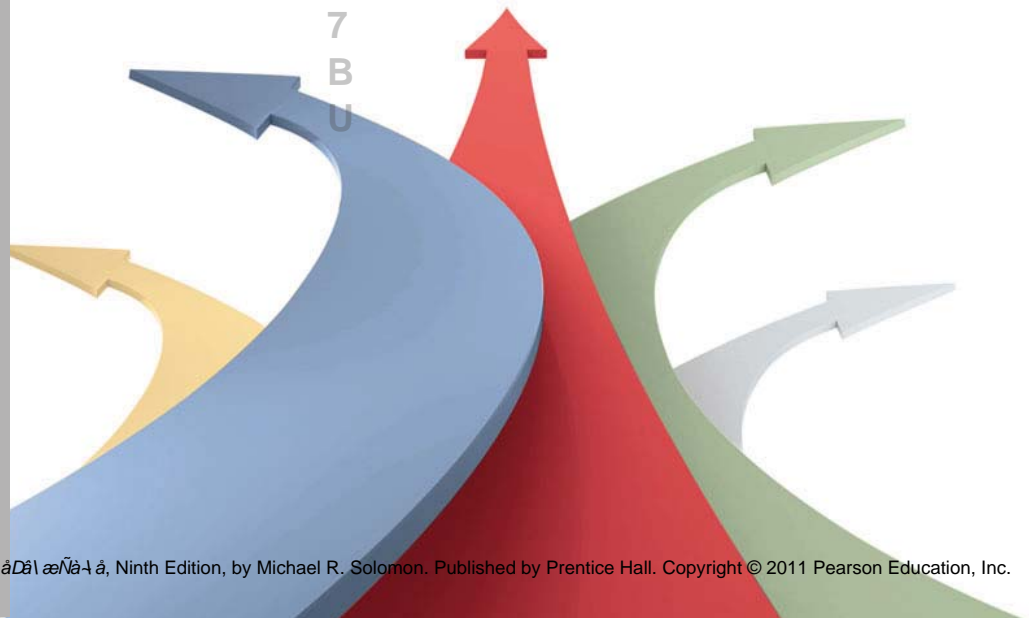


15

Cultural Influences on Consumer Behavior

Chapter Objectives

- When you finish this chapter you will understand:**
- 1 Why is a culture like a society's personality; how does it shape our identities as individuals?
 - 2 How are myths stories that express a culture's values, and how in modern times do marketing messages convey these values?
 - 3 Why are many of our consumption activities—including holiday observances, grooming, and gift-giving—rituals?
 - 4 Why do we describe products as either sacred or profane, and why do some products move back and forth between the two categories?





Karin is at her wits' end. It's bad enough that she has a deadline looming on that new Christmas promotion for her gift shop. Now, there's trouble on the home front as well: Her son Ken had to go and flunk his driver's license road exam, and he's just about suicidal because he feels he can't be a "real man" if he doesn't have a license. To top things off, now she'll have to postpone her much-anticipated vacation to Disney World with her younger stepchildren because she just can't find the time to get away.

When Karin meets up with her buddy Melissa at their local Starbucks for their daily "retreat," her mood starts to brighten. Somehow the calm of the café rubs off as she savors her *grande cappuccino*. Melissa consoles her with the ultimate remedy to beat the blues: Go home, take a nice long bath, and then consume a quart of Starbucks Espresso Swirl ice cream. Yes, that's the ticket. It's amazing how the little things in life can make such a big difference. As she strolls out the door, Karin makes a mental note to get Melissa a really nice Christmas gift this year. She's earned it.

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**OBJECTIVE**

Why is a culture like a society's personality; how does it shape our identities as individuals?

What Is Culture?

People around the globe mimic Karin's daily coffee "fix" as they take a break from the daily grind and affirm their relationships with others. Of course, the products they consume in the process range from black Turkish coffee to Indian tea, or from lager beer to hashish. Starbucks turns the coffee break into a cultural event that for many is almost like a cult.

The average Starbucks customer visits 18 times a month, and 10 percent of the clientele stops by twice a day.¹ Even a simple cup of coffee is more than a simple cup of coffee.

Culture is a society's personality. It includes both abstract ideas, such as values and ethics, and material objects and services, such as the automobiles, clothing, food, art, and sports a society produces. Put another way, it's the accumulation of shared meanings, rituals, norms, and traditions among the members of an organization or society.

We simply can't understand consumption unless we consider its cultural context: Culture is the "lens" through which people view products. Ironically, the effects of culture on consumer behavior are so powerful and far-reaching that it's sometimes difficult to grasp their importance. Like a fish immersed in water, we don't always appreciate this power until we encounter a different culture. Suddenly, many of the assumptions we take for granted about the clothes we wear, the food we eat, or the way we address others no longer seem to apply. The effect when we encounter such differences can be so great that the term *culture shock* is not an exaggeration.

We often discover these cultural expectations only when we violate them. For example, while on tour in New Zealand, the Spice Girls (remember them?) created a stir among New Zealand's indigenous Maoris when they performed a war dance that only men can do. A tribal official indignantly stated, "It is not acceptable in our culture, and especially by girlie pop stars from another culture."² Americans had a somewhat similar reaction when Posh Spice came to the United States with her husband David Beckham to teach us Yanks about the joys of soccer! Sensitivity to cultural issues, whether among rock stars or brand managers, can only occur when we understand these underlying dimensions—and that's this chapter's goal.

