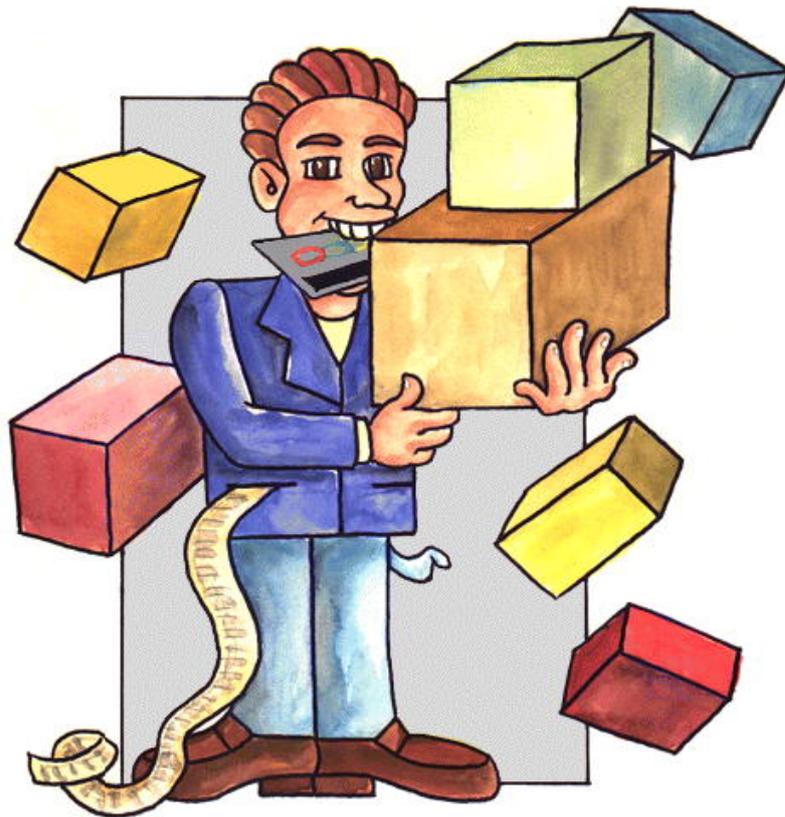


TEACHING UNITS

CONSUMER INTELLIGENCE

SELF-DISCIPLINE AND RESPONSIBILITY IN SHOPPING AND SPENDING



Javier Garcés Prieto

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INTRODUCTION

Children and young people do not choose the society in which they live. Today's youth were born into a consumer society and know no other. It is therefore unfair for adults to talk of the 'excessive consumerism of youth' or of how 'wilful and extravagant the youth of today are', or any one of the other criticisms that are levelled at young people. On the whole, their values, ideas and consumer behaviour have been passed on to them by their parents and are reinforced by what they learn at school, from the television and from advertising.

On the other hand, despite the pitfalls and problems of living in the consumer society, it has created unprecedented standards of living and comfort. The youth of today must learn to take advantage of its benefits while at the same time avoiding its dangers. We have written these teaching units with them in mind, but with an eye to their teachers, parents, and adults in general. Our aim is to help young people become intelligent, responsible and self-disciplined consumers.

All too often, despite its importance, consumer education is dealt with superficially or with a lack of enthusiasm or depth that would seem inappropriate in more traditional subjects. Or it can take on a tone of paternalistic indoctrination. We have attempted to steer away from these attitudes and treat our readers like people capable of thinking about their actions and the world in which they live and improving the society in which they live through their behaviour.

In order to be able to do this, they need a foundation of serious and adequate consumer education. We have tried to make these units as interesting and user-friendly as possible as well as a really valuable teaching tool.

Although this material is mainly aimed at students of between thirteen and eighteen years old, much of the material will be useful for younger students, teachers and parents.

Lastly, support material for these units is available in the form of transparencies and slides.

UNIT 1

CHARACTERISTICS, ADVANTAGES, AND DANGERS OF THE CONSUMER SOCIETY

Excessive consumerism is the worst enemy of the planet.

(Jacques Cousteau)



I WHAT IS THE CONSUMER SOCIETY?

We always describe today's society as the 'consumer society'. We are so used to this phrase that we never stop to think about what it is that makes today's society different from earlier societies or contemporary societies which we would not describe as consumerist.

This distinction is even more difficult for children and young people today, given that they know nothing else. Basically, in order to live, we human beings need to 'consume'. We need food, water, clothes, and medicines and this applies to all societies.

So, why exactly do we call our society the 'consumer society'? What makes us different from other societies?

The fact is that we are different in practically everything: in our economies, in our way of life, in our values, and even in the way we think of and understand what is going on around us. One way or another, all of these things are influenced by the values and norms of the consumer society.

It is easier to explain this with an example: if a fish tried to analyse its life and environment, the most difficult thing for it to understand would be water, even though it is completely surrounded by it and has never lived out of it. In the same way, for those who have never known anything other than the society in which they live, it is difficult

to understand its characteristics. It would be even more difficult to imagine what it would be like to live in a different society.

You only need to go back fifty years and look at rural societies. If you compare the way of life and consumer habits of yesteryear with ours today, it is easy to see the difference. In those days, maximum use was made of everything: clothes, for example, were worn for as many years as possible. It was very common for people to turn coats and jackets inside-out to make them last longer, and once they were completely worn out, they were cut up into kitchen cloths, dusters, or used to make smaller garments. Pots, knives, crockery, and household tools were passed on from generation to generation. Nothing that could be made use of, repaired, or re-used was ever thrown away.

From this you can draw two conclusions: belongings were scarce and because of this they were valued and appreciated. Secondly, and more importantly, there existed for centuries an understanding passed on from generation to generation that the greatest possible use should be made of possessions, whether they were clothes, food, or tools. In most cases, the possessions in question were essential or expensive items that would have been difficult to replace.

The consumer society can therefore be defined both in economic and social terms, and also by the way of thinking and behaviour of the people who live in it. In other words, all of us. It is the latter that we will be exploring in these units, studying the positive aspects of modern society and trying to understand its dangers and excesses so that we can learn to avoid them.

II DOMINANT CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CONSUMER SOCIETY

All societies 'mould' people by way of their values, ideas, customs, and traditions, but in today's society, the growth of the media, and the use of marketing and advertising has meant that this 'moulding' is particularly intense.

Not everyone who lives in the consumer society thinks or behaves in the same way. There exist, however, several dominant attitudes in the vast majority of consumers which are a direct result of the influences which surround them. Without realising it, they internalize these influences, making them a part of their being, their life, and their view of the world.

We need to identify which of these attitudes are most likely to expose us to the dangers and excesses which we have talked about:

- a) The ever-increasing desire for consumer products.
- b) The increasing dependence on material things.
- c) Misuse and waste of resources.
- d) The use of material possessions as status symbols.
- e) The infiltration of commercial or consumer attitudes into almost every area of human activity.

In the following sections we will investigate these attitudes in more detail.

III INCREASED DESIRE FOR MATERIAL POSSESSIONS AND SERVICES

In order to survive, the economic model of the consumer society needs to have an impact on the thought processes and lifestyle of the people who live in that society.

The economic progress of advanced societies is based on technological development and ever-increasing production of goods and services. It is logical that with this increase in productivity, people's expectations and demands for goods and services become higher.

It follows that as societies evolve and develop, so people's perception of their needs changes. Society, as we know it, would be inconceivable if we had continued to hold onto basic subsistence patterns of living as primitive societies have done. Strictly speaking, real human necessities are few: food, clothes, shelter, medical facilities, and very little else. It is true to say that as long as these basic necessities are taken care of, there is little room to manoeuvre: someone who is properly nourished will gain no benefit at all from eating twice as much and generally, nobody is going to feel better for wearing two coats instead of one.

But from the point of view of our behaviour as consumers, the important thing is not our real needs but our perceived needs: in other words, what each person desires or thinks he or she needs. These perceived needs fall within the realm of human psychology. They are the result of the influence of the social values and culture which affect each member of society. We need clothes to keep us warm but we also 'need' particular clothes in order to be the height of fashion. We 'need' a lot of clothes quite simply so that we do not have to wear the same thing two days running. More often than not, our 'needs' are really socially induced needs.

Take, for example, jewellery or perfume. From the point of view of actual needs (as essential elements for human existence), they are absolutely useless. However, they are highly prized in practically all societies, as much today as they were in the past. These social 'needs' are present in all civilizations, but more so than ever in the consumer society.

IV PEOPLE'S INCREASING DEPENDENCE

As we have pointed out, one of the characteristics which defines the consumer society is that more and more products are perceived to be 'necessary'. The important aspect of this is not only the increase in the number of things that we want to possess, but also the increased number of things that we feel we 'need'. In other words, those things that we have come to view as indispensable in our daily lives. The majority of people living in today's society would probably find it almost impossible to live without a tele-

vision, a telephone, a washing machine, a computer, or electric lights, even though they are all relatively new additions to our lives and humanity survived for centuries without them.

This increase in our perceived 'needs', that is to say the fact that we feel that we need more and more material things in order to survive, makes us ever more dependent. Put another way, we have become more alienated, since the things we desire are things that we cannot provide for ourselves. Primitive man, or families living in rural societies, were able to survive because they were able to provide everything that they needed for themselves. The food on their tables came from hunting, cultivating crops, or raising cattle. They could make their own clothes and they collected wood for cooking and heating their homes. They rarely needed to buy anything and they were perfectly capable of living in remote areas.

In contrast, those of us living in the consumer society are becoming increasingly dependent on the 'needs' that we have created for ourselves. Electricity, computers or television, for example, are all things which we cannot provide for ourselves outside of our own social environment. Our increasing perceived needs makes us more and more dependent on the technology and economics that make these things available to us.

V MISUSE AND WASTE OF RESOURCES

According the dictionary, 'to consume' means to use food or other things in order to survive, but it can also mean to destroy or obliterate something. The difference between these two definitions gives us the key to another of the characteristic attitudes of the consumer society. In this case it is clearly a negative attitude: the use and destruction of the goods and natural resources which surround us, as if they were inexhaustible. We throw clothes away simply because they are not longer in fashion. Domestic appliances, computers, and other electrical goods may be in perfect working order, but we replace them in favour of more modern appliances which will, themselves, become obsolete in a very short time. Modern disposable containers and packaging would have been regarded as an unimaginable waste of resources a few decades ago. In a frenzy of blind consumerism man has destroyed forests, marine life, wild animals and their habitats, and he has even managed to poison the very air he breathes.

As members of the consumer society, we tend to ignore the dangers of our own excesses and appear to feel no sense of responsibility for the consequences of our actions. In the last analysis, for every warning we are given to moderate and change our habits in order to be able to live in harmony with our environment, we encounter a hundred temptations to consume.

An excellent example of this is petrol and the many by-products of crude oil. Petroleum is a very scarce resource, whose reserves are limited and which took many millions of years to be laid down in the earth. Once the reserves are exhausted, there will be nothing to replace it. Despite this, in developed countries we have been using and wasting this precious resource with gay abandon and carelessness for many years, at a pace which, if we do not slow down soon, will exhaust the reserves in a few decades.

VI THE SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF CONSUMER GOODS

In the second half of the twentieth century, the differences between the social classes have been steadily diminishing. With the disappearance of other indicators of prestige and social standing, material possessions have become the main means of achieving our need for social status and measuring ourselves against others.

This leads us to one of the most negative aspects of the consumer society: conspicuous consumption. We buy things to make our friends envious, in order to have something which nobody else has, or, conversely, in order to have something which everyone else has. This is particularly true among children and young people. Their circle of friends and acquaintances becomes a point of reference for them which encourages the idea that 'you are what you have'. Directly or indirectly, this encourages advertising.

This presents us with one of the most serious dangers of the consumer society. We have lost our values and our ability to differentiate between what we want and what we really need. We are conditioned and swept along by the rampant materialism of our social environment or by such negative influences as envy and vanity.

This is also a direct result of the increasing dependence of modern man on material things. In the consumer society, the possession of material things is no longer just a means of satisfying our physical needs. It has become our means of attaining intangibles such as self esteem, our real or perceived self-worth, our way of showing that we belong to a certain economic class, or of improving our social standing.

As we will see in Unit 8, this explains why the vast majority of advertisements do not concentrate on the specifications and characteristics of the products they are attempting to sell. Instead, they try to persuade us that the mere possession of these products is synonymous with a certain way of life, a social triumph, that we will be envied or feel special because we possess something which the majority of people do not have.

**READING****WHAT DID THEY DO IN THE OLD DAYS WITH RUBBISH?**

One of the major problems in modern cities is waste disposal. Every day, families put out their rubbish bags which are then picked up by lorries and taken out of the city. An enormous amount of money is spent on collecting, destroying, and recycling the tons of refuse we create.

In recent years, recycling has become an unavoidable necessity. However, in order to be able to recycle efficiently, one first needs to separate the different types of refuse or waste. We have separate recycling bins for paper and glass. We can usually count on a collection service for old (or in some cases not so old) furniture and domestic appliances, which are taken to huge rubbish tips.

