



CAUGHT IN THE SPIRAL OF CONSUMPTION?

Principles of consumer attitudes and publicity

Consumers feel frequently caught in a circuit from which they cannot escape. The motto of marketing-strategies is to enchant and seduce, and the compulsion to consume is often just too strong to resist. Like hunters and collectors we drag along more and more objects, and there seems to be no end to this circuit - in spite of economic constraints the exchange of money and goods has not lost its attractiveness. This module wants to make us familiar with the psychic and social aspects of consumption, to develop sensitivity for perceiving in which way we are ourselves subject to influences, and to make more transparent which factors influence our decision to buy a given product.

1. Subject-specific information

1.1 Why can we feel caught in a spiral of consumption?

Have we got all that we need - do we need all that we got?

Human needs are the basis of human life in general, but also of the functioning of economy. The offer of goods and services we desire is a logical consequence of these needs.

Chosen needs are satisfied by goods, services, leisure-activities, information, specific items of food or stimulants, etc.

The need of self-realization and self-development is satisfied by education, the freedom to shape life according to individual ideas, possibilities to participate in political, economic, and social processes, or having access to information and communication.

The varying needs of people are shaped by personal ideas and values, as well as by available financial resources, social and professional surroundings, and society and culture.

1.1.1 Consumption and patterns of consumption

Diverging definitions of consumption vary according to the emphasis they lay on different aspects. But all known definitions agree on the fact that consumption refers to actions which serve the satisfaction of individual needs by products or services (or own work/ housework). Consumption serves the satisfaction of needs, which may vary according to culture and nationality. For this reason we talk of global, national, or cultural consumption-patterns. Consumption-patterns can be altered by new consumption-trends.

◆ *Patterns of global consumption:* brand-names are often a typical feature of such patterns. Some examples are: Coca-Cola, Benetton, Mc Donald's etc. In addition to their functional usefulness branded articles transfer the symbolic value of being global and mobile. We do not buy running-shoes, we buy "Nikes". The brand-name pattern of consumption does not depend on the buying potential of the upper class. The purchase of branded articles has become a general pattern of consumption all over the globe, as well as for all social groups.

◆ *National and cultural patterns of consumption* relate primarily to eating-habits, the way we furnish our apartments, and how we spend our leisure-time. Distinctive characteristics are diminishing. We can buy food from another continent in the supermarket around the corner. The "Americanisation" of taste (taste and ingredients of the pizza most consumers love to eat has but little in common with the Italian national dish) is but one of many examples which show that national patterns of consumption are disappearing. Trends regarding housing also are increasingly shaped by global patterns [25].

*Consumption is the general term for all areas which regard the satisfaction of needs
(goods and services = areas of need)*



1.1.2 From the satisfaction of needs by consumption towards the immaterial benefit of consumption

The primary purpose of consumption is to guarantee physical survival. But in a society where this need is satisfied for the majority of the population self-preservation can not be reduced to the satisfaction of biological needs. In addition to the satisfaction of physical needs the purchase of products of consumption produces an immaterial benefit. By using certain products we show that we belong to a specific group, or that we enjoy status and prestige.

A purchased product can also fulfil the function of strengthening a person's identity (e. g: a man wants to emphasize his virility by driving a sports-car, a woman wants to underline her beauty by cosmetics). In this way products can complement chosen or desired lifestyles. Any chosen lifestyle includes the dimension of consumption.

Each good has a **value of usage**

This term stands for the measurable usability of an article for a specific purpose.

Everyday-objects acquire significance, because they can be related to certain habits which indicate a person's lifestyle. Most of the time cultural, social, and yet other symbols are interconnected. The transfer of **symbolic values** to goods happens primarily by publicity (a credit-card becomes a symbol of independence, or a shampoo is a symbol for beauty). These symbols have nothing to do with the practical value of usage of a product, - they respond to immaterial aspirations [27].

◆ **Goods fulfil a communicative function** - they are a message which is addressed either to the consumers themselves, or to their fellow citizens. The established *communication* can be either expressive, or regulative [28].

On the one hand the object acts as a medium to represent abilities, qualities, or the social position of a person. On the other hand an article can also become a symbol of the position a person holds in a specific social system, or it can shape inter-human relations, and express emotions.