Our culture determines the overall priorities we attach to different activities and products, and it also helps to decide whether specific products will make it. A product that provides benefits to members of a culture at any point in time has a much better chance to achieve marketplace acceptance. For example, American culture began to emphasize the concept of a fit, trim body as an ideal of appearance in the mid-1970s. The premium consumers put on thinness, which stemmed from underlying values such as mobility, wealth, and a focus on the self, greatly contributed to Miller's success when the brewer launched its Lite beer. However, when Gablinger's introduced a similar low-cal beer in the 1960s the product failed. This beverage was "ahead of its time" because American beer drinkers at that time (who were almost all men) weren't worried about cutting down on calories.

The relationship between consumer behavior and culture is a two-way street. On the one hand, consumers are more likely to embrace products and services that resonate with a culture's priorities at any given time. On the other hand, it's worthwhile for us to understand which products do get accepted because this knowledge provides a window into the dominant cultural ideals of that period. Consider, for example, some American products that successfully reflected dominant values during their time:

- The TV dinner reflected changes in family structure and the onset of a new informality in American home life.
- Cosmetics made from natural materials without animal testing reflected consumers' apprehensions about pollution, waste, and animal rights.
- Condoms marketed in pastel carrying cases for female buyers signaled changes in attitudes toward sexual responsibility and openness.



This ad for a line of veggie foods borrows the look of World War II propaganda art to imply that eating our broccoli is an heroic act.

Source: Courtesy of Fantastic Foods.

Culture is not static. It is continually evolving, synthesizing old ideas with new ones. A *cultural system* consists of these functional areas:³

- **Ecology**—The way a system adapts to its habitat. The technology a culture uses to obtain and distribute resources shapes its ecology. The Japanese, for example, greatly value products that make efficient use of space because of the cramped conditions in their urban centers.⁴
- **Social structure**—The way people maintain an orderly social life. This includes the domestic and political groups that dominate the culture (e.g., the nuclear family versus the extended family; representative government versus dictatorship).

Marketing Pitfall



Marketers continue to push the envelope as they challenge society's norms regarding what topics are appropriate to discuss in public. Products that people only used to whisper about now pop up in ads and billboards; these include feminine hygiene products, condoms, lubricants, grooming aids, and pregnancy tests. A commercial for a digital home-pregnancy test kit even broke a taboo when it showed urination on TV. As a stream of liquid flows onto the device, a voice-over says, "Introducing the most sophisticated piece of technology . . . you will ever pee on." Ads for feminine hygiene products used to barely hint at their function (typically they depicted a smiling woman who wore white to subtly signal how well the item worked). Today, Procter & Gamble's Always line of menstrual pads advertises with the cheerful theme, "Have a happy period."⁶

- **Ideology**—The mental characteristics of a people and the way they relate to their environment and social groups. This relates to the idea of a common *worldview* (we discussed this in Chapter 12). Members of a culture tend to share ideas about principles of order and fairness. They also share an *ethos*, or a set of moral and aesthetic principles. A theme park in Bombay called Water Kingdom that caters to India's emerging middle class illustrates how distinctive a culture's worldview can be. Many consumers there are unfamiliar with mixed-sex swimming in public, so the park rents swimsuits to women who have never worn them before. No thongs here, though: The suits cover the women from wrists to ankles.⁵

Although every culture is different, four dimensions account for much of this variability:⁷

- 1 **Power distance**—The way members perceive differences in power when they form interpersonal relationships. Some cultures emphasize strict, vertical relationships (e.g., Japan), whereas others, such as the United States, stress a greater degree of equality and informality.
- 2 **Uncertainty avoidance**—The degree to which people feel threatened by ambiguous situations and have beliefs and institutions that help them to avoid this uncertainty (e.g., organized religion).
- 3 **Masculinity/femininity**—The degree to which a culture clearly defines sex roles (see Chapter 5). Traditional societies are more likely to possess very explicit rules about the acceptable behaviors of men and women, such as who is responsible for certain tasks within the family unit.
- 4 **Individualism**—The extent to which the culture values the welfare of the individual versus that of the group (see Chapter 10). In **collectivist cultures**, people subordinate their personal goals to those of a stable in-group. In contrast, consumers in **individualist cultures** attach more importance to personal goals, and people are more likely to change memberships when the demands of the group (e.g., workplace, church, etc.) become too costly. Whereas a collectivist society will stress values (see Chapter 4), such as self-discipline and accepting one's position in life, people in individualist cultures emphasize personal enjoyment, excitement, equality, and freedom. Some strongly individualist cultures include the United States, Australia, Great Britain, Canada, and the Netherlands. Venezuela, Pakistan, Taiwan, Thailand, Turkey, Greece, and Portugal are examples of strongly collectivist cultures.⁸

As we saw in Chapter 4, values are very general ideas about good and bad goals. From these flow norms, or rules that dictate what is right or wrong, acceptable or unacceptable. We explicitly decide on *enacted norms*, such as the rule that a green traffic light means "go" and a red one means "stop." Many norms, however, are much more subtle. We discover these **crecive norms** as we interact with others. These are all types of crecive norms:⁹

- A **custom** is a norm that controls basic behaviors, such as division of labor in a household or how we practice particular ceremonies.
- A **more** ("mor-ay") is a custom with a strong moral overtone. It often involves a *taboo*, or forbidden behavior, such as incest or cannibalism. Violation of a more often meets with strong sanctions. In Islamic countries such as Saudi Arabia, people consider it sacrilege to display underwear on store mannequins or to feature a woman's body in advertising, so retailers have to tread lightly—one lingerie store designed special headless and legless mannequins with only the slightest hint of curves to display its products.¹⁰
- **Conventions** are norms that regulate how we conduct our everyday lives. These rules often deal with the subtleties of consumer behavior, including the "correct" way to furnish one's house, wear one's clothes, or host a dinner party. The Chinese

government tried to change citizens' conventions when the country geared up for the 2008 Olympics in Beijing: Local habits are at odds with what planners knew that foreign visitors expect to encounter. For one, it's common to spit on the sidewalk—the sinus-clearing, phlegmy pre-spit hawking sound is so common that one foreigner dubbed it “the national anthem of China.” In addition to the extensive cleanup the government conducted (it even restricted city traffic to reduce smog levels), it imposed a hefty fine for public spitting to get people accustomed to holding in their saliva before hordes of fans descended on the city.¹¹

