consumers usually respond quite consistently to simple cues that they receive in the marketplace. If they are more familiar with a market leader, which probably has more shelf space and more promotional support, consumers are also likely to buy it more often than the alternatives. It also suggests that in most situations consumers are essentially satisficers as opposed to utility maximizers, and that our behaviour as consumers is not likely to be overcomplicated and too goal orientated.

Overall, the 'mixed' approach suggested by social cognitive theory is appealing. It has the advantage of not reducing humans, who are clearly capable of forethought and planning, to the same level of decision making as their pets, but at the same time it does not turn every decision and behaviour into a complex goal-directed extensive problem. Furthermore, the bi-directional aspects of Bandura's relationships in his social cognitive approach also seem to fit with recent ideas in marketing such as co-creation. They allow causality to flow back from the individual to the environment in any situation and confirm that the marketing manager may influence, but is never in control in a way that the purely behaviourist approaches might suggest could be the case.

Outside the dominant cognitive and social psychology research the other main stream of research published in JCR has been the interpretative material focusing on actual consumption and possessions. In this area there has been at least one explicit recent attempt, by Arnould and Thompson in 2005, to generate an integrative framework to bring together much of this research under the banner of consumer culture theory (CCT). Even so, Arnould and Thompson are absolutely explicit in saying that they are not trying to create any sort of general theory in the

area but are rather providing an evaluation and classification of the research in this area. They draw together a large number of articles into a fourfold classification as follows:

1. Research that develops theory around consumer identity
2. Studies of marketplace culture where the important role of consumption configures cultural blueprints
3. Investigations into socio-historic patterns of consumption, involving the institutional and social structures that influence consumption
4. The examination of mass-mediated marketplace ideologies.

It is accepted that classifications such as this are often the first step towards substantial theory development since they provide both a basis for future integration and assist with the generation of future research questions and propositions so we may expect strong theoretical developments in the area in the future.

_____ Missed opportunities in consumer behaviour theory _____

In 1991 Wind, Rao and Green identified a series of seven shifts in consumer research that they felt pointed to the future at that time. Briefly these were:

1. A change in the unit of analysis from the individual to more realistic assessments of households and groups
2. Consideration of assortments of products and sets of behaviours as opposed to single instances
3. Examination of situation-specific behaviours in order to increase the validity of consumer research
4. A move from deterministic to stochastic modelling of consumer behaviour
5. A lessening of the US focus in consumer research
6. A shift from a 'low tech' to a 'high tech' consumer environment with consequent changes for consumer research and methodologies
7. The use of integrated sets of research methods rather than single approaches.

All of these seemed reasonable predictions at the time since they were based on known needs at the end of the 1980s and observable trends and developments in research methods. However, nearly two decades later virtually none of these have come to pass. The main unit for research is still the individual, with most research using experimental formats with individuals (often students as noted earlier). While some research has been conducted on product and brand constellations in an effort to understand the inter-relationship between sets of items, this is still very

much the exception. The JCR index which clarifies research on situational aspects of consumer behaviour shows no observable increase in this work over time and the researchers following in the Ehrenberg tradition with stochastic modelling are still very much in the minority. The US focus in the research is still very much apparent despite the policies of some recent editors to internationalize their publications. There has been a shift for many consumers to a 'high tech' environment but this has not been followed by researchers using the kind of methods and materials envisaged by Wind, Rao and Green. Panel scanner data and internet data, for example, may be common in marketing science publications but not elsewhere in the consumer behaviour literature. Finally, while there does seem to have been a change in one respect regarding research in consumer behaviour at least, it is not towards the use of integrated sets of research methods but rather towards integrated studies using similar methods. Looking through articles in the last few years in JCR, for example, it is much more common to see repeated studies with a programme of research reported, as opposed to seeing single snapshot studies.

One other call for consumer research was made in 1991 by Hirschman, who made a strong plea for more research into a range of social problems associated with consumption. She argued that many such problems were the result of 'consumption gone wrong' and that some of these issues would inevitably rebound as consequences for marketing managers. While there is clearly some evidence of research related to health, addiction and gambling in the consumer journals, they are still a very small proportion of the work carried out. As with Wind, Rao and Green's list of opportunities from the same time, Hirschman's call looks like another missed opportunity by marketing scholars. Journals in areas such as energy and health are now replete with studies of consumer behaviour arising from the need to deal with issues such as increasing energy efficiency and combating global warming, through to managing the Western obesity crisis. While social marketing studies have increased in number they have not become part of the mainstream material in consumer research. One difference, as alluded to earlier, is that studies in these areas, usually conducted by people outside business schools, have tended to stay with integrated approaches to analysing consumer behaviour such as the Theory of Planned Behavior of Social Cognitive Theory. Another construct that they have adopted widely but which is now hardly referred to in the consumer behaviour literature is that of lifestyles. Largely abandoned in marketing and consumer behaviour after being criticized as both atheoretic and also impractical, they are widely referred to in the health literature. A search on the term in GoogleScholar in March 2009 revealed that of the first 100 articles (mainly written in the last 10 years), 78 were health references with most of the rest arising from sociology, geography or planning. When lifestyles were first introduced into marketing in the 1960s as a meso-systemic approach for understanding consumer behaviour, it was well in advance of scholars from those areas in realizing the potential use of the construct for understanding an integrated pattern of resources, attitudes and behaviours that could usefully describe the heterogeneity found in the marketplace.

Summarizing on what are some missed opportunities, I believe consumer research has probably become too fragmented and over-concerned with internal as opposed to external validity. As such it has lost touch with important issues facing

the marketing system. For example, while some acknowledgement of aspects of sustainability can be found, particularly related to environmental issues, some of the problems associated with the current credit crisis were no surprise to those who had followed credit card or savings behaviours. Similarly, the idea of 'peak oil' has been known for decades, the same with global warming and the need to reduce carbon emissions. These important consumer behaviour issues, together with their consequences for businesses and all the other actors in the marketing system, simply do not figure as issues in building theory and knowledge on consumer behaviour in marketing. I believe that consumer behaviour must strive to regain its relevance both for marketing managers and for policymakers.

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