◆ **Goods "create" experiences and satisfy hedonist aspirations**

With increasing frequency needs which go beyond sheer physical necessities (food, clothing, housing) are considered basic, - the structure of these created needs focuses on experience (a standard of consumption defined by intensity of experience); this structure is so rigid that it does not adapt to a lessening of monetary means, but resorts to savings or credits. To lower one's standard of living is considered a loss of esteem and triggers a crisis regarding one's personal value, which is often makes itself felt as a feeling of poverty. There is no "real poverty", but rather "a claim to poverty ". It is a question of a claimed or desired lifestyle [29].

Using a certain product is part of the personal experience of a person. the person imagines the image he/she offers to other people when he possesses and uses the product. The person seeks access to a certain lifestyle or status-group. The use of the product also is a mark of distinction from other groups (out-groups). At the same time the product strengthens a person's identity, because it complements or defines the picture which the consumer has of himself (e.g. "Are you still stashed up somewhere or have you begun to live?" - IKEA advertisement*).

A product is most likely to make a hit when the following complex reactions spring up in the consumer: "I feel well" (emotion); "I want to do/buy this" (motivation); "I think product A is good" (opinion).

The three levels of reaction are like successive steps: opinions engender emotions, and emotions trigger motivation. It is important for us to realize that different methods which publicity uses pursue the objective to "activate" us, in the sense of making us want to buy something.

1.1.3 From impulsive shopping towards informed shopping

Which sources of information can consumers dispose of?

Whether consumers make use of sources of information depends on different factors, like their own field of work, the product itself, their personal involvement, and the respective situation and shopping-conditions. The most important source of information is direct, personal exchange, because it covers the very basic need of



social contact. From the perspective of consumer-politics counter-information is important, because it enables consumers to verify the truth of the information which the producer has given them. Looking for information takes time, which the consumers might else use for leisure-activities or for the satisfaction of other needs. For this reason searching for information is not necessarily an activity which consumers consider to be meaningful.

Sources of information regarding the purchase of a product are:

- ◆ Conversations with sales-personnel. In the textile branch mostly female costumers are given advise, in the automobile branch mostly men.
- ◆ Advise from friends and acquaintances: experiences with a product or a source of shopping are passed on among friends and acquaintances.
- ◆ Information contained in product-descriptions, magazines, newspapers, in the internet, and in other media.
- ◆ Shop-window: informs the consumer on the shop as a source of purchase (the shopping-window gives up-to-date information).
- ◆ Publicity, advertisement.

Consumers often decide spontaneously - without applying what they know in a convenient way. After buying reasons are found to justify the decision: "this is a renowned producer", or "my friend has had good experiences with the product".

This means that many decisions are taken automatically, without applying existing knowledge. Further processing of information is also done rather automatically - in this way we can cope with an abundance of information, but we can also easily arrive at a wrong judgment and, consequently, develop a false opinion of a product. Our reactions are programmed - we deduce the freshness of a product from its color, and quality from its price, or we associate quality with a certain trademark. Expert literature classifies consumer-decisions according to

- ◆ buying-attitudes under strong cognitive control = limited buying-decision, *high involvement*
- ◆ buying-attitudes under weak cognitive control = *impulsive buying*

Differences of impulsive buying and strongly controlled buying: see appendix, OH-foil

Risks consumers fear when buying

Financial risks: excessive price, being cheated

functional risks: defectiveness

psychic risks: frustration and anger

social risks: reactions by our social surrounding, e.g. the husband's reaction after a mail-order delivery.

1.1.4 Examples of consumer-attitudes...

- ◆ We transfer preferences for a given product on other, similar products.
- ◆ We associate qualities (e.g. stimulant) of an already existing product with those of a new product which has the same ingredients - e.g. we all know Cola (a stimulant), - when a new product which contains Cola, e.g. cola-chocolate, comes on the market, it rates automatically positive.
- ◆ If consumers are not satisfied with a product, a future purchase from the same company depends on the way the complaint was handled. If complaints are not dealt with in a satisfactory way, negative propaganda is passed on by word of mouth.
- ◆ Dissatisfaction with a purchase can be expressed by conflictive methods like a vague remark, a buying-boycott, a menace, or a justified reclamation or complaint. Cooperative measures, like recommendations or inquiries, can also be chosen.