All three types of prescriptive norms at times operate to completely define a culturally appropriate behavior. For example, a more may tell us what kind of food it's okay to eat. These norms vary across cultures, so a meal of dog is taboo in the United States, Hindus shun steak, and Muslims avoid pork products. A custom dictates the appropriate hour at which we should serve the meal. Conventions tell us how to eat the meal, including such details as the utensils we use, table etiquette, and even the appropriate apparel to wear at dinnertime. We often take these conventions for granted. We just assume they are the “right” things to do (again, until we travel to a foreign country!). Much of what we know about these norms we learn *vicariously* (see Chapter 3) as we observe the behaviors of actors in television commercials, sitcoms, print ads, and other media—that reminds us why the marketing system is such an important element of culture.

Cultural differences show up in all kinds of daily activities. For example, a Big Boy restaurant in Thailand was having trouble attracting customers. After interviewing hundreds of people, the company found out why. Some said the restaurant's “room energy” was bad and that the food was unfamiliar. Others said the Big Boy statue (like the one Dr. Evil rode in the *Austin Powers* movies) made them nervous. One of the restaurant's executives commented, “It suddenly dawned on me that, here I was, trying to get a 3,500-year-old culture to eat 64-year-old food.” Once the company put some Thai items on the menu, business picked up.¹² No word yet on the fate of the statue.

Cultural Stories and Ceremonies

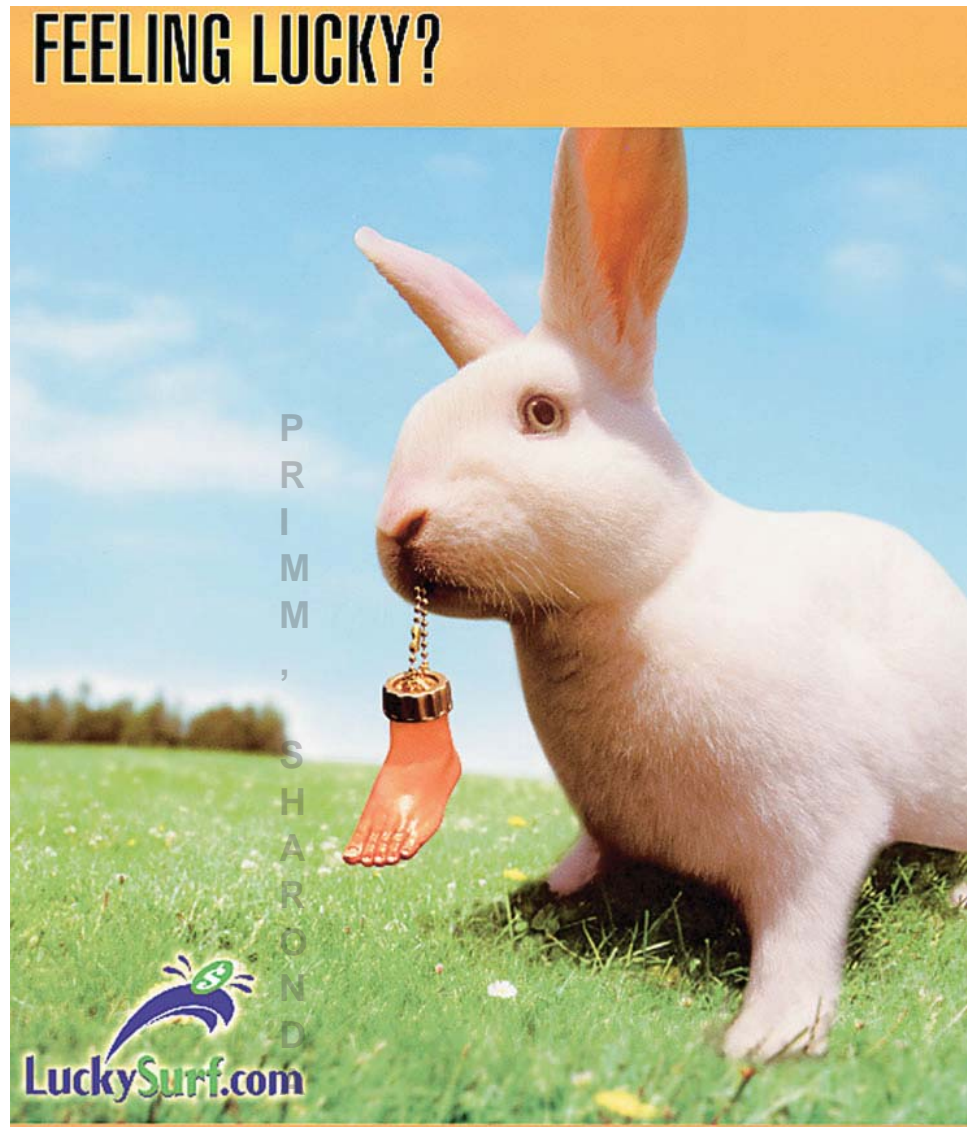
Every culture develops stories and ceremonies that help us make sense of the world. When we hear about some strange practice that goes on in another place, it may be hard to figure out just what these people think they're doing. Yet, our own cultural practices seem quite normal—even though a visitor may find them equally bizarre! Just take a European to a NASCAR event and you'll understand that culture is relative.