However, it is only in recent years that we have begun to show any concern about this serious problem. What did they do before about refuse? Who collected it? Where was it taken? Let us take as an example a farming village at the beginning of this century. Can you imagine trucks driving up and down the streets collecting the bags of rubbish that the villagers put out every day? Of course not. This problem did not exist before, for the simple reason that there was no rubbish.

Any left over food was used to feed their animals. Clothes were darned and repaired and worn until they fell apart. When, for example, a sheet could no longer be used as a sheet, the cloth was cut up and used to make smaller articles. And, of course, clothes and shoes were passed from mother to daughter or from sister to sister, and in some cases, from rich families to poor families.

And containers? Where did they go when they were thrown away? An older person remembering their childhood would not be able to help smiling on hearing this question. Throw away a container! Glass jars were valuable things and they were saved and used again and again, and no-one would have dreamt of throwing one away. Deposits on bottles were commonplace and one would return the bottle to the shopkeeper in order to get one's deposit back. Rice, sugar, beans, and other similar dry goods were sold by weight in paper bags. Paper was very useful and scarce and no one would have thought of simply throwing it away. It was re-used for wrapping up food and snacks or for lighting fires. In fact, until recently, many people collected used paper to sell it.

We could do the same exercise with everything that we throw away today without even thinking about it. Plastic containers either did not exist or were so scarce that they were kept to be re-used. Furniture and tools were used for decades, sometimes for centuries, and when they could really not be used any longer, they were broken up and either used to make something else or for fuel.

In closing, if we really needed any proof that we are living in the consumer society, we only have to look at what we throw away every day.

VII COMMERCIAL ENCROACHMENT ON EVERYDAY LIFE AND THE CONSUMER VIEW

The consumer society has invaded almost every area of human activity. Every day we are offered new services or activities which are based on turning into a business what was previously undertaken without any thought of financial gain. Party planners and entertainers, etc. are good examples of this.

By the same token, traditional holidays such as Christmas have become completely commercialized and are used by advertisers to excite our ever-increasing desire to buy things.

There is no doubt that this evolution is a result of the changes that have taken place in our lifestyles and need not necessarily be regarded as negative. It is excess which has caused the commercialization of our every day lives. It has devalued and marginalized the fundamental aspects of our existence – those things that, for the most part, cannot be satisfied by money or the things that we can buy with it. The worst mistakes that the consumer society can make are to confuse the value of something with its price and to fail to appreciate anything that has no commercial value. Young people today have come to believe that it is almost impossible to have fun or to have a good time without spending money. They need money for drinks, cars, computer games or to get into clubs and discos etc. This causes feelings of dissatisfaction because the majority of young people do not have access to endless supplies of money. It also means that they have forgotten or chosen to ignore some of the most enriching and satisfying pastimes: reading, listening to music, chatting with their friends, taking part in sporting activities, or going for walks in the country, all of which are generally freely available to us all.

VIII ADVANTAGES AND DANGERS OF THE CONSUMER SOCIETY

The economic development of our society has given rise to enormous technological progress which has improved many aspects of our lives – healthcare, nutrition, communications, and culture, etc. – allowing most of us to enjoy an unprecedented quality of life. But today many people and many governments and international organizations have begun to ask themselves whether we have not paid too high a price for this ‘progress’. Few people can fail to see the need to change our habits in order to limit the damage our society is doing to the environment, while at the same time continuing to enjoy the benefits of social and economic progress.

Obviously this not only affects society as a whole but also has an enormous impact on the quality of life of each and every individual. What is the point of progress, social development, technological advances, and increased productivity if all of these can only be achieved at the cost of the psychological wellbeing (or happiness if you prefer) of the individual? This is the problem that we are attempting to avoid, and the message that we are trying to convey.

Recognition of the problems and dangers (as well as the undeniable benefits), of what some people chose to call the 'post consumer revolution', has become a primary aim of our society and its institutions. This does not mean that we should necessarily adopt an ideological, moral, or ethical stand against the values or attitudes of the consumer society.

This gives rise to at least three issues which must be addressed:

1 First, and most important, is the recognition of the fact that certain consumer habits and attitudes which have become the norm in our society are clearly incompatible, either in the short or long term, with the protection of our environment. This ecological critique of our consumer society is no longer simply in the domain of the enlightened few. It has become an undeniable truth, substantiated by serious and objective scientific research.

The need for development and economic growth is generally accepted on our society. However, we also recognize that we cannot allow this growth to continue without any consideration of the catastrophic consequences to our environment which come hand in hand with industry and consumerism.

2 The second issue is related to the first but concerns more the individual consumer. Studies of the psychological and social impact of certain consumer habits, values and lifestyles, have shown that our physical and mental health, wellbeing, and family values are being put at risk.

For example, the relationship between certain types of advertising and consumer messages and the increase in such problems as eating disorders, alcoholism, and consumer addiction is becoming clearer every day.

3 The third and especially critical issue is the need to foster the education of children and young people so that they become responsible, self-disciplined and intelligent consumers. To do this we need to improve the quality of information and education that train them and protect them as today's consumers, and prepare them to be the adult consumers of the future.



SUMMARY

Today's society is described as the consumer society. Because of technological and economic progress we now have access to and can acquire an enormous number of goods and products. The five characteristics of the consumer society are:

- An increase in 'needs' above and beyond what is actually needed to survive.
- An increased dependence on technology, for example electricity, television, computers, telephones, etc.
- Abuse of natural resources and misuse of available materials.
- Acquisition of products, not because they are needed, but for the social significance, status, or prestige that they represent.

The ever-increasing number of activities or areas of life which have become commercialized: traditional holidays such as Christmas and Easter, birthdays, and other similar events. Almost every event or festivity which in the past was celebrated in a family environment now has a commercial or economic significance.

Although the economic and technological advances of our society have improved our lives in many respects, for example health, nutrition, communications and culture, and have allowed us to enjoy an unprecedented quality of life, there are dangers inherent in excess. There are three main concerns:

- 1 The environmental impact of industrialization and consumerism.
- 2 The psychological and social impact of consumer habits, values, and attitudes which endanger our physical and mental health and our personal or family wellbeing. These are manifested in problems such as consumer addiction and personal debt.
- 3 The need to improve education for children and young people so that they become responsible, self-disciplined, and intelligent consumers.

UNIT 2

CONSUMER ADDICTION



God gave us enough to fulfil our needs,
but not our ambitions.

(Ghandi)

I PROBLEM BEHAVIOUR IN CONSUMPTION AND SPENDING

Issues of consumption and spending habits are always interesting because they concern us all. That is why the media has paid so much attention to the growing concern over the psychological and social problems related to certain consumer habits: we see more stories about consumer addiction, compulsive (or impulsive) shopping, shopaholics, etc. We also hear about the increasing number of people who find themselves in debt because of their lack of financial self-discipline.

For years people have been protesting and voicing their concerns about the ecological and global impact of consumerism. The focus of these protests has been the awful damage that man has wreaked on the planet. Some manufacturing processes and our uncontrolled consumption threaten our very existence. Are we talking about the same problem seen from two different points of view? Or are they different problems which have the same root cause?

To answer this question it is probably easier to tell the old story about the blind men who had to feel a part of an elephant and then describe the animal. While each man knew that he was only feeling one part of the elephant, he attempted to describe the whole animal on that basis. The man who had felt the trunk described the elephant as being long and thin, like a snake. The man who had felt one of the elephant's legs described it as a strong column. The man who had felt the elephant's body said that it was something like a rhinoceros. The men were all trying to describe the same animal, but as they had only felt a small part of it, they were not able to describe the whole. It is the

same when we talk about impulse buying, addiction to shopping, or people whom we describe as 'shopaholics', or, in more general terms, of consumerism as one of the characteristics of our society. What we are talking about are different aspects of the same problem: the psychological, social, and environmental impact of the modern consumer society.

In this unit we are going to concentrate on trying to define the problems and dangers associated with our consumer and spending habits. To begin with, we need to differentiate between the consumerism characteristic of our society as a whole, which involves a set of habits and behaviour shared by the majority of us, and other problems related to consumption and spending which affect fewer people, albeit that the number is increasing. That is what we aim to do in the following sections.

II ADDICTION TO THE EXCITEMENT OF SHOPPING

What we mean by this is that people can be particularly attracted to the different feelings they get from shopping or other consumer activities, for example window shopping, going to the supermarket, or to large department stores. It is absolutely normal for people to enjoy this sort of activity, and in any case, it is socially acceptable. But the combination of particular character traits and the right set of circumstances can produce an actual addiction to this type of activity.

The signs of this particularly strong attraction to consumer activities are all there to be seen: some people spend hours looking in clothes shops, others look in dozens of jewellery shop windows every day and others feel drawn to computer stores. Modern shopping centres, where we can stay and walk around all day if we want, offer us a huge variety of stimuli and inducements which we find particularly attractive and which gives them an enormous power of seduction.

As we have already discussed, this sort of behaviour is commonplace in our society and, as long as it is kept within reasonable bounds, we see nothing wrong with it. We should begin to worry when these activities take up all of a person's free time, even when they do not actually need to buy anything. Their insatiable passion for shopping takes up every spare moment of their time, even their lunch and tea breaks, making it quite impossible for them to do anything else.

In fact, as window shopping and shopping itself takes on greater and greater importance to them, they begin to lose interest in other activities and pastimes.

This type of seemingly addictive behaviour, which is becoming more and more common in our society, does not necessarily indicate the consumer addiction we have been discussing. Many people enjoy spending hours in large department stores or window shopping, although they hardly ever buy anything. There are others who perhaps do not have the money to buy anything for themselves, but persuade their friends to go shopping and go along with them to keep them company or offer them advice. Some people can spend entire days window shopping or walking around shopping centres and,

although they might not buy anything, they do not suffer for it, or lose their interest in it.

Very often, this sort of behaviour is caused by loneliness, boredom, or general unhappiness. For example, if very extrovert people who enjoy sensory stimulation and plenty of social contact were to find themselves alone and bored in a strange city, they might well gravitate towards large department stores and shops. There they could be certain of finding social interaction, albeit very superficial, which they could not find elsewhere.

On the other hand, there are many people who are truly obsessed with shopping and the need for possessions who do not enjoy walking around shops window-shopping for hours on end. For these people, walking around shops or window shopping and returning home without having bought anything causes feelings of frustration and irritability.

III CONSUMER ADDICTION

Consumer addiction is the constant craving to buy new and, in the vast majority of cases, unnecessary or superfluous things. Shopping addicts lose interest almost immediately in the thing they have just bought and find themselves caught up in a never-ending (and ultimately unsatisfying) spiral of spending, in order to fulfil an insatiable urge to buy.

When this happens, shopping, which should be something we do in order to get the things we do not have and really need, becomes a dependency. It becomes an obsession around which our lives revolve, even though we do not actually need to buy anything. It is like an uncontrollable urge which, if we do not learn to resist it, leads us to constant buying of things which are, more often than not, totally unnecessary and superfluous.

We must emphasize here the fact that when spending hours on end in department stores or shopping centres becomes someone's favourite pastime, it is usually because they are trying to make up for something else lacking in their lives. If this is the case, it is important that they try fill the gap with other satisfying activities and do whatever it takes to make their lives more exciting and fun. When this happens, their passion for shopping will die down to a more normal level. We should enjoy the things that we are able to acquire without becoming dependent on having them.



READING

Many people will recognize themselves in the three examples that follow:

- *One day Jose finds an advertising leaflet in his letterbox which tells him that a certain supermarket in town is selling milk at almost ten pence less than he would pay for it elsewhere. Getting into his car, he sets off for the shop where he will be able to get this bargain (never mind the cost of the petrol he will use to get there). Once there, the first thing he sees is the household and gardening department and he is attracted by the deals on offer there. He buys a wooden bookcase, a set of screwdrivers, and two flower pots. This is not all he buys and he ends up with a shopping trolley full of things which he had had no intention of buying and, to cap it all, he forgets to buy the milk, which is what he went there for in the first place.*
- *Maria has not been able to go shopping all week, and because of this, she has no food in the house and there are various other things she needs to get. She has decided to spend Saturday morning shopping and sets off early to a local supermarket. She does not bother to make a shopping list because she thinks that she will be able to remember everything she needs as she goes along. With this in mind, she rushes up and down the aisles, throwing anything that catches her eye into her shopping trolley without giving it that much thought. The special offers particularly attract her attention because they are very prominent. With her trolley full, she gets to the check-out and is surprised to find that she has spent much more than she intended to. When she gets home, she becomes very annoyed with herself, because she realizes that despite having spent so much money, she has managed to come home without many of the things that she really needed.*
- *Elena goes out one afternoon for a walk around town. As she does not know exactly where she wants to go, she heads towards the centre of town and, almost without realizing it, she finds herself going into a big department store. She does not want to buy anything because it is the end of the month and she is rather short of money. She tells herself that she will just have a look around. After wandering around several floors of the store, she finds herself in the clothing department, where she comes across a sign announcing trousers for sale at 'huge reductions'. She tells herself that they really are very cheap and that it would almost be a sin not to buy them. She thinks, 'I'll put them on my credit card, and that way I will be able to pay for them later.' When she gets home and takes the trousers out of the bag, she realizes that she may have been a bit hasty in buying them because she has another pair very similar in colour and, quite honestly, she does not like the style of them at all. She hangs them up and forgets about them, so much so that the following month (and she is once again rather short of money), when her credit card statement arrives, she gets annoyed because she has not made any provision for the extra charge on her card.*

We will leave it up to you, the reader, to match up these examples with the different types of behaviour we have discussed in this unit.