- ◆ Even complex consumer-decisions are only to a limited extent backed by information which was sought beforehand. Searching for information involves time, money, and effort. The higher the consumer estimates his risk, the more he searches information [30].
- ◆ Visual information is remembered better than mere verbal information (e.g. the Calgon publicity, where the calcification of the washing-machine is demonstrated by a picture).
- ◆ Satisfied clients like to stay with the same producer, dissatisfied clients tend to change brands.
- ◆ A change of brands can also be an expression of satisfaction, if the change itself is experienced as a pleasant stimulation.
- ◆ Loyalty to the same brand is stronger for persons of an advanced age or of a low social status. The motto is: "no experiments!" Loyalty to brands is also high when the article boosts prestige.
- ◆ Men exert more influence on purchases of consumer-goods which are used outside the house or are technically rather complex (e.g. car). Women dominate decisions which refer to products used in the house. For products which are used jointly buying-decisions are often arrived at together.

Older children directly influence buying-decisions (e.g. 52% when buying a TV, or 54% when buying a computer); they either take part in the process of decision-making directly or exert an indirect influence by opening a specific phase in the household [31] (e.g. the purchase of a computer for a school-child introduces a new phase in the household, which attaches importance to communication-technologies; or the birth of a child influences consumer-attitudes in a new way, and introduces at the same time a new phase in the household).

Product-information which consumers can make use of on buying a product

- ◆ Direct product-information
- ◆ the qualities of a product, such as color, shape, surface, suitability for any one of the sexes (e.g.: formerly coffee-machines were designed to please women, today they are given a "unisex-mage") [32].
- ◆ the registered features of a product, such as price and warranty: some information - like factory-price, or offer, can be confusing, because the client may automatically get the impression of a low price. The same is true for prices which are optically emphasized.

Indirect product-information

- ◆ the situation we take in when a product calls our attention, where it is ranged, which other articles are placed next to it a famous trademark influences automatically the impression we get of a product, because we associate it with good reputation.
- ◆ other, simultaneous occurrences which are not at all related to the presentation of a product (e.g. the presence of a good friend).

How powerful are consumers/suppliers?

- ◆ Power of promotion: consumers can show their preference for a supplier of their choice by ordering his products.
- ◆ Punishment: consumers decide to buy from a different supplier (e.g. supply of energy). Suppliers can rise the price of a product by artificial means, such as holding back the product, or producing less.
- ◆ Expertise: extensive information offers the consumer different options and presents thus an advantage. Usually it is the supplier who enjoys this advantage and makes use of it when he presents the product to the client.
- ◆ Recommendation: consumers can show their esteem for a supplier by recommending him to others and giving reference. The supplier can show the client a list of references.



- ◆ Legal power: consumers possess the right to receive a corresponding product for their money and, where applicable, a respective warranty. Suppliers possess the right to receive payment for their product and, if necessary, enforce it by legal means.
- ◆ Organized action: consumers can unite and take action against a product or a supplier, and in this way force him to establish socially or environmentally just conditions of production (e.g. Nike-initiative against child-labor).
- ◆ Innovation: by specific, carefully directed measures, and by establishing contact with business rivals, consumers can enhance competition, and in this way contribute to innovations.

1.2 Publicity

Publicity is defined as the attempt to influence opinions and attitudes by a sophisticated use of the media. (advertising media). Publicity is a systematic intent to open possibilities of marketing. It is a legitimate social technique which no social system can do without. Usually the term publicity refers to sales on the market. But it is also used to influence people in other areas: political, ecclesiastical, and local publicity are some examples, which could be paraphrased by the terms propaganda, or public relations.

1.2.1 The function of publicity from the perspective of the consumer

From the perspective of the consumer publicity can fulfil four functions:

- ◆ **Pastime and amusement:** Consumers relax when hearing advertising slogans or advertising music. It provides free amusement, but not without consequences, - it can engrave ideas or feelings on a person or encourage prejudices. Publicity thus shapes our view of life, and can induce consumers to change the values they subscribe to.