To appreciate how “primitive” belief systems influence our supposedly “modern” rational society, consider the avid interest many of us have in magic and luck. Marketers of health foods, antiaging cosmetics, exercise programs, and gambling casinos often imply that their offerings have “magical” properties that prevent sickness, old age, poverty, or just plain bad luck. People by the millions play their “lucky numbers” in the lottery, carry rabbits' feet and other amulets to ward off “the evil eye,” and own “lucky” clothing.

When the calendar hit July 7, 2007—7/7/07—many people scrambled to take advantage of its link to lucky 777. Our culture associates the number seven with good fortune (like the seven sacraments in Roman Catholicism) and marketers from Wal-Mart to Las Vegas casinos jumped on the bandwagon. The Mandalay Bay Casino hosted a group wedding for more than 100 couples. The New York City Ritz-Carlton even offered a Lucky Number 7 wedding package with a reception for 77, a seven-tier wedding cake, and a seven-night honeymoon at any Ritz in the world for \$77,777.¹³ Keep in mind that these beliefs are culture centric so they take on different forms around the world. For example, in China eight is the luckiest number. The Chinese word for eight is *ba*, which rhymes with *fa*, the Chinese character for wealth. It's no coincidence that the Summer Olympics in Beijing opened on 8/8/08 at 8 P.M.¹⁴

LuckySurf.com, a free lottery site, puts an interesting twist on the common practice of keeping a lucky rabbit's foot.

Source: Courtesy of LuckySurf.com.



Interest in the occult tends to spike when members of a society feel overwhelmed or powerless—magical remedies simplify our lives when they give us “easy” answers. Many consumers even regard the computer with awe as a sort of “electronic magician” with the ability to solve our problems (or in other cases to cause data to magically disappear!).¹⁵ Software developers even supply “wizards” that guide the uninitiated through their programs! Or, we may even think a person’s soul possesses an object—kids (and maybe some adults as well) believe that when they put on their Air Nikes they magically absorb some of the athletic ability of Michael Jordan. Sound preposterous? The movie *Like Mike* had this exact storyline. In this section, we’ll discuss myths and rituals, two aspects of culture common to all societies from the ancients to the modern world.

2

OBJECTIVE

How are myths stories that express a culture’s values, and how in modern times do marketing messages convey these values?

Myths

A **myth** is a story with symbolic elements that represents a culture’s ideals. The story often focuses on some kind of conflict between two opposing forces, and its outcome serves as a moral guide for listeners. In this way, a myth reduces anxiety because it provides consumers with guidelines about their world. Most members of a culture learn these stories, but usually we don’t really think about their origins.

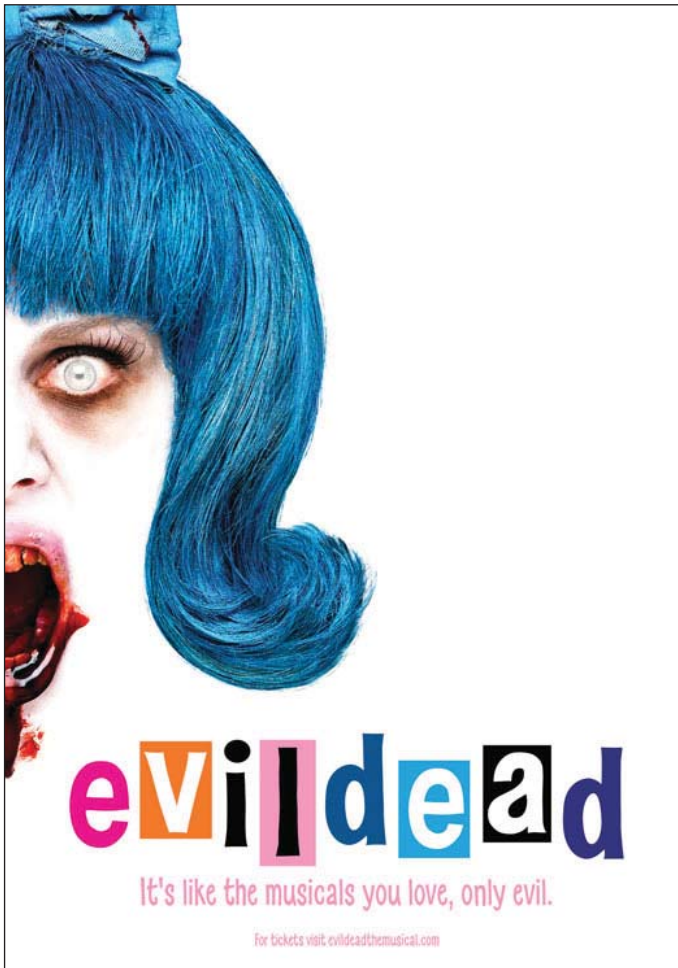


Consider, for example, a familiar story in our culture: *Little Red Riding Hood*. This myth started as a peasant's tale in sixteenth-century France, where a girl meets a werewolf on her way to granny's house (there is historical evidence for a plague of wolf attacks during this time, including several incidents where men were put on trial because they allegedly turned themselves into the deadly animals). The werewolf has already killed granny, stored her flesh in the pantry, and poured her blood in a bottle. Contrary to the version we know however, when the girl arrives at the house she snacks on granny, strips naked, and climbs into bed with the wolf! To make the story even more scandalous, some versions refer to the wolf as a "gaffer" (a contraction of "grandfather") implying incest as well. This story first appeared in print in 1697; it was a warning to the loose ladies of Louis XIV's court (the author puts her in red in this version because this color symbolizes harlots). Eventually, the Brothers Grimm wrote their own version in 1812, but they substituted violence for sex in order to scare kids into behaving. And to reinforce the sex-role standards of that time, in the Grimm version a man rescues the girl from the wolf.¹⁶ So, this myth sends vivid messages about such cultural no-no's as cannibalism, incest, and promiscuity.