IV IMPULSE BUYING

All the problems that we are dealing with here can often be attributed to impulse buying. Many people lack the ability to control their desires or urges or subject them to any sort of serious thought before acting on them. In the case of shopping, this means that as soon as they see something they like in a shop window or display, they are immediately caught up in the irresistible urge to buy. This lack of resistance to these urges means that when they see something they want, they are unable to say to themselves 'There is no harm in dreaming', and walk away without buying it. The sad thing is that most of these impulse buys give them nothing more than a fleeting pleasure and, once home, they often regret their purchase and want to take it back to the shop or quite simply they forget about it and never use it.

As we will see later, the best defence against impulse buying is to force oneself to allow a certain amount of time between feeling the urge to buy something and actually buying it. This way we can control our urges and allow ourselves time to think about what we are doing, before we do it.

V LACK OF FINANCIAL SELF-DISCIPLINE

Lack of financial self-discipline is the inability to set oneself a budget, and once set, adhere to it, and tailor one's spending to one's financial means.

Many people are unable to control their constant and excessive spending which exceeds their financial means, and this includes people in middle- and high-income brackets. For such people, it is not that regular or unforeseen expenses cause financial distress. The problem is their total inability to monitor their personal or family finances and control their spending, superfluous as some of this may seem to the objective observer.

VI ADDICTION TO CREDIT AND OVERSPENDING

This problem is becoming more common in our society as it is made easier for us to succumb to the temptation to live beyond our means. Credit cards and banks and other financial establishments encourage us to use credit, rather than deprive ourselves of whatever takes our fancy, without stopping to think of the financial consequences of credit spending.

When a person gets caught up in the vicious circle of living on credit, they tend to carry on doing it. The problem snowballs, and they seem cheerfully unaware of the danger. The end result is an enormous burden of debt, from which they often try to escape

by taking out bigger loans and longer term credit which leaves them and their families in extreme financial straits. We will discuss this further in Unit 7.

VII OVERCOMING THE PROBLEMS

All the problems that we have dealt with so far can often be caused by personal conflicts, fundamental unhappiness, frustration, or sometimes even by serious psychological problems, which people try to escape and protect themselves from by constantly buying themselves new things.

However, if someone thinks that they may be suffering from one of these problems, they should not worry about it too much: in the vast majority of cases, this behaviour is a result of habits that we have learnt. We can also learn to change our behaviour so that we can spend our money sensibly and in such a way that we can enjoy the things we do have. The most important factors in overcoming a problem are the recognition that the problem exists and the real desire to do something about it. It will not be easy. We are surrounded by advertising, which shows us a world where our happiness and wellbeing are dependent on material things and we must constantly fight to resist these temptations.



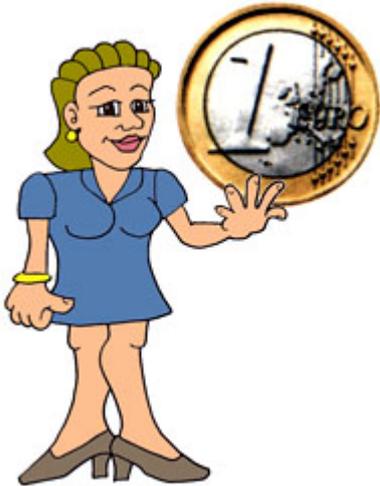
SUMMARY

In this unit we have discussed the problems and dangers related to our buying and spending habits. These can be divided into two distinct groups: consumerism as a characteristic of society as a whole. This consists of habits and behaviour shared by all members of society. Secondly, there are the problems which affect a small, but ever-increasing number of individuals. These are:

- Addiction to the excitement of shopping: this is the strong attraction to the feelings of excitement aroused by shopping or related activities such as window-shopping or browsing in shopping centres even without actually buying anything.
- Addiction to shopping: The irresistible urge to buy things which most of the time are unnecessary or superfluous.
- Impulse buying, which is often at the root of all the other problems we have been discussing. This means the total inability to resist the temptation to buy something. People see something they like and they buy it there and then, without stopping for a second to think.
- Lack of financial self-discipline, which is the inability to regulate one's spending to keep it within the bounds of one's financial means, other than a genuine lack of financial resources.
- Addiction to credit, leading to debt. This is the abuse or over-use of credit to buy things. This causes people to live above their means and to get sucked in to a vicious circle of more purchases, taking out more loans, and getting further into debt.

UNIT 3

INFLUENCE OF IDEAS, OPINIONS, AND VALUES ON CONSUMER HABITS



Nobody thinks that he gives too little or has too much.

(Proverb)

I CONSUMER HABITS, IDEAS, AND STIMULI

The things which make us behave in a certain way as consumers are no different from those which dictate our behaviour in other areas of our lives. Sometimes our behaviour is dictated by our opinions or beliefs, that is to say, our way of thinking. Sometimes it is motivated by habits we have learned, and sometimes it is affected by outside influences.

With regard to our behaviour as consumers, practically all of our ideas, habits, and reactions are the result of our experience, that is to say, the result of external influences. We know that we are not born with this behaviour, and just as we can learn it, we can unlearn it, and so change our way of thinking and acting. As in other areas of our lives, if we know what is influencing our behaviour, we can recognize the causes of our bad habits and by doing so, find ways of changing our behaviour and improving our lives.

Firstly, we are going to discuss how certain ideas and opinions can influence our behaviour as consumers. In the following units we will be discussing consumer habits and our reactions to various stimuli related to consumerism.

II WAYS OF THINKING AND ADDICTION TO SHOPPING

Opinions and beliefs are intangible, but we can recognize them through what people say and do. In fact very often our beliefs and opinions are not clear to us, and yet they dictate our behaviour and can cause us to feel happy or unhappy, can make us succeed or fail.

Take, for example, people who believe that they are ugly, disagreeable, or unlikeable. This belief may be totally untrue or exaggerated, but will, nonetheless, determine their behaviour and their understanding of what goes on around them. They will try to avoid social contact because they feel insecure or uneasy in any sort of social situation. People who suffer from anorexia are painfully thin, but they see themselves as fat, and this completely false perception of themselves makes them behave in a way that is both inappropriate and very dangerous to their health.

As consumers, we are driven by many opinions and beliefs, some of them mistaken or even harmful. These can be divided into two main types:

- Some can be said to be fairly superficial, as is the case, for example, with our opinions, knowledge, or prejudices about certain products or items. We may believe that one particular brand is better than another, or that a certain shop is very expensive. These beliefs may or may not be correct and, if the latter is the case, can influence us to make poor or inappropriate decisions as consumers. In either case, it is a question of conscious opinions and, as such, their influence is limited.
- Other opinions or beliefs are of a more fundamental nature and because of this, their influence on our behaviour is enormous. These beliefs dictate our behaviour and affect our feelings, emotions, and values.

Advertising (as we will explain later) and the whole culture of the consumer society shapes the second set of beliefs that we described above. The influence of advertising is immensely effective because it is nearly always covert or subliminal. Take, for example a car advertisement on television. Someone who has a 'cool car' (the one they are trying to sell to us), is much admired and envied by everyone else: the traffic police are so impressed that they give him priority over the drivers of not-so-cool-cars (or so it appears from a television advertisement). The advertisers would have us believe that our professional and personal success depend on the sort of car we drive.

This is the sort of message that many advertisements are trying to convey: 'If you drive such-and-such a car, you will be the envy of everyone.' But there would be no point to these advertisements if there were not also an underlying message that 'people will always envy those who can afford to buy the things that they themselves cannot.' They also convey the idea that to be envied is a good thing, that it makes us somehow better than others and we can take pleasure in the fact that we have something that everyone else wants. This means that we have come to accept it as natural that we should be judged by the car we drive, the type of house we live in, or what we can buy, and that our friends, our social or professional success, and even being 'loved' are dependent on these things.

There is hardly anybody in our society (even the harshest critics of the values of consumerism) who is totally immune to this type of message. The effect of these messages is particularly strong on people who are easily influenced, especially if aimed at areas to which we are all sensitive. Take, for example, the image portrayed on television that a 'good mother' is one who is always buying things for her children. In fact, if the advertisements are to be believed, the children's very happiness and wellbeing are dependent, not only on being bought things all the time, but also on being bought the right brands. If the mother does this, her children will be happy, healthy, cheerful, and strong, and will shower her with hugs and affection.

This is obviously ridiculous and can have a boomerang effect from an educational point of view. In fact, good parents must be capable of standing fast against their children's whims and educate them so that they become moderate and responsible consumers. Furthermore, what we can afford to buy for our children has nothing to do with how much we care for and love them. However, confronted by this type of advertising, many parents become unsure about whether or not they are doing it right. Others devote all their time and attention to buying everything they possibly can for their children, in the mistaken belief that it makes them better parents.

III MODIFYING OUR THOUGHT PROCESSES

Generally speaking, there are three stages we must go through in order to be able to modify a way of thinking which can lead to inappropriate or negative behaviour (for example that displayed by those suffering from anorexia or obsessive-compulsive disorders). These are to:

- 1** Identify the problem areas, that is to say, to find out what they are, recognize that they exist, and that they are causing us to behave in a certain way.
- 2** Understand that we are dealing with mistaken or even harmful ideas or beliefs that have no basis in reality.
- 3** Develop strategies to help us modify these thought processes.

However, in the field of consumerism and advertising it is often the case that the message being conveyed is so unacceptable that as soon as we realize what it is, we reject it. This is not only because the message is absurd or ridiculous, but also because it goes against the grain of our convictions or beliefs.

But, as absurd or outrageous as many advertisements are, we cannot disregard their enormous influence because, despite ourselves, they do affect our behaviour.

**READING****IS IT GOOD TO BE ENVIED?**

Directly or indirectly, a large proportion of advertisements encourage us to buy a particular product – for example an expensive car – because it will make us feel superior and people will envy us for it.

Is it good to be envied by other people? To put it another way, should we enjoy the things we have more because other people cannot have them? Few of us would admit to this sort of selfish attitude, and yet advertisers would have us believe that it is very common.

Buying a car (or a motorbike or whatever else it might be) in order to make people envious, or to be admired or respected is patently absurd and unworthy of an intelligent and sensible person. Is it not better to buy a car that one can afford and that will serve its purpose, and also to be able to afford the other things one needs?

Apparently not. There are many people who will get into debt so that they can give the impression of a certain social status. When they buy a car, it is with other people's opinion and admiration in mind. People like this usually pay very close attention to what other people buy as well. Imagine a world where everybody behaved and thought like this. People would rush headlong into borrowing and financial hardship in order to be able to buy the most luxurious and ostentatious car possible, to be the envy of their neighbours and thus to avoid feeling envious themselves. This is an exaggerated and fearsome scenario from the point of view of the consumer, but what a dream for car manufacturers and banks!

IV FUNDAMENTAL VALUES AND BELIEFS

Sit down in front of the television one day with a pen and paper, and try to analyse the underlying philosophy of the advertisements you see. This exercise allows us to identify the fundamental principles which are given to us as fact, and on which the incitement for us to buy a particular product are based.

The first thing we notice (as we will see in the unit on advertising) is that the vast majority of these advertisements are totally devoid of any sort of informational content about the products themselves. That is, they say nothing about the characteristics or specifications of the product (the price, what it is made of, the advantages of one product over other similar products, etc.). By using attractive and seductive images and simple, but expressive, language, many of these advertisements associate a product or brand with fundamental values or a particular lifestyle.

By watching advertisements and taking note of their underlying messages, we can see that the majority of them are based on a few common misconceptions, for example, that:

- Our happiness and contentment are dependent on the things we can acquire.
- Being able to buy a particular brand is a sign of social status and prestige.
- We are loved and appreciated for our physical appearance.
- We all want to look young, beautiful, and thin, and we can all achieve this if we buy particular products.
- Being able to buy the things that other people cannot have will make us envied and that will make us happier.
- We should buy what we want as soon as we want it, as buying on credit is so easy and really does not cause any problems.

We could go on, but we will leave it up to the reader to come up with a list of ten more advertising ‘hooks’. The important thing to remember is that we should always watch these advertisements with an objective and critical eye. In the reading section, we will discuss how envy and vanity can influence what we buy. The same exercise can be used to analyse other aspects of advertising.

V CONSUMER PREJUDICE AND PRECONCEIVED IDEAS: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BRAND, QUALITY, AND PRICE

Many of us approach shopping with preconceived ideas. We believe that the most expensive products are the best, or that brand-name products are of a better quality than others. Sometimes these prejudices are about the country of manufacture: we may think that German household appliance are more hard-wearing or that Japanese cars are better. Some of us prefer to buy Italian shoes or ties. Some of us are prejudiced against certain products, believing them to be inferior because of where they were made.