- ◆ **Emotional experiences of consumption** are primarily produced by the generous use of pictures. Pictures of people in erotic poses, beautiful landscapes, or children with relaxed smiles are examples of emotional stimulation. Even when the actual contents of an advertisement do not call our interest, the generated emotions draw our attention to it. It is suspected that consumers expose themselves deliberately to emotional publicity, because it can fulfil emotional needs. It is assumed that in the future the number of people who love publicity will keep growing, because they need the emotional stimulus and see no possibility to get it somewhere else.

- ◆ **Information regarding buying-decisions:** Publicity can enrich the field of decision-making of a consumer, especially if he participates actively in the search for information. It informs consumers on rival products and services, or specific qualities of a product. But the frequently heard argumentation of trade and industry that, as a response to consumer-oriented politics and to the more and more critical attitude of consumers, publicity has become more informative, has been refuted by science [33].

- ◆ **Norms and patterns of consumer-attitudes are "created":** We have already mentioned that products are most of the time bought without a previous, well-reflected process of decision-making. Our buying-decisions are controlled by our habits or by emotions. Consumers learn from publicity patterns of behavior which they have not deliberately chosen, and which may not be advisable. Example: by depicting different social contexts publicity induces the consumer to compare his own situation with that of others, and creates expectations and standards which determine the choice of a product.

Most of the time publicity works simultaneously on different levels, meaning that different effects (information, emotional contents) are combined.

These multifarious functions which publicity fulfils for consumers are often conflicting with producer-interests - e.g.: publicity is useless if it is consumed only for amusement. When consumers ask for comprehensive information, producers will furnish it only if it offers them some kind of advantage over their business-rivals.

1.2.2 Which strategies does publicity use?

Publicity utilizes collective ideas, - it expresses thoughts which sound convincing to most people. As the difference between products is not anymore defined by their functional use, they must be "charged", or filled" with meaning - in a way which makes them appear valuable to consumers. And these implications must finally be translated into symbols. Publicity thus translates products into pictures, poetic expressions, or music. It uses comparisons and metaphors (e.g. Esso-tiger for strength, suppleness, velocity), allegoric figures (Mr. Proper and others), and yet other symbols. For publicity to be effective people must understand these symbols and their meaning.

Intentions of publicity

- ◆ Consumers are induced to deflect their attention from information 1 to information 2.
- ◆ Consumers who are not looking for information are made to direct their attention to some specific information.
- ◆ Consumers notice primarily the kind of information which corresponds to their needs and interests.

On the whole, publicity functions according to the AIDA-formula, which was developed in the USA.

A = stands for attention: to call attention

I = stands for interest: attention is directed to the product

D = stands for desire of possession: the wish to have the product shall be aroused

A = stands for action: the client is stimulated to buy.

Strategies of publicity

◆ *Influencing people by pictures, words and space*

Primarily for design and wrapping. Generally, pictures are registered before words, if the picture has a certain size (at least one-fourth of the advertisement). If words are extra-large they are read first. Pictures invite action more than words. When we see an advertisement, we

- focus primarily on the top, and not on the bottom;
- strongest focus is on the left top;
- smallest focus is on the left bottom.

In their advertisement for Asia noodles Maggi does not present the product, but the world one buys with the product, - scenes of Chinese life. Places of nature play an important role: lush meadows, green hills (e.g. for "Kerry Gold", an Irish brand of butter) or the alpine pasture of Milka-publicity, which presents a piece of original nature. Ocean pictures trigger feelings of prototypical strength, freedom, and adventure. These places are either without people, in order to evoke everlasting nature, or with people who inhabit them, as a symbol of a natural way of life.

Publicity often uses the dimension of space for cosmetics and food, e.g. the wrapping of sugar for gelatinizing, which sells a "nostalgic world", is sprinkled with all sorts of fruit.

Pictures of landscape are not just reproductions of real places - they also represent moods and yearnings. The colors which are used also call forth specific reactions.

◆ *Imparting experience by music*

Melody, modulation, tempo or sound-intensity have an emotionally stimulating effect: e.g. Fast tempi call forth an impression of feeling happy, excited, active, or restless. In the area of marketing music is primarily used as a background, in order to create a pleasant atmosphere for communication and shopping.