In some cases marketers adapt these stories and (perhaps unconsciously) pattern their messages along a mythic structure. Consider, for example, the way that McDonald's takes on "mythical" qualities.¹⁷ The "golden arches" are a symbol consumers everywhere recognize as virtually synonymous with American culture. They offer sanctuary to Americans around the world; they know exactly what to expect once they enter. Basic struggles involving good versus evil play out in the fantasy world McDonald's advertising creates, for example, when Ronald McDonald confounds the Hamburglar. McDonald's even has a "seminary" (Hamburger University) where inductees go to learn the ways of The Golden Arches.

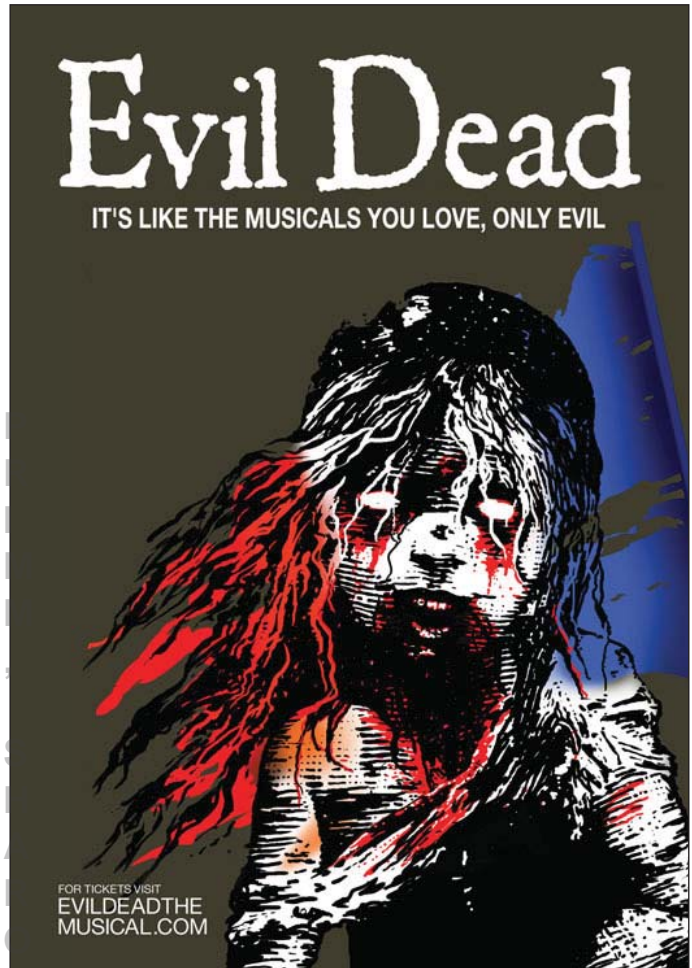
Every culture creates mythical characters to impart moral lessons. The Romans had their gods and goddesses like Artemis, and the Chinese tell of Chang E, whose husband served the mythical Chinese emperor Yao. She drank a stolen elixir of life, then fled to the moon where she became Queen.

Source: a. Photo by Dagli Orti/Courtesy of Picture Desk, Inc./Kobal Collection. b. Photo by Asian Art & Archaeology, Inc./CORBIS-NY.



Advertisements like these for Canadian plays build on familiar stories.

Source: Courtesy of Saatchi Toronto.



Corporations often have myths and legends in their history, and some make a deliberate effort to teach them to newcomers. Nike designates senior executives as “corporate storytellers” who explain the company’s heritage to the hourly workers at Nike stores. They recount tales about the coach of the Oregon track team who poured rubber into his family waffle iron to make better shoes for his team—the origin of the Nike waffle sole. The stories emphasize the dedication of runners and coaches to reinforce the importance of teamwork. Rookies even visit the track where the coach worked to help them appreciate the importance of the Nike legends. And rumor has it that senior Nike executives (including the CEO) have a “swoosh” tattoo on their backsides.¹⁸

What Myths Do

Myths serve four interrelated functions in a culture:¹⁹

- 1 **Metaphysical**—They help to explain the origins of existence.
- 2 **Cosmological**—They emphasize that all components of the universe are part of a single picture.
- 3 **Sociological**—They maintain social order because they authorize a social code for members of a culture to follow.
- 4 **Psychological**—They provide models for personal conduct.

When we analyze myths, we examine their underlying structures, a technique the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (no relation to the blue jeans company) pioneered. Lévi-Strauss noted that many stories involve **binary opposition**,

which represents two opposing ends of some dimension (e.g., good versus evil, nature versus technology).²⁰ Advertisers sometimes define products in terms of what they are *not* rather than what they *are* (e.g., “This is *not* your father’s Oldsmobile,” “I can’t believe it’s *not* butter”).

Recall from our discussion of Freudian theory in Chapter 6 that the ego functions as a kind of “referee” between the opposing needs of the id and the superego. In a similar fashion, a *mediating figure* typically resolves the conflict between mythical opposing forces; this links the opposites as it shares characteristics of each. For example, many myths are about animals that have human abilities (e.g., a talking snake) to bridge the gap between humanity and nature, just as marketers often give cars (technology) animal names (nature) such as Cougar, Cobra, or Mustang.