Next we are going to discuss some of the most common prejudices and preconceptions.

- The most expensive products are the best. When confronted with the relationship between quality and price, many consumers appear to be confused and unsure. On the one hand, the majority of us accept that brand-name products are usually more expensive, although not necessarily better, than other products. On the other hand, when faced with a choice between two similar products, we will often chose the more expensive, assuming that it will be ‘better’. When the only difference between two items is the price, many consumers tend to believe (for no particular reason), that the more expensive one is better.

- Brand-name products are always better. When asked, the majority of consumers will say that well known brands are not always better. But in practice, we buy particular brands out of habit, without stopping to think about whether their quality or price makes them better than similar products of another brand. Children and young people are particularly susceptible to this sort of irrational ‘brandism’ because of advertising and social influences which associate some brands with social prestige or status, a certain way of life, or with the popularity of celebrities.

Strangely enough, this ‘brand loyalty’ is usually quite relative in practice. As consumers, we differentiate between products such as clothes, oil, coffee, detergent, cosmetics, etc, for which we have favourite brands which we buy irrespective of price. When it comes to products such as sugar and rice however, we tend to go for special offers and cheaper prices, paying little attention to the product brands.

Although some of our opinions or prejudices are not entirely without basis, we must not allow ourselves to be blinded by them. Some manufacturers keep their prices higher than those of the competition, knowing that this will give their products the illusion of better quality (although they might not actually be better). We should always look at the ascertainable facts: the price, the brand, the guarantee, the opinion of experts or people we trust who know the product, etc. And we must never forget that when faced with a choice between similar products, the best for the consumer is always the cheapest.

As far as brand-names are concerned, It may seem obvious, but well known brands are just that: ‘well known brands’. That does not mean to say that just because a product carries a particular brand name, it is better or worse than another, for that reason alone. Of course there are many products whose brand-name is a guarantee of quality. The important thing is that we must be objective about it.



SUMMARY

As consumers we are motivated by beliefs or prejudices or rigidity of thinking which, if unfounded, can make it difficult for us to make responsible or appropriate choices. There are two types:

- Specific beliefs, knowledge, or prejudices about particular products.
- Ideas or beliefs of a more fundamental nature, which influence our emotions, feelings, and values. These are often unconscious or unrecognized.

Advertising is based on and attempts to influence both of the above, especially the latter, in order to sell products. It plays on the positive aspects (for example the desire to be good parents), as well as the more negative ones like envy or vanity. We must learn to recognize the hidden meanings behind advertisements because very often they go against our own convictions or beliefs.

Other consumer prejudices or preconceived ideas are more specific, such as the belief that more expensive products are always better or that well known or more widely advertised brands are of higher quality than others.

UNIT 4

CONSUMER STIMULI

The wise man enjoys what he has, the fool pines for what he cannot have.

(Proverb)



I THE INFLUENCE OF EXTERNAL STIMULI ON BEHAVIOUR

Much of our behaviour is dictated by external stimuli, that is to say, we usually react in the same way to particular stimuli. If we walk past a bakery and see a particularly delicious looking cake, we want to buy it; a piece of music may make us feel happy, sad, melancholy, or contented; for some people, snakes evoke a feeling of absolute horror.

Stimuli dictate and control our behaviour. In human beings, a small percentage of our reactions to stimuli are innate (for example pulling our hand away if we burn ourselves or blinking if someone blows in our eyes), but the vast majority are learned. In fact, an important part of our education is learning appropriate responses to given stimuli. We learn to stop the car when we come to a stop sign or a red traffic light. We learn behaviour appropriate to where we are, for example in a church, on a football field, at a dance, or in a library. We also learn that we should not dance in a library or that we are not expected to keep quiet at a football match. Our state of mind, our feelings, and our thoughts are entirely dependent on the stimuli which surround us.

Thus, much of our behaviour as consumers, and this applies as much to our sensible decisions as to our lapses in judgement, can be explained by our learned responses to given stimuli. This explains, for example, our impulse buying in superstores or during the sales and the fact that some brands are more attractive to some of us, regardless of the quality of the product in question.

II INDUCEMENTS TO BUY

Although it should not be like this, we seldom set off shopping with a clear idea of what we need, and then look for it sensibly, comparing prices and quality. Many of our purchases are thoughtless, often made because something has caught our eye in a window or in a shop display. Others are a result of the atmosphere that surrounds the sales, or the belief that a certain item is a bargain.

In other words, our desire to buy things is not driven by the fact that we think we need something and are looking for it. On the contrary, it is often a response to outside inducements, from advertising, shop displays or special offers. In other words, we respond to what we see and hear (and sometimes to what we smell!).

This inability to resist the temptations aroused by the stimulus of consumer goods in general explains many of the problems of consumer addiction and serious debt that we have been discussing. It is also the reason for the majority of our unconsidered or unnecessary purchases. Not long after giving in to the temptation to buy something, we realize that we have made a mistake and regret our impulsiveness.

Next we are going to discuss three very important issues relating to the influence of stimuli on consumers: impulse buying, the effect of certain situations, and brand names.

III IMPULSE BUYING AND SELF-DISCIPLINE

Self-discipline is the ability to resist impulses. In human beings, self-discipline means behaving in a way we will not later regret. Of course self-discipline is important in many situations in life, but if we are to become responsible consumers it is an essential prerequisite.

The attitude of children towards toys is a good example of immature behaviour (completely logical and understandable in children but incomprehensible in adults). Children see a toy and want it there and then. It is difficult to make them understand that they must wait or that they cannot always have what they want. They will probably cry and protest in frustration at not getting their own way. However, the majority of their whims are temporary and once they get the object of their desire, they often forget about it after only a few days. In fact these whims are often based on a mistaken idea or illusion. The toy that they see on television is nothing like the real thing. The aeroplane does not really fly and it is not as much fun as it looks on the screen, but it does not help at all to tell someone who is not yet able to be discerning or resist their impulses, that their desires are temporary, deceptive, or unrealistic.

As we mature and grow into adults, we must learn to be more critical and discerning, how to control our impulses and become responsible and self-disciplined, so that

we have the money to buy the things we really need, rather than wasting it on buying unnecessary things.

It is therefore essential that children and young people learn this. If we want to become responsible consumers, we must understand that shopping involves choices. This personal maturity, which can only come with the passage of time and adequate education, teaches us that we cannot give in to instant gratification, that we must be objective and realistic, that buying something today may mean that we must go without tomorrow. In other words, that spending involves choices and the use of resources, which means that it is not a question of deciding whether or not to buy something, so much as a choice between buying something now, or buying something else later.

One might think that if people are very rich, they can spend money like water, but this a big mistake. Wealthy parents might be able to afford to buy their children whatever they want, but they would be gravely mistaken to give in to their children's every whim. Learning to be responsible consumers involves making choices and resisting unnecessary spending. If we do not do this, we fall into bad habits which we take with us into adulthood. The resulting 'rich kids' of today are extravagant and incapable of controlling their spending. They allow themselves to give in to their desires and impulses because they cannot control them. and They are also unlikely to be able to put off buying something until they can afford it, which is one of the keys to good financial management.

When we do not learn to check these impulses or practise self-discipline, we are not in control of ourselves. We need to be able to resist the desire for the instant gratification of a momentary whim. If we do not do this, we will obviously never know the pleasure of being able to buy something after saving up and making sacrifices for it. Self-discipline is essential, not only because of the effect it has on our behaviour as consumers, but also on our behaviour in other roles, as students or employees for example.

It is a sad truth that there are more and more children, many from ordinary families, who display attitudes and behaviour normally associated with 'rich kids', because of the unconscious lessons learned from their parents' example.

As we have said before, impulsiveness can only be overcome by self-discipline. The only way to learn this is to allow time to elapse between feeling the impulse or temptation to buy something, and actually doing it. This not only gives us time to compare and think about what we are doing, but also if we put distance between ourselves and the stimuli which cause impulse buying (for example by leaving the shopping centre), very often the impulse to buy disappears completely. If, on the other hand, we really do like what we have seen and think it would be a good buy, we will continue to think so, perhaps even more so, after a few hours.

In fact, anyone who has a tendency to overspend would do well to take this advice. If we are in a shop and something which we had not set off to buy catches our eye, we should not give in to the temptation of the moment, but go away and think about it. If the object is really worth buying, then we will probably still think so a few days later. In the vast majority of cases, once we leave the shop, we completely forget about whatever it is we wanted to buy.

IV SITUATIONS THAT ENCOURAGE IMPULSE BUYING

No one is an impulse buyer twenty-four hours a day. There are circumstances or moments when we are more likely to buy. Knowing what these are is important because it helps us to strengthen our self-discipline. Smokers who want to quit know that there are times when the temptation to smoke is very strong, for example after a meal, when they have a cup of coffee or when they meet up with friends who smoke. There is always a time and a place when the temptation is strongest.

In the same way, there are times when all of us are psychologically more prone to irrational or impulsive spending. Although this varies greatly from one person to the next, it is generally true that we all tend to spend unwisely in certain circumstances, for example:

- During the sales, or following advertisements announcing special deals or offers: most consumers (90%) would agree that they often take advantage of special offers when it comes to food or other household shopping and that they go to the sales. It is strange then, that if you ask people what they think of offers, sales, and discounts in general, they are quite cynical in their answers. Their behaviour, however, would indicate that they believe that these special deals and sales offer a genuine opportunity to buy products for less than they would normally pay.
- As for offers, deals, and sales, the rule of thumb is quite clear. We should not necessarily believe that we are getting a good deal just because we are told so. We can only be sure that we are getting a bargain when it is something that we really need and we know that it would usually be more expensive. Otherwise we should always remind ourselves that the cheapest products are those that we do not buy at all!
- As we will see later, large shopping centres present one of the greatest inducements to impulse buying. Here we are surrounded by temptations and stimuli which have been very carefully planned to make us want to buy.
- Many people tend to spend money freely in the first few days of the month, as soon as they have been paid, after being short of money at the end of the previous month.
- For many people, shopping is a way of making themselves feel better if they are angry, depressed, or unhappy. In these circumstances they are more inclined to give in to their whims, which they would not normally do.
- If we go shopping on an empty stomach, our hunger makes it almost impossible for us to shop sensibly.

As we have said before, knowing our weaknesses and the circumstances which exacerbate them is the best way to fight them.

V BRAND IMAGES AS COMPLEX STIMULI

One characteristic of human beings is that we react to stimuli, not for what they are, but for what they represent. We attribute 'referred', symbolic significance to things, that is to say that we react to what they represent, not to what they themselves are.

If one writes the word 'dog', what the reader sees is simply a trail of ink on a piece of paper. But to anyone who can read and speak the language, the trail of ink will undoubtedly evoke a picture of an animal with four legs which barks. A flag is only a piece of multi-coloured cloth, but it can represent a country, an ideology, or a football team and can arouse feelings of solidarity or hatred in different nationalities or supporters or opponents of a football team. This 'training in symbolism' forms the basis of most advertising and marketing today.

It is this very ability to associate a certain significance with a stimulus which makes advertising and commercial strategies so successful. It also explains how advertisers can guide us towards certain brands by the use of graphic stimuli (logos, emblems, and brand images). Through advertising, these emblems have become associated with certain characteristics of the product (for example quality, prestige, foreign manufacture, etc.), or even with lifestyles or values. This associated stimulus can persuade us to buy one product as opposed to another, apparently identical one, purely on the basis of the positive, and sometimes unconscious, image that the emblem evokes.

Let us look at an example. The emblems of the most prestigious and expensive cars (it will be easy for the reader to think of one and remember the emblem on the bonnet), are an obvious sign of the quality of manufacture, distinction, and prestige of the car, but they also make us assume something about the economic status of the person driving the car. Once an emblem – in this case a simple graphic representation or symbol which identifies a particular make – is associated with quality and prestige, it can be applied to other products (for example a bicycle or a van), and these products will also be associated with the same image of prestige and quality.

Once an emblem or trade mark has acquired a positive image with consumers, the manufacturers can and do apply it to whatever product they want. For this reason, owning a prestigious trade mark is worth a great deal of money. It is a stimulus which evokes a positive image (consciously or unconsciously) in most consumers, and allows the manufacturers to sell many more products as long as they carry that trade mark.

We will discuss the effects of advertising again later, but we would like to reiterate what we said in the previous unit: brand names can be an indicator of the prestige or quality of a product, but we should not fall into the trap of buying expensive, branded products instead of identical, cheaper ones just because of our prejudices or the influence of advertising.

**READING****HOW STIMULI INFLUENCE US**

We do not fully realize the extent to which the careful use of stimuli shapes our buying habits. Consumers, particularly those who are not sure about what they want to buy, usually browse in shops, looking at the displays and making decisions based on what they see. Everything influences us: placing goods at eye level, special offer announcements, the size of shopping trolleys, even seemingly insignificant details like background music, the colour of posters or walls and the absence of any reference to time (have you ever noticed that there are no clocks in department stores?).