◆ *Imparting experience by scents*

Scents are not consciously realized, but felt from the background. Yet they are among the most effective triggers of emotional conduct. Reaction to odors, which is stronger than reaction to other stimulants, seems to be biologically programmed to a large extent. Scent can on the one hand create an emotionally stimulating atmosphere, and on the other hand impart experiences related to the product. The emotional effect of scent is primarily used for products of personal hygiene, or perfumes, and they are also added to cleansing agents to produce an additional effect. Fresh odors signal cleanliness. "Ajax" and Mr. Proper" use a citrus-scent. Due to the use of scents for rivaling product-competition the number of commercially used scents has doubled during the last few years, - with undesirable side-effects for allergic persons [34].

◆ *Reflected combination of stimuli*

A skillful combination of different stimuli can trigger an emotional experience of freshness.

sounds: clear, clean sounds in C-major, joyful melodies

colour: green-yellow, some shades of blue

pictures: flowers, landscapes in spring, and with water, young people

words: "the wildness of lemons", "April-freshness", "youthful freshness"

scents: citrus-scent, grassy-green scents

flavour: menthol, peppermint

touch : smooth surfaces like glass, metal, wood

◆ *Pressure to buy is exerted by offering a product at a low price for a short period of time.*

◆ By using a long uninterrupted text publicity is made to look like a competent source of information (e.g. small print used for advertising). This illusion of information makes publicity more credible, and conceals the intention to influence.

◆ *Positioning of products*

A well-known example is the method which Pepsi Cola chooses to distinguish itself from Coca Cola: The young, egocentric group of consumers is addressed. Another expression of product-positioning in the year 2002 was "Geiz ist geil"* of the electronic enterprise Saturn.

◆ *Effect of interference of TV - advertisement*

Advertisement interrupts a film or a podium-discussion, because in this way they exert a positive influence on the curve of forgetting, and people can better retain the transmitted messages. After the fourth repetition the learning contents are forgotten slower than after the second repetition [35].

◆ *Product-placement*

In films, branded articles are chosen deliberately. The exactly planned placement of branded articles in films has become a fix sum of budgeting in many enterprises. The objective is to improve the image of a product by associating the product with a specific action. The effectiveness of such indirect publicity in films depends on the popularity of the actor who uses the product.

1.2.3 *What makes consumers weak?*

◆ A giant selection, endless shelves, splendor of colors, and gleaming lights provide for an atmosphere which makes it difficult to find one's way, and which induces clients to adopt an impulsive consumer-attitude. In small shops only half as many purchases as in supermarkets are done on impulse.

◆ A supermarket reminds us of the fairy-world of childhood: all that we want is within our reach. Things which might arouse our interest are placed where we can reach them. Products which we buy anyhow are on the top-shelves or on the bottom-shelves, in areas which we can reach only by stretching or bending. Research has shown that clients in supermarkets can enter a hypnotic state (eyelid-blinking, which normally happens about 32 times per minute, is reduced to half while we walk through the supermarket, and speeds up at the cash register before returning to normal). This condition favors spontaneous shopping tremendously.

- ◆ Play-areas, activities for children, etc. make children and adolescents totally convinced of a product, and make them return to the enchantment of shopping in adult life. In this way the supplier hits the bull's-eye because he touches three areas of marketing: the primary market (where children are consumers), the area of influences (buying-decisions which are influenced by children), and the market of the future (children are the consumers of tomorrow). For these reasons publicity tries to address children directly, as an opinion-building target-group. Examples are H&M, Ikea, Mc Donald's, or Benetton.
- ◆ Slow background-music also makes consumers slow down their pace when they stroll through the shopping-temple. The more time clients spend in the shop, the more they buy. In fast-food restaurants faster music produces higher profits because it makes people move faster. Music is also associated with luxury, freshness, dynamism, and security. Research revealed that the clicking sound of the closing devices of some recipients of liquid soap stimulate feelings of security. Specific sounds trigger conditioning, e.g. consumers enjoy the sound which is heard on opening a package and get used to it, and whenever they buy something this joyful feeling is reinforced.
- ◆ The role of touch (what a product feels like when we touch it) is also taken into account. Certain rough surfaces undergo a series of tests before a product enters the market.
- ◆ Thanks to new technologies the suppliers also take into account the sense of smell. The next generation of techno-games will permit us to smell the tires, or the breath of the dragon, or powder. Smells have a long-lasting impact on the senses. On perceiving the same scent at a later occasion the original situation is recalled [37].