Myths in Modern Popular Culture

We associate myths with the ancient Greeks and Romans, but in reality comic books, movies, holidays, and yes, even commercials embody our own cultural myths. And researchers report that some people create their own *consumer fairy tales*—they tell stories that include magical agents, donors, and helpers to overcome villains and obstacles as they seek out goods and services in their quest for happy endings.²¹

Smart marketers are more than happy to help us live out these fairy tales. Consider the popularity of the elaborate weddings Disney stages for couples who want to reenact their own version of a popular myth: At Disney World, the princess bride wears a tiara and rides to the park’s lakeside wedding pavilion in a horse-drawn coach, complete with two footmen in gray wigs and gold lamé pants. At the exchange of vows, trumpets blare as Major Domo (he helped the Duke in his quest for Cinderella) walks up the aisle with two wedding bands he gently places in a glass slipper on a velvet pillow. Disney stages about 2,000 of these extravaganzas each year. The company continues to expand the appeal of this myth as it moves into the bridal gown business. It sells a line of billowing princess gowns complete with crystal tiaras. Fairy-tale brides can walk down the aisle costumed as Cinderella, Snow White, Belle, Sleeping Beauty, Jasmine, or Ariel.²²

Comic book superheroes demonstrate how a culture communicates myths to consumers of all ages. Marvel Comics’ Spiderman character tells stories about how he balances the obligations of being a superhero with the need of his alter ego, Peter



This Italian jeans ad evokes imagery from a modern myth that involves an animal character.

Source: Courtesy Meltin' Pot Jeans/Armando Testa, Milan.

Parker, to succeed in school and have a normal love life.²³ Indeed, some of these fictional figures embody such fundamental properties that they become a **monomyth**—a myth that is common to many cultures.²⁴ Consider Superman—a father (Jor-el) gives his only son to save a world with his supernatural powers. Sound familiar?

Many “blockbuster” movies and hit TV shows draw directly on mythic themes. Although dramatic special effects or attractive stars certainly don’t hurt, a number of these movies also owe their huge appeal to their presentation of characters and plot structures that follow mythic patterns. Here are three examples of mythic blockbusters:²⁵

- **Gone with the Wind**—Myths often take place in times of upheaval such as wars. In this story, the North (which represents technology and democracy) battles the South (which represents nature and aristocracy). The movie depicts a romantic era (the antebellum South) when love and honor were virtues. Following the war, newer values of materialism and industrialization (i.e., modern consumer culture) replace these priorities. The movie paints a picture of a lost era where man and nature existed in harmony.
- **E.T.: The Extraterrestrial**—E.T. represents a familiar myth involving messianic visitation. The gentle creature from another world visits Earth and performs miracles (e.g., he revives a dying flower). His “disciples” are neighborhood children; they help him combat the forces of modern technology and an unbelieving secular society. The myth teaches that the humans God chooses are pure and unselfish.
- **Star Trek**—The multiple television series and movies, prequels, and sequels that document the adventures of the starship *Enterprise* also link to myths, such as the story of the New England Puritans who explore and conquer a new continent—“the final frontier.” Encounters with the Klingons mirror skirmishes with Native Americans. In addition, at least 13 out of the original 79 episodes employed the theme of a quest for paradise.²⁶ The popular series *Battlestar Galactica* does as well.

Advertisements sometimes represent mythic themes. For example, commercials for Pepperidge Farm ask consumers to “remember” the good old days (lost paradise) when products were wholesome and natural. Avis famously used the theme of the underdog prevailing over the stronger foe (i.e., David and Goliath).²⁷ A commercial that encouraged Hispanic consumers to buy more milk featured a female phantom who wails as she walks through a home. She is *La Llorona* (the crying one)—a character in a Hispanic myth who murders her children, commits suicide, and roams for all eternity as she seeks her lost family. In this version, however, the moaning phantom makes her way to the refrigerator, only to find an empty milk carton.²⁸

Even packages can mythologize a brand, as researchers who analyzed the messages on some “natural” products report. The authors found that many of the packages present a narrative about a romantic past, where values of family, tradition, authenticity, peace, and simplicity reigned. For example, the label on a box of Celestial Seasoning’s tea reads: “When you find a quiet moment, ease into a cup of contentment with Honey Vanilla Chamomile Herb Tea.” The brand name itself, note the authors, conjures the transcendent possibilities of tea consumption (celestial). The package includes a personally signed guarantee of satisfaction from the company’s founder.

These elements subtly invoke the binary opposition to large, impersonal corporations where the founder would never take the time to write a message. Other “natural” product packaging often includes origin myths such as: “It began very simply. In 1960 in the back of a small health food store. . . .”²⁹

3

OBJECTIVE

Why are many of our consumption activities—including holiday observances, grooming, and gift-giving—rituals?

Rituals

A **ritual** is a set of multiple, symbolic behaviors that occurs in a fixed sequence and is repeated periodically.³⁰ Bizarre



Koreans are discovering the Western ritual of brunch.

Source: Photo by Chung Sung-Jun/Courtesy of Getty Images, Inc.

tribal ceremonies, perhaps involving animal or human sacrifice, may come to mind when you think of rituals, but in reality many contemporary consumer activities are ritualistic. Just think of Karin's daily "mental health" trip to Starbucks.