One of the most effective ways of influencing consumers is the placement of products. Generally, when it comes to deciding what to buy, we judge what is expensive or cheap, not on the price of that product, but compared with the price of the product next to it. This is understandable: faced with so many choices, for example in the supermarket, it is difficult to remember what we paid for something last time, or how much it was in another shop. The only point of reference we have is the price of other, similar products in the same shop. This means that shop owners can direct consumers towards buying certain products by putting them next to other products which, by comparison makes them look more attractive. But it is not enough to put them next to more expensive products because the consumer does not always buy the cheapest and is slightly wary of products which are much cheaper than others.

We are going to take a real example of how the relative placement of products can affect their sales. Take a brand of coffee which we want to sell more than others because it is our 'own brand', that is, it is made specifically for our company. First we put it next to a well known and more expensive brand. The results are as follows:



Price 250
65% for sale



Price 200
35% for sale

You can see from the illustration that our own brand sells well enough, but consumers still prefer the more expensive brand. As our brand is the cheapest, it is possible that they are wary of buying it and that the well known brand, although more expensive, attracts more buyers.

To increase the sales of our own brand, and reduce the sales of the more expensive coffee, we do not need to change the price of either of them. All we need to do is find a third, cheaper brand and put it next to them. The results are:



Price 250
18% for sale



Price 200
67% for sale



Price 150
15% for sale

By putting a cheaper brand next to our own brand, we have completely changed the distribution of sales in our favour. Now the well known brand seems too expensive as it is the highest extreme of three options. We are doubtful of the quality of the cheapest and it is at the lowest extreme. Faced with the choice, the 'own brand' is the middle option, which is usually the most popular with consumers when it comes to food or household appliances.



SUMMARY

Some of our behaviour as consumers – and this applies to both our good and bad decisions – is a result of our reactions to consumer stimuli. For example, seeing products attractively displayed in shop windows, or posters announcing special offers and discounts during the sales. We do not always buy something because we need it, but because we are induced to do so by external influences such as advertising, shop displays, or other stimuli.

Impulse buying and lack of self-discipline are usually caused by our lack of resistance to these stimuli. As consumers we must know how to control these impulses and learn responsibility and self-discipline so that we do not spend unnecessarily and find ourselves with no money to buy the things that we really do need. The only way to check this impulsiveness and acquire self-discipline is to allow ourselves time between feeling the impulse to buy something and actually doing it.

Some situations make us more likely to buy on impulse or without careful thought. For example, the sales, posters about special offers, and large shopping centres are all designed to encourage us to spend. Some people spend their money as soon as they have earned it and others see it is a way of making themselves feel better when they are angry, sad, or upset. Hunger can also make us buy more food than necessary if we go shopping on an empty stomach.

One of the stimuli which most influences our consumer decisions is the brand image. Through advertising, brand images and emblems are associated with certain characteristics of a product (for example quality, prestige, or foreign manufacture), or given lifestyles and values. This stimulus, associated with a particular product, can induce us to buy one product instead of another, apparently identical one, simply because of the positive image the emblem evokes.

We must not allow ourselves to be swept along by excessive 'brandism', which makes us buy an expensive product instead of a cheaper product of the same quality, just because of our prejudices or the influence of advertising.

UNIT 5

SHOPPING HABITS



What's cheap is expensive when you don't need it.

(Proverb)

I THE NOTION OF HABIT

Much of human behaviour is repetitive, that is to say, it consists of habits that we have acquired and that have become ingrained in our lives. From the moment we wake up in the morning, go to the bathroom, have breakfast, and do whatever it is that we do in class or at work, to the end of the day when we have supper, watch television, read a little maybe, or listen to a radio programme in bed, we are carrying out learned actions and behaviour that vary very little from day to day.

Many of the problems that we as humans have, including our behaviour as consumers and shoppers, result from the fact that we have acquired habits in our way of doing things, and that these habits are very difficult to change, however much we want to. Students with poor study habits and smokers are good examples of how difficult it is to break a habit. This is why it is better to be forewarned, so as to avoid dangerous habits which are then almost impossible to break.

II SHOPPING HABITS

Each of us has our own individual shopping habits. We tend to go to particular shops, to prefer certain brands, to buy mainly the same things and eat more or less the same things most of the time. These tendencies in the long run become a habit and as such, we stop thinking about them and take them from granted as good, even when they may not be.

For example, many people have got into the habit of going to big shopping centres to pass the time, or of going to supermarkets 'just to look around'. Another very com-

mon phenomenon among young people and adults is that of going regularly at the weekends to recreation facilities considered to have ‘atmosphere’, without stopping to think about the many alternative activities they could be engaging in.

Often these leisure activities can be classified as ‘consumerist’: for example, a group of youths spend the afternoon ‘hanging out’ in a bar, without even considering the possibility of taking part in sporting activities, going for an outing, staying at home to read, or just going to a park for a walk and a chat.

Force of habit also accounts for something we referred to earlier, whereby some people are incapable of saving, and spend whatever money they have straight away, or else spend too much at the beginning of the month as soon as they are paid, and are then in a tight spot for the rest of the month.

Let us now look at some of the more widespread shopping habits.

III ‘JUST LOOKING’

Some people, when they go out of the house and have no clear idea of what they are going to do, find themselves getting into the habit of drifting off to a shopping centre just to pass the time.

‘Just’ looking’ nearly always ends up in a purchase. In supermarkets, for example, over 95% of customers who go in with no fixed idea about what they want to buy or who are ‘just looking’, end up buying something, usually something that they see on special offer.

Many different factors influence such unplanned purchases. One of the reasons is that superstores and supermarkets provide lots of checkout counters, but leave only a very narrow, guarded aisle for those who leave the store without buying anything, which tends to suggest to non-purchasers that they are doing something shameful. This is, of course, not the case. Stores are perfectly within their rights to adopt whatever surveillance measures they can to obviate theft, but these measures should not be intimidating. Shoppers have the absolute right as consumers to enter and leave any establishment open to the public without purchasing anything.

IV DIVERSIFYING OUR SHOPPING

Consumers usually shop in the same store for no very logical reason. It should come as no surprise that their preference is not determined by ‘their’ store being the nearest, or that they choose it because the prices are lower. As in the case of brand preference, it must be pointed out that purposeful and conscious choices are entirely reasonable, but beyond that, the development of a shopping habit ends up constraining people

into repetitive and inflexible behaviours which are in no way helpful to them as consumers.

Good consumers are those who diversify their shopping as much as possible, buying their products in places where quality for quality the price is lower. It is unrealistic to imagine that one store is always going to be best for all products. Once we start comparing, we will notice that in one store we may want to take up special offers, in another the quality is better, and in a third the prices for basic products are very competitive.

We should also be wary of the so-called 'halo effect', which leads us to believe that a particular store is expensive or cheap, based on the price of a few important items, such as oil, or milk, for example. If in fact we see that a particular item is genuinely cheap, we do well to buy it. But we should not take it for granted that the price of everything else in the store will be equally competitive.

V SHOPPING LISTS

Overspending on shopping (which shoppers nearly always regret the minute they leave the store) can largely be avoided if consumers set out to go shopping with a written shopping list of those items they genuinely need. However, only a minority of shoppers (fewer than 20%) take a shopping list with them, and of these, most just write down a list of the minimum basics in order to remember to buy essential items. As a result, many of them buy much more than is on their list.

One particularly bad habit for shoppers to get into, is to wander down the aisles in the hope that items on the shelves will remind them of things they need to buy. This habit actually benefits the managers of big stores, one of whose strategies is to direct people's buying in a particular direction by careful location of the products they are particularly anxious to sell. Bearing in mind that we cannot possibly notice all the vast array of products for sale in these stores, products placed at the end of a main aisle or at eye level are those that people are going to see and therefore those that will sell the most. Similarly, we are much less likely to notice items in corners, on at the top or bottom of shelves.

Product location is so important, that often manufacturers contract ahead of time for choice location of their products and offer special incentives for these locations.

When we set out to do our household shopping without a shopping list, we often find when we get back that we have forgotten some really essential items. If we stop to think about it, we will also find that the things we buy without really needing them are things for which we have no real need, or that we 'just fancied'.

**READING****HOW CAN WE CHANGE OUR HABITS?**

When we want to change our habits, it is not enough just to tell ourselves 'I'm going to stop doing it this way'; we have to find a positive alternative to the way we do things, and act on it in the knowledge that taking on this new style of behaviour will in the long run make us feel better about ourselves.

This was the case for Nuria. She had been working afternoons only. She started to get bored at home in the mornings because all her friends were either in class or working, so she got into the habit of going for a walk, which always wound up in a big shopping centre near her home. There, she nearly always ended up buying something, usually clothes, and this daily outlay was much more than she could afford. Furthermore, far from getting satisfaction out of it, she felt bad about herself.

Her friends and family kept telling her not to go to the shopping centre so often. Her habit was costing her too much and she disliked her own behaviour. To make matters worse, her purchases were inappropriate since the majority of the clothes she bought did not suit her and ended up the back of her wardrobe. Furthermore, her shopping habits made it impossible for her to save up to buy a house and a car, which was what she really wanted.

What was Nuria's reason for going to the shopping centre every day? It was because she was a sociable and restless person. As she herself told us, 'Every morning I had a really hard time, I was so lonely. I felt as if the house was closing in on me.' Her mornings were full of tedium and boredom. Shopping was an escape, a form of distraction, and way of dealing with boredom.

This is why it was not helpful for her acquaintances just to tell her not to go shopping every morning. That was the equivalent of telling her to stay at home, and she had tried that many times, but was always overcome by the temptation to go anyway, because her 'mornings were so long...'

Habits do not simply get cancelled or wiped out. We can really only change them when we opt to do other, more positive things, and engage in this change with enthusiasm and pleasure.

We put a wide range of alternatives to Nuria. They included reading, learning a foreign language, taking up a sport. But it was she who found the solution, when she remembered that what she like best was painting and drawing. She was interested and talented, but had somehow 'never found the time' to learn the techniques and devote herself to painting as she would have liked.

She enrolled on a part-time course and went to study art every day. As her mornings were completely taken up with something she was really interested in, she automatically stopped her visits to the shopping centre unless she had something to buy.

By a curious coincidence, her class's first art show, put on by the academy where she was studying, was exhibited in the very shopping centre she had so often frequented earlier. Nuria did admit that occasionally she still went to the big department stores, and sometimes was tempted into buying something. We smiled at her slight look of guilt as she said it, but reassured her that this happens to everybody and is nothing to worry about. We all have impulses and it is OK to allow ourselves little rewards. As with nearly everything else in life, the danger is in excess.



SUMMARY

As consumers, we have acquired certain habits which we repeat over and over again without thinking about them. Once they have become fixed habits, they are very difficult to change. We tend to go regularly to the same shops and buy the same things.

One of the most widespread habits is that of going to big shopping centres 'just to pass the time'. Another is to go to superstores 'just to look'. It is also common to go to shopping centres or other places of entertainment without considering alternative activities we might engage in.

When we go to a shopping centre 'just to pass the time' or 'just to look' it is easy to end up buying something because of the number of temptations and incitements to buy that we are exposed to. This is how we end up buying a lot of things we really do not need.

Another consumer tendency is always to go shopping in the same shops, when there may be no rational reason for it. This may be due to the 'halo effect', where our view of whether a store is expensive or cheap is based on the price of a few important items.

It is better to diversify our shopping, looking for the best shops for our purposes after we have compared quality and prices. It is unrealistic to assume that one store is always best for every different kind of product.

Another very common habit that we must avoid is that of combing the aisles of the store in the hope that the items on the shelves will remind us of what we need to buy, instead of leaving home with a written list of all the items we need.

If we go out to do household shopping without a list, we usually find that we have forgotten several things that we really needed and have spent a lot of money on things we really had not planned to buy.

UNIT 6

SHOPPING CENTRES AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON SHOPPING AND LIFESTYLE



What I have I don't want, but I want everything I see that I don't have.

(Proverb)

I INTRODUCTION: FROM TRADITIONAL SHOPS TO SHOPPING CENTRES

Economic and social development and the attendant growth of what we have labelled the 'consumer society' has brought in its train a fundamental change in economics, in production technologies, and in our whole way of living and thinking. Some of the more gradual of these changes may have passed virtually unnoticed. One phenomenon, however, that no one can have missed is the gradual disappearance of small businesses (traditional shops) and the growth of the modern shopping centres. This can be seen as a direct consequence (and maybe even a cause) of the changes in lifestyle referred to above.

Shopping centres are designed to include not just shops, but also areas for leisure and recreation. You can go shopping, go to a movie, or eat in a restaurant in these centres. Once in them, we forget that they are designed specifically and in every detail to be maximally attractive in commercial terms, to encourage us to shop, and thus to make lots of money. Do we ever give sufficient thought to the consequences of spending so much of our time in these 'inner cities' created by the business world?

In order to answer this question and to understand why there has been this movement away from traditional shops in favour of the growth of the big shopping centres, we need to look at the three most important stages of this development. The first was the worldwide growth of self-service outlets, followed by the increase in size of those outlets, and finally, the evolution of the fully-fledged 'commercial city'.