1.3 NOT making ends meet

1.3.1 Shopping mania as a psycho-sociologic and socio-economic problem

Shopping-mania goes par in par with a loss of control, which is experienced as a frightening dissolution of the self. In the beginning there are unsatisfied needs (quarrels, no love and no security, etc.) which cause frustration and are satisfied by compensation. But this compensation is condemned to failure, the purchased article arouses anger and loses its value. Self-criticism and a feeling of impotence because of the incapacity to control reality is the consequence. In order to avoid that the anger directed at the purchased product turns against oneself, the shopping-maniac precipitates himself on a new product which promises an increase of self-esteem.

Constantly refined marketing strategies activate the consumers' emotions, and for persons who have a respective predisposition the danger to suffer an attack of shopping-mania increases.

A characteristic feature of the psycho-dynamics of attacks of shopping-mania is that money plays an important role. The possession of money represents the possession of yet unrealized opportunities. People who have money feel that they own the world. Shopping is related to spending money, but shopping-maniacs loose their self-esteem when they are confronted with their excesses. They realize that action entails consequences which they can not control. The product loses its value or is stored away in an attempt to erase it from memory, but only to re-start the circular process with a new purchase.

When the shopping-maniac realizes that he has again spent money he feels even worse, and his self-esteem suffers anew. "Having" the product does not produce the desired feeling of relief.

We speak of mania when a person is so attached to a feeling, or object, or other person that he feels no appreciation for anything else and loses all other interests. The object of attachment has become his sole source of satisfaction. In our case, this object of attachment is the process of shopping, or the possession of a product.

Shopping-mania shows some features which are characteristic for all forms of mania:

Irresistible urge to purchase goods - whether they are useful, or useless and superfluous: the bought article shortly animates the person and mitigates depression. These persons seek support in the possession of goods and supposedly buy prestige and respect. Sometimes a large number of the same articles is purchased, as a protection, but the large quantity diminishes the value of the product.



Irresistible urge to shop for the sake of shopping: what is important is not the purchase of certain goods but the very process of shopping. For a short period the person suffers the illusion of sharing in a world of luxury, adventure, and elegance. Shopping becomes an attitude which actually is a reaction to everyday stress and permits a person to escape from it for a short time.

Use of a product: the purchased products are either kept or thrown away after a short time. Some shopping-maniacs hoard the purchased products without even unwrapping them, or give them away, or wear them out fast by careless handling.

Dependency: is not on the product itself, but on its symbolic value, - what matters is the idea a person has of how she will use the product. Material goods fulfil the function of compensating for missing self-esteem or inner emptiness.

German and American research has revealed that 2% - 56% of the population suffer from shopping-mania, and that the tendency is rising [38].

1.3.2 Indebtedness and heavy debt

In Austria about 350.000 households are heavily indebted, - they are not able to pay back their debts. In other European countries the situation is similar. The classic career of debtors begins frequently when they are young, by overdrawing the bank-account. Strikingly, indebtedness is more and more caused by credits which were taken in order to satisfy consumption-habits, - people buy more than they can afford (in Austria 2002: 36%). Most debts fall to the share of bank-accounts, followed by mail-order enterprises and mobile-phone companies.

In the near future net-incomes are likely to stagnate or even sink, while at the same time, due to improved methods, the influence of publicity increases. Consumption is constantly given more importance, - people recur to it to fight the menaces to personal identity, to advance individualisation, to ward off threatening competition and feelings of fear (dependence, helplessness, failure, submission). We buy things because we give way to our emotions, and also to strengthen our self-esteem [39].

Help for debtors

We all live in a social network of acquaintances, friends, relatives, and colleagues, whose help can be very valuable, and we also can resort to professional institutions of debtor-counselling.