Or consider a ritual that many beer drinkers in the United Kingdom and Ireland hold near and dear to their hearts—the spectacle of a pub bartender "pulling" the perfect pint of Guinness. According to tradition, the slow pour takes exactly 119.5 seconds as the bartender holds the glass at a 45-degree angle, fills it three-quarters full, lets it settle, and tops it off with its signature creamy head. Guinness wanted to make the pull faster so the bar could serve more drinks on a busy night so it introduced FastPour, an ultrasound technology that dispenses the dark brew in only 25 seconds. You probably guessed the outcome: The brewer had to scrap the system when drinkers resisted the innovation. Note: Diageo (which owns Guinness) hasn't given up and it continues to experiment with more efficient techniques in markets where this ritual isn't so inbred. A system it calls Guinness Surger shows up in Tokyo bars, many of which are too small to accommodate kegs: The bartender pours a pint from a bottle, places the glass on a special plate, and zaps it with ultrasound waves that generate the characteristic head.³²

Many colleges boast unique rituals in which students engage in some scripted group activity, but in recent years some institutions abolished these because of safety concerns or because they encourage underage drinking. Casualties include spring couch burning at the University of Vermont and Princeton's Nude Winter Olympics. The death of 12 people from collapsing logs ended the tradition of Texas A&M's bonfire on the eve of the annual football game against the University of Texas (the bonfire ritual has since been revived off campus). Some campus rituals that survive include the following:

- **MIT**—Each spring students haul a steer into a dorm courtyard, put it on a spit, and light a fire under it with a flaming roll of toilet paper they lower from the roof.
- **Wesleyan College (Connecticut)**—Students honor the pot-smoking Doonesbury character Zonker Harris each spring with a day of live music, face painting, and plenty of open marijuana use.
- **Simon Fraser University (British Columbia)**—Costumed engineering students throw one another in the reflection pond during February's Polar Plunge.

Marketing Opportunity



Many Americans treasure the ritual of Sunday brunch. But chowing on a late-morning spread of pancakes, bagels, and other cholesterol-laden goodies was unknown in South Korea until a few years ago. Now it's all the rage; several hundred restaurants offer brunch now after one restaurateur opened a place—decorated with photos of New York City—in 2005 and ignited the trend. One change in Korean society fueled the fire—the government shortened the official workweek from six days to five in 2004 so suddenly people had a weekend to enjoy. Consumers there also like the American show *Sex and the City*, where the characters often drink their way through a long brunch. A consumer ritual is born.³¹



CB AS I SEE IT

Professor Lauren Block, Baruch College, City University of New York

Do you have any rituals you perform for good luck? I know a college student who will only walk up the left staircase of her university building on exam days. This student won't take the elevator or use the staircase on the right side of the building for fear that she will jinx her good performance on tests. I know another student who turns off the football game with three minutes left in the fourth quarter if his team is winning. It's not that he doesn't want to watch his team win, it's that he doesn't want to jinx them in the final moments and have a loss be his fault. Make sense? Of course not. But does it feel familiar? Probably.

Research has recently begun to document just how common and ordinary such superstitious or magical thinking is among people. **Superstitions** are beliefs that run counter to rational thought or are inconsistent with known laws of nature. While many superstitions are culturally shared and socially transmitted from generation to generation, others consist of relatively more idiosyncratic beliefs or rituals, like the examples described previously. My colleague Tom Kramer and I study how peoples' superstitious beliefs influence their behavior as consumers. For example, common superstitions among Taiwanese include beliefs about lucky

colors (e.g., red) and lucky numbers (e.g., 8). In research Tom and I conducted in Taiwan, we found that Taiwanese consumers are more likely to purchase a product that is red than the same exact product in another color, and purchasers have higher expectations for the red product than for, say, a green product. In other words, consumers expect the red product to work better than the green one and would be more upset if the product failed or broke. Our research also demonstrated that Taiwanese consumers are willing to pay a higher price for a package with a "lucky" number of items inside (8 tennis balls) than the same package with a greater but neutral number of items (10 tennis balls). Taiwanese consumers were willing to spend over 50 percent more for 25 percent fewer tennis balls because of their positive superstitious beliefs with the number 8 (versus 10). Similarly we found that Taiwanese consumers are willing to pay more to avoid unlucky numbers. They would rather pay TW\$555 (5 is a neutral number) than TW\$444 (4 is an unlucky number), foregoing a discount for the same product.

Would you be willing to spend more money to avoid unlucky numbers? American consumers don't have the same beliefs as Taiwanese, but they do think 13 is an unlucky number. Many American buildings don't have a 13th floor, and U.S. businesses lose a large amount of money every Friday the 13th

because people avoid important transactions on that day. Tom Kramer and I studied whether superstitious beliefs about Friday the 13th influence the choices American students make. Students were asked to choose between two bets: in the first bet students knew they could win a small sum of money and in the second bet students had to gamble to win either a large amount or nothing. For example, students were asked to choose between receiving \$18 for sure versus a 20 percent chance of winning \$240 and an 80 percent chance of winning nothing. It turns out that most American students prefer the riskier option in the hopes of winning the large amount of money. But when we asked this question on Friday the 13th, their choice switched to the not-risky smaller amount.

Using this knowledge of how superstitious beliefs influence behavior can help managers make better business decisions. How much more profit could Taco Bell have earned if it had altered its seven-layer Crunchwrap Supreme into an eight-layer one for Chinese consumers? Similarly, the \$4/\$4/\$4 promotion by Domino's Pizza was probably not well received by Chinese consumers. With one of the luckiest days of the century for Western cultures passed (7/7/07) and one of the luckiest days of the century for Eastern cultures still fresh in memory (8/8/08), the study of superstition in the marketplace is both important and timely.