II FIRST STEPS IN THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE RETAIL INDUSTRY: OPEN STORES AND SELF-SERVICE

The advent of self-service stores, to which we are now so accustomed, were the first stage in the development of new methods of sales and distribution. As this new way of shopping gradually took hold, stores became more open. We no longer had someone behind a counter asking us what we wanted. Quite the contrary. That question would prompt most casual shoppers to beat a retreat, since many of them have no idea when they go into the store what they really want. They may even need absolutely nothing the store has to offer. They do not enter the store with anything particular in mind. The urge to buy arises once they are in the store, faced by an attractive and tempting article which they then buy, almost without thinking about it and often on credit (and thus with money which has not yet been earned).

So much so that, even in small stores where there is still a personal interaction between shopper and store attendant, the latter will now accept it with a smile if we say we are 'just looking'. Years ago, if we had said the same thing, store attendants would have become angry or thought we were making fun of them.

III HOUSEHOLD SHOPPING AND THE GROWTH OF MEDIUM-TO-LARGE DEPARTMENT STORES

The second stage in the evolution of the shopping centres was the creation of medium-to-large department stores and their enormous success as the favourite places to do the household shopping. These days, most basic household goods (food, cleaning products, household and other products) are bought in supermarkets, superstores, and department stores. There are also discount shops, where products are cheaper but there are fewer brands and varieties than in the bigger stores. Aside from the size and types of these stores, in all of these businesses, the sales system is the same – shoppers walk around freely, helping themselves to the items they want, and then pay all together at the checkout.

The very rapid spread of shopping as a self-service system in medium-to-large establishments, so characteristic of our consumer society, has meant that consumers have become used to it without stopping to think about the changes in shopping habits and even in lifestyle that these changes imply. The reason for this rapid expansion into supermarkets, superstores, and department stores is that consumers felt attracted by the advantages. However, any large-scale transformation of this kind carries with it its own pitfalls and disadvantages.

The changes in consumer habits dictated by the nature of the modern shopping establishments has meant a decrease in reason and common sense. Consumers have been inadequately prepared to face the pressure to buy and the onslaught of the power of suggestion created by the mere fact of being in a wide shopping aisle with an empty shopping trolley.

As we mentioned earlier, from the moment we step into a department store, superstore, or supermarket, we are in a world where everything has been specifically designed to influence us to buy. This includes the advertisements all around us, the way the products are arranged around the store, their position on the shelves, special offer announcements, and the very fact of being surrounded by other people all filling up their trolleys – even the size of the trolleys, everything is designed to encourage us to spend.

Of course small, traditional shops and open markets still exist, but now over 80% of all household purchases take place in medium-to-large establishments. According to research surveys, the main reasons people choose to shop in these establishments are their prices, discounts, and special offers. Other motivating factors are the variety of products available, the long opening hours and, in the case of supermarkets and department stores, the ease of parking access and closeness to the shoppers' homes.

However, in spite of the fact that the desire to save is what motivates us most strongly to prefer the big stores (and indeed, their products on the whole tend to be cheaper than those available in the smaller traditional shops), research indicates that most people spend 20% more in the big shops than they planned to before they set out. What accounts for this increase? It is well known that, unless we have a lot of self-discipline, it is all too easy to fall prey to unthinking impulse buying, in other words, we buy items that we had no previous intention of buying, or buy in greater quantities than we had planned. It is all too easy to go in to buy a litre of milk and come out with a trolley full of stuff that we had not planned on buying. And we may even find we have forgotten to buy the milk that we went in for in the first place!

IV SHOPPING CENTRES AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON SHOPPING AND LIFESTYLE

Most recently, shops have branched out even more and turned into shopping malls: they have become leisure centres, places to walk around, to be entertained in. We have now seen the advent of the huge commercial 'cities' geared up to entertainment and leisure. The shops are grouped together forming artificial but highly welcoming streets and galleries. They give the appearance of being mid way between streets and shops – we can walk stroll through them as if through the streets of a city, lined with benches, plants, and trees (mostly artificial!). In these streets we find boutiques, medium-sized shops, department stores and superstores, as well as cinemas, restaurants, discotheques, and other leisure activities.

In former times, shops had to find a place to establish themselves in the city streets. Now the shops create their own streets. Stores become the cities themselves and create a new world based on consumption. They may be imitation cities, but they mimic the real thing: they are easy to park in, feel safe, and everything everywhere is designed to feel welcoming and appealing to the buyer. The danger of being drawn into overspending in such an alluring environment is obvious. This is particularly true for people for whom these malls are the favourite place of relaxation outside the home, and who spend hours and hours in them, even when there is nothing they actually need to buy.

Finally, one of the biggest attractions of shopping malls can be explained by the negative aspects of life in large cities, where often the only places that are easily accessible and near enough are these large centres. In addition, they are open all hours, people do not have to book in advance for anything, have easy parking, and provide the cheerful and pleasant atmosphere we described earlier. Anyone living in London, Paris, Madrid, or Rome probably feels very alone amongst all the millions of people in the city, and may feel that it is very inhuman. Big cities do not encourage contact between people, unless they are immediate neighbours or work colleagues. Friends and family are likely to live in different areas of the city. Visiting them may be difficult, since it often involves planning to meet in a place that takes some time to get to, both going and coming back. The frequent feelings of loneliness, disorientation, and insecurity that the city dweller experiences are to some extent soothed in shopping centres.

V CHILDREN IN SHOPPING CENTRES

Training children to develop self-disciplined and responsible shopping habits is of utmost importance, as we have pointed out elsewhere. One of the most important factors in this connection is that of behaviour in shopping centres, superstores, department stores, etc.

From a very early age, children are taken by their parents to these centres. If many adults find them irresistible, children find them even more so. All the incentives to buy found in shopping centres are highly tempting to children, partly because so many of the goods and special offers are designed specifically with them in mind.

Children are extremely easily manipulated by advertising and other consumer influences. Store managers, knowing how much pressure children can exert on their carers, turn their store into a never ending source of temptations into which adults fall by default: they offer little presents with the purchase of certain products, project images of particularly popular characters on others, put toys, sweets and other similar temptations within children's reach or at their eye level.

Adults need to have it as a very clear principle, both for their own sake, and for that of their children, to educate their children to be responsible shoppers, by avoiding the reinforcement of wilful and consumerist behaviour. Before going shopping, adults should 'do a deal' with their children and decide together on a reasonable amount to spend. This way the children themselves decide what amount they will spend (the children may even be encouraged to get their items rung up at the till themselves). Furthermore, they will quickly realize that everything has its price, and that choosing one item means giving up another. This obviously does not mean that children have to be allowed their whim every time they go shopping. Here too, children need to learn to give up the idea of buying beforehand if the family finances or circumstances so dictate.

In any case, children must not be allowed to pressure adults into buying things for them. For example, if children insist on parents buying a particular brand of breakfast cereal, cocoa, or biscuits just because the boxes have a picture of a popular television

star on them, the children must be made to understand that this is just a trick to manipulate them into buying, whereas the important thing is the quality of the product they are buying and not what is on the wrapper.



READING

THE GROWTH OF BUSINESS AND LIFE IN THE CITY OF X

Let us imagine a European city in which we live, and call it 'X'. It could be a medium-sized or a large city. It does not matter what country it is in. We are going to talk about this city, because, although all cities are different, they are also all similar in certain respects. Readers will easily be able to identify what follows with the city in which they live. We are going to try and explain the general characteristics of the growth of commerce and the development of shopping habits in the second half of the twentieth century. It will be up to the readers to change an element here, or add others there in order to make the text fit their own cities.

In the last forty years we, as citizens of 'X' have seen such a vast transformation of life in our city that, in order to get some perspective on it, we will need to look back and go over our own memories and reflect on them. Of course, we are talking about a gradual change, not unlike that which has taken place in other European cities since the 1960s, and which happened alongside the fundamental economic, social, and demographic changes which have occurred in the last few decades. You can identify the history of these changes in the streets themselves through the almost imperceptible changes in domestic lifestyle.

In the 1950s, people's shopping habits were very different from what they have become since the growth of the consumer society. As had been the case for centuries past, people's expenses were regular and predictable. They bought material, shoes, coats, and domestic or work tools that would last for years and years. Then gradually came the first big purchases available to the well-off in the earliest stages of development – big wireless sets and the first televisions. Originally, when people came in from the rural areas to buy in the cities, they always shopped in the streets of the commercial sectors, usually to be found in the centre of the city. They also thronged to the bustling markets, where they would be surrounded by a large variety of different traditional stalls. (We may still have a century-old example left that fills us with wonder and nostalgia.) In those days, the commercial sector was always within, or at least in the immediate vicinity of the 'old town'.

Outside the centre of the city, were the little local shops where people bought their daily household needs: grocers, pharmacies, bakeries, butchers, etc. Nonetheless, it was still normal for housewives from whatever area of the city to go at least once or twice a week to the central markets and nearby shops to do their major weekly shopping. These central markets had remained unchanged for centuries.

Over time, the city entered into the period of huge growth and change whose results we see today. The city grew outwards, and the outskirts took in populations mi-

grating to the city from the rural areas and further afield. A large proportion of the middle and upper classes moved from the centre of the city to the elegant new residential areas on the periphery, where they found more modern apartments and houses to guarantee a better quality of life.

This process stimulated the development of high-rise conglomerations on the outskirts of the city which at the same time swallowed up the nearest villages and rural centres. The first department stores and shopping centres were created as a logical response to this expansion of the city.

The situation we have today is based on three phenomena:

- Commercial decentralization. The outskirts of the city are involved in ever-increasing commercial growth. Many businesses set up large branches in other parts of the city. It becomes more obviously profitable to set up stores in the residential areas; as the city is so much bigger, people no longer consider going into the centre to do their household shopping.*

The development of the urban outskirts. As a result of the general access to private cars, the main roads into the city have been developed to include typical 'ribbon development' shopping centres. Initially it was the large furniture stores and super-stores that took advantage of the ease of access, of the parking facilities, and low ground rents to get established along the main roads into the cities. Later, specialized department stores and other businesses established themselves, in the knowledge that the generalized use of motor cars gave everyone access to their businesses.

- The 'mall' phenomenon. Here the combination of department stores, small businesses, recreation areas with cinemas, bars, banks, and restaurants, all sharing a single source of access, parking facilities, and security arrangements form small 'inner business and leisure cities' whose success is based on the ease with which they can be reached from any part of the city. Their success is also due to the wide variety of shopping and leisure activities they have to offer.*



SUMMARY

Changes in the systems of sales and marketing have resulted in the disappearance of small businesses (traditional shops) and the growth of modern shopping centres – superstores, supermarkets, discount stores, and malls, which combine business areas with restaurants and recreation and leisure facilities.

This phenomenon is also the result of the generalized move towards self-service and the development of medium-to-large stores and industrial parks.

Most basic household items today (food, cleaning products, household and similar goods) are bought in superstores, supermarkets, and department stores. Another important innovation is the establishment of warehouse-type discount stores, where prices are low, but there is less variety of goods and labels. In all of these types of establishment, sale is by self-service: the customers walk around freely, choosing what they want and paying for their goods at the checkout counters.

When we buy things on a self-service basis, until we get to the checkout, we do not know how much we have spent. Consequently, it is easy to go too far, and to fall prey to thoughtless impulse buying, that is, buying items we had not planned to buy, or in greater quantities than we need. Research shows that on average, consumers spend 20% more in these shops than they planned before entering.

The big malls or shopping centres, which combine retail outlets and recreation facilities have been very successful, particularly in the big cities. Many people choose to pass all their leisure time outside the home in these centres, spending hours and hours in them, even though there is nothing they need to buy. The danger is that we can then lose sight of the fact that, when all is said and done, these are business centres, and that we forget or ignore the non-consumer recreation and leisure activities that may be on offer elsewhere.

Parents take their children to these shopping centres, where the children are exposed to a hundreds of attractive and tempting goods. Adults need to educate their children to be responsible shoppers, and to avoid rewarding wilful and demanding behaviour and thus teaching them habits of consumer excesses.

UNIT 7

CONTROL OF SPENDING AND MISUSE OF CREDIT FACILITIES: THE DANGERS OF SERIOUS DEBT



There are two pleasures to be had from money - knowing how to earn it and knowing how to spend it.

(Proverb)

I INTRODUCTION: THE RESULT OF FEWER CASH PAYMENTS

Today, only a small proportion of income and outgoings transactions are carried out in cash: salaries, bills, charging or receipts from credit cards can only be carried out through a bank account.

As a result, more and more people are passive receivers of bank statements. Consequently, even ordinary expenses such as telephone and electricity bills seem to them to be unforeseen expenses. The problems increase when it involves credit card charges when they apply to purchases made some time before, and which the purchaser has probably completely forgotten.

We have lost the laudable habit of keeping income and outgoings accounts for ourselves and, as a result, the majority of consumers simply wait for their statements to arrive from the bank (always well after the event) and accept without question any entry on their statement.