○ *Material help*

People who are heavily in debt can be helped by money-presents, or helpful gestures which are equivalent to money, like invitations to eat, shared use of equipment and products, and interest-free private credits.

○ *Emotional help*

Maintenance of communication and appreciation, continuation of existing relations, and cultivation of friendship can help to reduce feelings of guilt and shame.

○ *Debtor counselling*

There are respective institutions, but because of the high number of people who are in debt they are hopelessly booked out and overtaxed. It is nevertheless necessary to encourage indebted persons to make use of this professional service.

Further information:

www.renitent.at - Austrian information on the buy-nothing day (in November in Europe, USA, Australia)

www.adbusters.org/campaigns/bnd/ - Website of the creators of the "buy-nothing" day in Canada

www.buynothingday.de - buy-nothing day in Germany

www.adbusters.org - Canadian organization, which promotes anti-publicity

www.verdant.net - English consumption-opponents

www.enough.org.uk critical contributions on consumption

1.4 Making ends meet

What do we need to do for managing well and in a sustainable way, evade manipulation by publicity, and strengthen our position as partners in the economic process? What do we need to learn?

- ♦ Read, compare, and evaluate product-information printed on the package. Make this a habit for all products, especially cosmetics, cleansing agents, food items, electric appliances, etc.
- ♦ When shopping, do not let yourself be manipulated by strategies of publicity - think about what makes you want to buy something. Bear in mind that your shopping-attitudes are an example which your children will follow. An uncontrolled desire to shop can become something your children want to imitate.
- ♦ Give preference to products without costly packaging.
- ♦ Buy fruits and vegetables of the season - use a seasonal calendar (you can get one at places of environmental counselling).
- ♦ Functional food supplements usually are expensive without having any scientifically proven effects. A balanced diet covers the need for nutrients.
- ♦ Buy food which grows in your area. It is ecologically and sociologically more acceptable than imported products.
- ♦ Make shopping-lists. In this way you are more likely to escape being influenced by publicity.
- ♦ Do not shop for food when hungry.
- ♦ Purchases which have social consequences for the family should be talked about with all who are concerned, in order to avoid possible disadvantages for other family members.
- ♦ In times of crisis, when it is not possible to pay monthly rates punctually, it is important to seek contact with the bank on time, and not hide away.
- ♦ Taking a credit is not like begging - show self-confidence! For the bank, credits are profitable business.
- ♦ Leasing contracts should be examined by competent people in places which offer respective services, before accepting the concept.
- ♦ Before buying an expensive article advice should be sought either by consulting a professional institution or by reading relevant magazines. In this way you are "fit" for shopping and equal to the one-sided arguments of the sales-personnel.
- ♦ Take credits only from serious institutions.
- ♦ Keep in mind that the price should not be the only criterion for deciding to buy a product.
- ♦ Keep notice of your expenses (household-book), in order to be in control of all expenditures (very important if you use credit-cards).
- ♦ Switch to new forms of usage of certain goods. Share them with others (car sharing, gardening appliances, leisure-time equipment,...).
- ♦ Before buying a product, take a second thought: do you really need it? Why do you need it? How will you use it? Goods which are only amassed but not used do not satisfy needs, and do not bring joy; they only create frustration.
- ♦ When you buy a product try to take into account how it was produced, who derives the main benefit, how it can be disposed of, and in which way disposal affects the environment.



2. Didactic processing

	Introduction/ Orientation	Caught in the spiral of consumption?
		Each participant finds a partner
1	Methods	<p>Reflection: which are my primary needs? Which of my basic needs are especially important to me? Which one of my multifarious needs is for me a central wish? What is something I really like would like to achieve as a part of my process of self-realization? The participants examine the structures of their needs in personal conversations and express the needs of their partner. These structures are elucidated by a OH-transparency.</p> <p>Reflection part 2: the same pairs examine, by questioning each other, their mutual "weaknesses" regarding consumption, - where they easily give in to temptation; they try to find the underlying reasons. The results are written on cards and presented on a poster. The different groups present their findings and attach their cards to the poster which the moderator divides into groups, according to contents.</p> <p>Discussion: which global patterns of consumption can we find in our surroundings? Can we also find regional patterns of consumption?</p>
2	Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reflect our own needs • discover our own ideas of life-quality • investigate trends of consumption and our respective personal receptivity
3	Contents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - do we need all that we have? Urges versus needs - what are the current consumption-trends in my social environment?
4	Duration	50 – 60 minutes
5	Material	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ OH-transparency: needs ✓ poster-paper, markers ✓ coloured cards

	Planning	Caught in the spiral of consumption?
		The participants form groups of five
1	Methods	<p>Exercise Each participant receives a piece of paper with the picture of an object. The task consists in finding the possible symbolic value of the object for oneself, and find other possible symbolic associations.</p>

		<p>Input: Information – where do I get it? Which danger can be involved in information? How can I distinguish true information from publicity? The role of information for shopping (impulsive shopping, controlled shopping).</p> <p>Individual work: which preparations do I sometimes make, and for which reason, before I go shopping? Which risks do I fear?</p> <p>Input: how do consumers act?</p> <p>Group-work: We buy a dishwasher. Each group receives informative material and a sheet of evaluation, and is asked to arrive at a (fictitious) decision.</p>
2	Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • getting to know the possible objectives of consumer-education • elements of consumer-education • getting to know necessary consumer-competences
3	Contents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - functions of goods and services which relate to the consumers' self-preservation - the process of decision-making - how different factors influence the decision to buy something
4	Duration	60 minutes
5	Material	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ cards to make notes of the symbolic value of objects ✓ evaluation-sheet for the purchase of an electrical appliance (from respective stores) example of publicity which is camouflaged as information (can be found in small-sized Saturday-papers) ✓ OH-transparency: differences between impulsive shopping and controlled shopping ✓ OH-transparency: how do consumers act?

	Translation into action	<p><u>Caught in the spiral of consumption?</u> Groups stay together.</p>
1	Methods	<p>Discussions in the groups: which kind of power do consumers exert? Complement with successful examples from scientific literature.</p> <p>Input: the function publicity fulfils with regard to consumers; intentions of publicity.</p> <p>Group-work: Why does publicity sometimes make us "weak"? The results are collected and presented on posters).</p>



		<p>Examples: analysis of the effects of TV-advertising-spots and the symbolic value of the advertised objects.</p> <p>Analysis of the applied sales-strategies in a supermarket: The participants visit a nearby supermarket and investigate - with the help of their written course-papers – the sales-strategies. They are asked to fulfil specific tasks. The results are presented in the plenum.</p> <p>Discussion: Special areas of advertisement for children – a challenge posed to consumers?</p>
2	Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • create awareness of the fact that consumers possess power; • get to know the influence of sales-strategies on buying-attitudes; • the fulfillment of specific assignments which refer to the creation of a supermarket atmosphere which makes consumers want to buy.
3	Contents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - effects of sales-strategies on the shopping-attitudes of consumers - different sales-strategies
4	Duration	70 minutes
5	Material	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ examples of commercial TV-spots ✓ markers, poster-paper ✓ tasks regarding the analysis of sales-strategies in the supermarket

	Testing/ evaluating	<p>Caught in the spiral of consumption?</p> <hr/> <p>Groups break up.</p>
1	Methods	<p>Reflection by individual work: which areas of publicity are especially appealing to me? Results are collected and the participants red points to the respective areas mentioned on the posters.</p> <p>Supplement: Not making ends meet?</p> <p>Discussion: Which advice can we offer to course-participants to help them to make ends meet? Where must we expect serious difficulties?</p>

		<p>Partner-work: Development of a written code of conduct for consumers. Different areas are considered successively, notes are made on A4-sheets. Thematic areas: "do not give in to temptation" or "making ends meet".</p> <p>The developed code is presented and discussed in the plenum.</p>
2	Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • creation of awareness of problems raised by uncontrolled shopping; • development of the sensibility to realize how we are ourselves influenced by publicity; • confrontation with the problems of indebted households.
3	Contents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - indebtedness of households - shopping-mania - strategies to escape from the fatal spiral of consumption
4	Duration	50 minutes
5	Material	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ empty A4-sheets (two different colours) ✓ red points (stickers) or red markers ✓ poster from previous phase