Not so many years ago, nearly everybody knew exactly at any one time how much money they had. They did not spend more than they had, since most payments were made in the form of cash. Nowadays most consumers have no idea how much money they have at any one time. The only way they can find out is to check their bank balance.

This is why it is so easy for people to use credit card or bank transactions to spend money that they have not got. This leads to a very serious situation: serious debt.

II THE DANGERS OF SERIOUS DEBT

Serious debt is one of the dangers resulting from consumer overspending, as we discussed in Unit 2. This situation is one which affects a growing number of families, and families need to be aware of the problem.

Conditions of bad debt are due to the fact that in our consumer society people increasingly resort to credit to pay for consumer goods, living months beyond their means in a never-ending spiral of credit transactions. They then have to set aside a large proportion of their income to pay off the interest charges. This can lead to serious insolvency in family finances.

There appear to be three basic reasons for serious debt:

- The effects of certain types of advertisement trivialize the use of credit transactions by suggesting you ‘treat yourself’, and ‘don’t deny yourself’, irrespective of whether it involves a holiday to some exotic place, ordering a new kitchen or living room furniture, or buying a new stereo. Any expenditure seems to justify getting into debt. When consumers are carried away by the urge to spend, they usually end up in a permanent state of debt, enmeshed in a perpetual spiral of credit spending.
- The dangers of inappropriate overuse of credit cards (even if they are a useful modern method of payment) are that they can become a trap for the impulse buyer. Deferred payment means that people can ‘spend merrily’ and forget what they have spent until the credit card statement comes in. People can get into debt in an impulsive, continual, and uncontrolled way. This could never have happened before the advent of credit cards.
- The number of people whose psychological characteristics and personal attitudes make them particularly prone to loss of self-discipline. (See Unit 4.)

In order to overcome these problems, a number of basic issues need to be addressed:

1 Loans are a way of buying money at a rate of interest that is always higher than that of inflation. For that reason, loans should only be taken out when it is absolutely necessary, or with full awareness of the financial strain on the individual’s personal finances, since these will affect the individual’s standard of living and financial future. Occasionally it is necessary and reasonable to take out a loan, for example, to take out a mortgage to buy a flat, to make an investment, or to deal with exceptional circumstances.

2 However persuasive and seductive the publicity for loans is made, we must never forget that the interests of the lender (banks and building societies) and the borrower (the

consumer) are not the same. Leaving aside the question of good faith and honesty of banks, they are inevitably (and rightly) working for their own benefit, which is why we should not allow ourselves to be seduced into taking out loans unless absolutely necessary.

3 For their own good consumers need to keep control of their financial situation, anticipating expenditure and income, keeping minimally simple accounts, and checking their bank statements. If people did the simple maths of calculating what they would have paid in total at the end of a hire purchase period, they would sensibly think twice before committing themselves to the purchase.

III SELF-ANALYSIS AND DISCIPLINE IN SPENDING

Self-analysis involves carefully noting down our activities, with a view to recording and analysing them. Self-analysis helps us to become aware of much about ourselves that might otherwise pass unnoticed. When it comes to income and expenditure, self-analysis plays a vital role in helping us to control spending and ultimately to rationalize our finances.

Reflection, on however small a scale, is a useful exercise for anyone. In addition to giving us a sense of control, there is the additional very positive psychological benefit of helping us to plan our spending effectively. For impulse buyers and over-spenders, who have problems with self-control, it is absolutely essential.

There is another factor to be considered: techniques to improve self-control are useful and simple tools to strengthen our willpower in order to achieve whatever goal we have set ourselves, but techniques alone cannot replace willpower if it is not there in the first place.

We have all come across people who, faced with month after month of failure to balance their accounts, complain they 'just don't know where the money goes to'. On their own initiative, or sometimes at the suggestion of a friend, they try to straighten out their accounts, do it for a month or two, and then give up. Control of one's own finances calls for willpower and persistence.

Control in this sense necessarily contains two elements: budget planning and then monitoring our spending to see if it is in line with the budget we have set ourselves. One of these elements without the other is useless.

IV INDIVIDUAL AND FAMILY BUDGETING

The ability to budget and control spending is vital. Many of our readers may not yet have an independent income, but will have in the near future. However limited our budgets may be, learning to keep accounts at this stage will always be a useful skill.

Budgets have to be realistic. Planning a budget has to be based on how we spend our money, not just, as is so often the case, a declaration of intent or a list of regular outgoings. Starting from accounts of previous months expenditure, we are able to detect regular patterns of payments and outgoings.

Any budget must be personal, that is, it needs to fit the circumstances, the income, and spending patterns of the individual. Personal finances differ so widely from person to person that it is not possible to think in terms of a universally applicable budget. Some people might spend considerable regular amounts in restaurants or pubs, others spend a lot on CDs, cassettes or on going to the movies. For smokers, a hefty sum is spent on tobacco. For this reason, our first question should always be 'What do I spend my money on?' If we go through our receipts for previous months, we will quickly identify our main regular outgoings. On the other hand, small but regular expenses, such as entertainment, drinks in pubs or bars, transport, and small purchases, all of which tend to eat a large hole in people's budgets, often pass unnoticed. If in previous months we have overspent and want to begin to do things differently, we have to have a genuinely realistic view of 'where our money goes'.

After we have planned our budget, we need to keep a daily record or account of what we spend and see just how closely it follows our intended budget. As we said earlier, people often make a note of the easiest expenses to check on – electricity bills, water rates, and so on, and forget such miscellaneous expenses as bus fares, the odd coffee, etc. For some these expenses may be minor, but in other cases (in the case of teenagers who do not yet have their own income, but rely on pocket money from their parents) these expenses may amount to everything they have. It is highly likely that lack of awareness of these apparently small expenses may account for serious financial instability in the family. A realistic attitude as to what and how much is involved is essential if we are to identify the problem areas in our finances. It is not a matter of eliminating the problems, but of seeing them as they really are.

Nowadays it is somewhat easier to keep a check on everyday expenses, since large payments are usually made through a bank, whereas people tend to use ATM machines to take out set amounts of cash to pay for everyday expenses. This means that we do not have to write down every time we take a bus. It is good enough to account in a general way for the money we take out for these purposes, and not confuse it with other expenses.

As we have pointed out, if we write down our expenses in the same notebook we planned our budget in, we will be able to see at once whether we have kept within the limits of our budget or not. For example, if in a given month we have estimated £40 to pay for electricity and we then get a bill for £65, we know we have a shortfall that we will have to recover from somewhere. If we have estimated £100 for miscellaneous expenses, we need to look at whether our monthly visits to the cash machine are in line with our estimate or not.

Any notes we make must be made immediately and on the same day as we carry out whatever transaction, otherwise, we are sure to forget to do it and thus lose the benefit of our financial self-control.

Monthly outgoings should be entered on a yearly summary table. (See below.) This helps to give us a better overview of our finances and to take appropriate steps to try and save money or avoid getting the family into serious debt.

V UNCONTROLLED SPENDING: MISCALCULATION

Miscalculation is another reason why we often spend so much more in some shops than we had anticipated when we went in. This is because, until we reach the checkout, we do not realize how much the total is going to be. This is one of the dangers of self-service shopping: we pick up items as we go along and pay for them all together at the end. Shoppers are often surprised when they unload their trolleys to have them scanned, to see how much they have in fact bought. Sometimes we ‘find’ items that we do not remember having chosen, or that we thought we had decided against buying and left on the shelves.

One way of dealing with this is to enter and add (with the help of a small calculator) as we go along. While this is not yet common among shoppers, it is a habit which, once acquired, pays rich dividends in terms of saving and monitoring of spending. It introduces a notion of common sense into the process of shopping and is one of the most effective ways to combat the impulse buying that superstores so easily encourage.

For those who always end up buying more than they anticipated, here is another good way of breaking the habit: after we have finished our shopping, but before getting to the checkout, we compare the quantity in our trolley with what we came for. If we have more than what we came for, we take out the least important items and return them to the shelves. We will immediately see that there are many items in our trolley that we do not recall buying and that we may have picked up almost unconsciously. As we use this technique, we will also leave the store feeling much better about ourselves!

Obviously there is no point in being a martyr to saving in our consumer society. We all have the right to ‘treat ourselves’ from time to time, but it is best if we set a limit on this before we start our shopping. One way of doing this is to decide what we can afford to spend on our treat before we go into a store (assuming we can afford it in the first place) and stick to that self-imposed limit no matter what temptations we are exposed to.



SAMPLE SUMMARY TABLE OF INCOME AND EXPENDIDURE



EXPENDIDURE	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	TOTAL
RENT	750,00	750,00	750,00	750,00	750,00	750,00	750,00	750,00	750,00	750,00	750,00	750,00	9.000,00 €
MORTGAGE													
COMMUNAL SERVICES.	26,00	26,00	26,00	26,00	26,00	26,00	52,00	26,00	26,00	26,00	26,00	26,00	338,00 €
WATER	18,00		16,50		16,00		21,00		24,00		18,50		114,00 €
ELECTRYCITY		60,00		68,00		51,00		47,50		48,00		67,00	341,50 €
GAS	55,00		52,50		48,00		35,00		19,00		34,00		243,50 €
TELEPHONE		42,50		45,00		45,50		41,00		33,00		56,00	263,00 €
SCHOOL	60,00	67,50	75,00	73,00	60,00	69,00	75,00			75,00	72,50	80,00	707,00 €
CAR	230,00	50,00	50,00	50,00	50,00	50,00	50,00	50,00	50,00	50,00	50,00	75,00	805,00 €
INSURANCE	17,50	17,50	17,50	17,50	17,50	17,50	17,50	17,50	17,50	17,50	17,50	17,50	210,00 €
FOOD	281,50	264,00	250,50	272,50	243,50	284,50	262,50	321,00	252,00	250,00	223,50	390,50	3.296,00 €
CLOTHES	60,50	21,50	10,00	33,50	40,50	14,00	32,00	54,50	5,00	21,00	44,00	71,50	408,00 €
OTHER	400,00	350,00	300,00	400,00	400,00	300,00	300,00	600,00	400,00	300,00	300,00	600,00	4.650,00 €
TOTAL	1.898,50	1.649,00	1.548,00	1.735,50	1.651,50	1.607,50	1.595,00	1.907,50	1.543,50	1.570,50	1.536,00	2.133,50	20.376,00 €
INCOME													
BASIC SALARY	1.750,00	1.750,00	1.750,00	1.750,00	1.750,00	1.750,00	1.750,00	1.750,00	1.750,00	1.750,00	1.750,00	1.750,00	21.000,00 €
EXTRAS			240,00							1.120,00			1.360,00 €
TOTAL	1750,00	1.750,00	1.990,00	1.750,00	1.750,00	1.750,00	1.750,00	1.750,00	1.750,00	2.870,00	1.750,00	1.750,00	22.360,00 €
SAVING	-148,50	101,00	44.2,00	14,50	98,50	14.2,50	155,00	-157,50	206,50	1.299,50	214,00	-383,50	1.984,00 €

**READING****UNFORESEEN EXPENSES AND
THE FAMILY 'ACHILLES' HEEL'**

Many people find that month after month, their intention of saving and cutting back on expenditure is at odds with the reality of unexpected expenses. The fact is that if we analyse these expenses, they are not unforeseen expenses, but extra-budgetary expenses, such as insurance premiums, car maintenance, birthday presents for friends or family, enrolment fees, or schoolbooks. In other words, they are not regular monthly expenses, but are nonetheless perfectly foreseeable. Often we need only look at our accounts for the same month in the previous year to be alerted to these 'unforeseen' expenses.

In addition to these problem areas, every family has its own 'Achilles' heel', its weak point, which often results in a snowball effect of seemingly minor incidental expenses. These are not written into the family budget or accounts and yet they can completely destabilize the family's financial resources: frequent meals out in restaurants, subscription to magazines, video rentals, etc. We are not suggesting that we should all deny ourselves these little pleasures, but that we should be realistic and take them into account, particularly if we have made a previous decision to save in order to make an investment or if we are trying to regulate our overspending.

To get over these problems, it is important for every member of the family to feel involved in the family finances. Children should not think that their only role in the financial situation is to get as much money as possible from their parents. Quite the contrary, they should be able to anticipate their own expenses and tailor them to what the family can afford. Since children are an integral part of the family economic unit, they should become responsibly aware of their family's general expenses and of the need to set reasonable limits on their own spending. The financial needs of the family unit as a whole or of particular individuals must always come before the whims and impulses of other members of the family.

VI CREDIT CARDS

As we have already mentioned, credit cards are a very useful modern way of paying for things, but they can also become a real trap for the unwary impulse buyer. It is important to differentiate the use of credit cards as a simple means of paying for goods as opposed to their use as means of obtaining credit. Credit card use just to pay for goods can serve to make us less aware of our spending and increase our tendency to overspend. But it is even more dangerous to make unnecessary purchases, using credit cards to spend money we have not yet earned.

In short, one negative aspect of the use of credit cards as a means of payment is the self-deceit involved in buying more when we use credit cards than if we were paying for goods in cash. One way round this is to write down all non-cash payments so as to keep them in mind and not be shocked by our bank statements when they show items we had forgotten about and therefore ignored.

Although this idea is not fashionable in our society, let us not forget that traditional wisdom advises us not to buy on credit frivolities or things which can wait until such time as we have the cash to pay for them.



SUMMARY

Nowadays, most payments and income transactions are made through banks, and very few transactions involve cash. Although this is a sign of the times, it also makes it essential for consumers to keep their own personal accounts in order to be able to foresee incomings and outgoings, and not just be passive and *ex post facto* readers of their bank statements.

Changes in payment habits, credit abuse, and shopping excesses and over-spending can lead to situations of seriously bad debt. This happens when people get used to relying on credit to pay for consumer goods, living months in advance of what they can afford. By living constantly on credit, they have to allocate a large proportion of their income to pay off interest charges, and can easily slide into insolvency and destroy the balance of family finances.

The main causes of serious debt are: the influence of some types of advertising that encourage people to buy on credit whatever their hearts desire; excessive and inappropriate use of credit cards; and the psychological and character profiles of certain types of people.

In order to increase self-control in spending and to avoid serious debt, the best policy is to keep personal accounts, based on a realistic budget, and to note down daily our incomings and outgoings as a way of sticking to our budget. In our budget planning, we need to take into account so-called 'unforeseen' and miscellaneous expenses, which are often a cause of disarray in family finances. Another technique is to make sure, when shopping in a superstore, to check before we reach the checkout counter that we have not bought more than we came for.

UNIT 8

ADVERTISING AND SPENDING

The faster fashions change,
the more I seem to spend!

(Proverb)



I INTRODUCTION: THE INFLUENCE OF ADVERTISING

Advertising has such a powerful influence on our lives that many people think that most of the problems and shortcomings in consumer behaviour are based on our human inability to resist and assimilate the quantity and sophistication of the advertising we are subjected to. Everyone in our culture is constantly surrounded by advertising messages of every kind, although it is true to say that we notice only a few of them and are influenced in our consumer behaviour by even fewer.

On the other hand, not everyone is equally susceptible to advertising. Although we are exposed to the same quantity, our individual reaction to advertising messages is very different. This means that those who are suggestible are also the people who tend to have the greatest problems with overspending.

II WHAT IS ADVERTISING ALL ABOUT?

Advertising is a vital way of putting the providers of a product or service in touch with potential buyers or users.

A person or business advertising a product aims to:

- 1 Differentiate their product from other similar products.
- 2 Make us want their product more than others'.

3 Stimulate or increase our desire to buy or use their product.

The first aim 'to differentiate their product from other similar products' is extremely important, since there is an ever-increasing variety of similar products. Let us take as an example, a common milk carton. All milk cartons have the same shape, size (one litre), and seemingly contain a similar product (milk). The manufacturers need for the buyer to be able to distinguish their product from others', which is why they go for the brand image. If that did not exist, the buyer would not be able to tell products apart and would not therefore be able to make an informed choice.

Another aim of modern advertising is to create new needs. Often the function of advertising is not only to bias our choice in favour of the advertiser, but to create a craving for something new. In other words, its purpose is to make us want to own something we do not have, and which we previously did not miss. This arises every time a technical innovation or design novelty launches a new product on the market.

III ADVERTISING AS INFORMATION FOR THE CONSUMER

For consumers, the best kind of advertising is that which provides information about a product and helps us to decide what is best for us. In this respect, there are two types of advertising messages:

- Those that really provide information about a product or service, such as price, characteristics and specifications, sales conditions, warranties, etc. An advertisement for a car, for example, should tell us what the car costs, whether it has air-conditioning, the engine type, brake system, etc. This is the information most needed by the buyer, since it offers verifiable data and helps the buyer to make a decision to purchase. If the information is untrue, it also gives the buyer some comeback from the manufacturers.
- Other advertisements try to persuade us to buy a particular product, but through the medium of a message that does not involve information about the product (advertisements for perfume and well known drinks are a case in point, where the characteristics of the product are hard to pin down). In such cases the advertisers associate a product with beautiful images, with attractive people using the product, or with a 'cool' lifestyle. To use the example of selling a car, the advertisement might show a very attractive and happy-looking person driving through a fabulous landscape, with a voice-over saying 'We can take you anywhere', yet without giving any information whatever about the car itself.

The fact that the second type of advertisement is becoming more common shows a marked change in advertising ethos. Reference to the product itself is reduced in favour of publicity for the brand image. The first type of advertisement we have called *informative*, in that its main characteristic is that it provides verbal information on the product. Brand-image advertising is more *indirect* and tries to create a brand image to fit one or more products.



READING

A THOUSAND ADS A DAY

One day a consultant informed the General Manager of a large company that, according to his information, out of every £10 million spent on advertising, only 1 million were effective in reaching the consumer. The other 9 million, he claimed, were 'money down the drain'. 'I know,' said the boss, 'but if you can tell me beforehand which advertisements will be successful, I'll pay you 5 million.'

Counting the advertisements we see in the street, in newspapers, on the radio, on television, and in shops, we are exposed to an average of 1000 advertisements a day. The result is that we simply do not notice more than 10% of them. Among those we do notice, only a very few have any influence on our shopping habits.

This is why the advertising industry uses famous people or powerful and evocative images which appear to have no relation to the product being advertised. These images are designed to try and capture our attention in the midst of an avalanche of other advertisements.

If you live in a city, check out what we are saying: count the number of advertisements you see on your way home – in buses, on billboards, walls, etc. Then add the ones you come across in newspapers, on television, or on the radio. You will be surprised at the number and at how many you had failed to notice before!

IV ADVERTISERS, AGENCIES, AND THE ADVERTISING MEDIA

Many traditional Westerns feature a medicine man on a cart, who sells a 'miracle cure' for every ailment. Throughout history, there have always been street vendors and charlatans who went around advertising their own wares.

These people were the creators of their own advertisements, their own advertisers, and the means of promulgating their advertisements. Nowadays, these different functions are nearly always separate. It is important to be able to distinguish them.

- The advertiser is the person or business for whose benefit the advertisement is designed. For example, an advertisement for ham would be designed for the benefit of the factory that produces it.
- The advertising agency is the body that creates and disseminates the advertisement. These agencies are professional people or businesses who are commissioned by the advertiser to create, design, and produce the advertisement.

- In order for the advertisement to reach the public, there have to be media through the advertisement is disseminated. The most common of these media, which enable us to see and hear the advertisements are the press, radio, and television. But there are others: billboards, walls and, more recently, telephone and computer advertising through the Internet.

This is why it is important to distinguish between the quality of the advertisement and the quality of the product. The advertising agency may not know much about the product they are creating for, but they follow the manufacturer's brief and try to create an alluring advertisement. An attractive, or seductive advertisement may help to sell a bad product, so it is vital to be able to differentiate between advertisements with an informative element, which provides information on the specifications and characteristics of the product we are going to buy, and advertisements which are simply trying to persuade us to buy or to promote the brand image of a particular product, without giving us any information or valid, rational arguments for it.

V OVERT AND COVERT ADVERTISING

When we see or hear an advertisement, we know that we are faced with a message that may be useful in helping us to make a purchasing choice, but which has as its main aim, to guarantee or at least promote a rise in sales of a particular product. In other words, the manufacturers have paid the advertising agency primarily to benefit their own business. Of course the advertising agency is going to praise and recommend the product and we expect this. So far, there is no deceit.

However, we believe that the contents of other, non-publicity media publications, which are not paid for in the same way, provide objective and neutral information without any commercial end. It is, of course, possible to use non-publicity material to argue particular issues or ideas, but that is another matter.

It is therefore important that we should be able to tell where advertising begins and ends, so as not to be hoodwinked. Although accepted standards require that there be a clear distinction between advertisements and non-publicity material, these standards are often not rigorously adhered to. Advertisers recognize the defensiveness of consumers in the face of advertising overload. They acknowledge that large numbers of people change channels on television as soon as the commercials come on without even glancing at them. In fact, advertising overload is in itself enough to explain the phenomenon of 'zapping' or channel surfing. This means that advertising can get masked or hide itself in other material. Some advertisements are even designed to mimic information or entertainment slots in order to achieve greater credibility.

With a little awareness of the means that television, radio, and the press use to separate advertisement from other material, it is much easier to detect the tricks that are sometimes devised to mask the difference.

VI ADVERTISING THEMES, THE CULT OF PHYSICAL APPEARANCE, AND FASHION

In order to attract us to a particular product, advertising tries to get us to make a connection between that product and the ever-increasing fashion themes or what's 'in'. That too, changes, so advertisers have to be alert to those which are most successful in helping to increase sales or improve the image of a product. Sometimes a theme can be the ecological friendliness and respect for the environment of a certain product. Sometimes a product stresses the health benefits (real or not) in the area the public are most sensitive to – no or low cholesterol, good for the heart, healthy diet, etc.

We shall now take as an example one of the most common issues: image-consciousness, physical appearance, and the idea of being seen in what's 'in'.

Most advertisements aim at creating a connection between specific products (cosmetics, clothing, jewellery, perfumes) with images of beautiful young, and highly standardized bodies. Although physical appearance has always been important in all cultures, in today's society it has reached epic proportions of importance to the consumer. Advertisements tend to equate physical appearance with social, professional, and sexual success. In doing this, they also imply that certain products can guarantee the desired image to whoever uses them.

The saddest feature of this deception is that advertising predicates an ideal of beauty unattainable by the vast majority of humanity. It is obviously desirable to make the best of ourselves and our image, but this must only be done by looking realistically at these idealized models of beauty by exercising a positive attitude to our own image, our age, and our personal traits and characteristics. It is perfectly reasonable to care for our health and our appearance, but not so reasonable to feel that we are in competition with the rest of the world to be the best, the most attractive, and the most seductive.

Acceptance of one's own image and the ability to keep preoccupation with one's physical appearance within reasonable bounds are essential prerequisites for happiness and for coming to terms intelligently and gracefully with the biological processes of physical growth, maturity, and ageing.

However, as we have already pointed out, certain types of advertisement present us with images of perfect, youthful, and mostly excessively thin creatures. In this they convey the message that anyone who looks different should be battling to change themselves to conform. They further imply that it is easy to achieve the desired image by buying particular products – slimming aids, beauty creams, mineral waters, etc. etc

Psychological problems such as anorexia and low self-esteem are closely related to this compulsive preoccupation with a particular ideal of physical beauty.

Lastly, with reference to another very important issue related to physical appearance, the subtle infiltration of the idea of the 'latest fashion', or 'being seen in what's in', as well as the opprobrium contained in 'that's really old hat' (and this applies not just to fashion in clothes). These judgements overshadow the really important questions for the consumer, such as comfort, type of material, durability, washing and ironing in-

structions, the relationship between quality and price, etc. The call to keep buying new clothes in order to be in fashion means replacing items in perfect condition and the unnecessary expenses that that involves.



SUMMARY

The purpose of advertising is to bring together those selling a product or service with potential buyers or users of those products or services. Advertising aims at creating or increasing in the target population a desire to buy or use the product(s) as well as creating a distinguishing feature that allows the end user to differentiate and prefer the product(s).

Appropriate advertising provides real information about a product or service, stating price, specifications, terms and conditions, warranties, etc. Nevertheless, an increasing number of advertisements provide little or no information about the advertised product, relying on the artificial association of the brand with beautiful images, beautiful people using the product, and a 'cool' lifestyle. These advertisements create a brand image, but give no informational content.

It is important to be able to distinguish between the quality of an advertisement created by an advertising agency and the quality of the product it is aiming to sell. Hence the importance of differentiating advertisements with informational content from those whose purpose is to stimulate a desire to buy the product, or to highlight the desirability of a brand, without providing information or rational arguments to support their claims.

It is also important to be aware of covert advertisements masked or hiding in non-publicity material, and of advertisements that mimic information or entertainment slots in order to be credible.

To attract buyers, advertisements espouse current themes or issues in order to associate them with the brand or product and to increase their sales or to promote a brand image. In the case of certain products, these issues might be respect for the environment, health benefits, zero cholesterol, a healthy heart, healthy eating, care for physical appearance, as well as the concept of being in fashion. Often the features and characteristics of the advertised product do not justify association with these issues.

‘... despite the pitfalls and problems of living in the consumer society, it has created unprecedented standards of living and comfort. The youth of today must learn to take advantage of its benefits while at the same time avoiding its dangers. We have written these teaching units with them in mind, but with an eye to their teachers, parents, and adults in general. Our aim is to help young people become intelligent, responsible and self-disciplined consumers.’

‘...We have tried to treat our readers like people capable of thinking about their actions and the world in which they live and of improving the society in which they live through their behaviour.’

‘In order to be able to do this, they need a foundation of serious and adequate consumer education. We have tried to make these units as interesting and user-friendly as possible as well as a really valuable teaching tool.’



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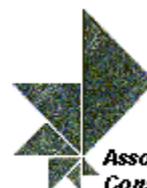


Junta de Comunidades de
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REGIONE TOSCANA



Giunta Regionale



Associazione
Consumatori
Utenti Milano



DUMFRIES AND
GALLOWAY