A study the BBDO Worldwide advertising agency conducted illustrates the close relationship between brands and rituals.³³ It labels brands that we use to perform our rituals **fortress brands** because once they become embedded in our ceremonies—whether we use them to brush our teeth, drink a beer, or shave—we're unlikely to replace them. The study ran in 26 countries, and the researchers found that overall people worldwide practice roughly the same consumer rituals. The agency claims that 89 percent of people always use the same brands in their sequenced rituals; three out of four are disappointed or irritated when something disrupts their ritual or their brand of choice isn't available. For example, the report identifies one common ritual category it calls *preparing for battle*. For most of us this means getting ready for work. Relevant rituals include brushing the teeth, taking a shower or bath, having something to eat or drink, talking to a family member or partner, checking e-mail, shaving, putting on makeup, watching TV or listening to the radio, and reading a newspaper.



CB AS I LIVE IT

Julia Koman, Penn State Behrend

Before big games or tournaments, the Penn State Behrend softball team organizes team dinners and enjoys a good meal with quality team bonding. As we were preparing to depart for a week-long spring training tournament in Clermont, Florida, we decided to go to Ceci's Pizza, a buffet-style pizzeria with large varieties of pizza and pizza desserts to choose from. Since the team gets together before all big games and tournaments, we have a *ritual* in place. The team dinners have long been a ritual for the softball team because as a senior now, I always remember going to these dinners even as a freshman.

The chapter's definition and explanation of a ritual was much more

broadly defined. After reading about the Starbucks ritual for the demanding businesswoman, I agree that rituals affect my own consumer behavior. I now can see that some of the things that I do can be considered rituals and highly affect my purchase behavior and the money that I spend. This is especially true when it comes to my softball team's dinners. They only happen every so often, but it's money that I never think twice about spending.

Now that I am aware of this concept, I can create a budget to keep a check on how much money I am spending each time I go out to a team dinner. This way, I can save more of my money, especially since I have an extremely limited income due to the fact that I am a typical college student. By keeping track of the reasons I spend money each month, I will have a better grip on my financials, which is very important today.

A marketer can learn from my experience by realizing the number of sports teams that have rituals like team dinners. A marketer for a restaurant chain could promote a discount for teams that want to have their team dinners in restaurants. For buffet-style restaurants that are reasonably priced and offer a large selection of food, knowing that teams in the area are willing to come to their establishment for get-togethers, such as team dinners, would be most beneficial. By offering small discounts to sports teams, restaurants like Ceci's and others could benefit by seeing increased sales and traffic. These increases, though they may be small, could help out their advertising efforts by better promoting free word-of-mouth communication by its satisfied customers.

- **Wellesley**—Seniors toss the winner of the annual spring hoop roll into chilly Lake Waban. This ritual has changed to keep up with the times—the winner used to be declared the first to marry—now she's proclaimed the most likely to succeed.
- **University of California at Santa Barbara**—Students run naked across campus on the first rainy day of the year. Princeton and the University of Michigan have banned nude sprints, but at Yale seniors still run naked through two campus libraries at the end of each semester and toss candy at underclass students as they cram for finals.³⁴

Table 15.1 notes that rituals can occur at several levels. Some reinforce broad cultural or religious values. Public rituals such as the Super Bowl, presidential inaugurations, and graduation ceremonies are communal activities that affirm our membership in the larger group and reassure us that we are reading from the same script as everyone else.³⁶ In one recent study, researchers documented the collective ritual of *headbanging* at heavy metal music concerts. They showed how participants, who tend to come from lower economic classes and feel disempowered in other settings, participate collectively in a performance that is a cathartic experience where they are rejuvenated and validated (perhaps this presents an opportunity for companies that sell headache remedies?).³⁷

Other rituals occur in small groups or even in isolation. Market researchers discovered that for many people (such as Karin) the act of late-night ice cream eating has ritualistic elements that often involve a favorite spoon and bowl!³⁸ And rituals are not set in stone; they change with the times. For example, when we throw rice at a wedding we express our desire for the couple to be fertile. In recent years, “green”



The wedding ritual contains many elements, and pulling it all together seems like a full-time job for a bride-to-be.

Numerous Web sites like theknot.com offer one-stops shopping to help brides and their moms get organized (just don't ask the groom for much help). Increasingly social networking plays a role as brides share tips and resources. JCPenney signed a partnership with the wedding-planning site OurWeddingDay.com. When a bride-to-be registers at the store, she receives a complimentary membership that includes access to “virtual wedding planner” tools such as “Brideline,” a live consultation via chat; an online task, a personalized wedding Web site, and financial planning tools to budget for the big event.⁴¹

TABLE 15.1 Types of Ritual Experience

Primary Behavior Source	Ritual Type	Examples
Cosmology	Religious	Baptism, meditation, mass
Cultural values	Rites of passage Cultural	Graduation, marriage festivals, holidays (Valentine's Day), Super Bowl
Group learning	Civic Group Family	Parades, elections, trials Fraternity initiation, business negotiations, office luncheons Mealtimes, bedtimes, birthdays, Mother's Day, Christmas
Individual aims and emotions	Personal	Grooming, household rituals

Source: Dennis W. Rook, "The Ritual Dimension of Consumer Behavior," *Journal of Consumer Research* 12 (December 1985): 251–64. Copyright © 1985 JCR, Inc. Reprinted with permission of the University of Chicago Press.

Marketing Opportunity



Tailgating at college and pro football games is one of the most visible group rituals around today. According

to legend, this practice started in the nineteenth century when fans had no choice but to cook meals in their carriages after they journeyed to the site of a football game. Now, tailgating is also big business. A survey Coca-Cola sponsored reported that 41 percent of tailgaters spend more than \$500 a season on food and supplies, whereas a Ragu survey found that more than half of the fans prefer the party to the actual game! Now, everyone from food conglomerates to camping suppliers tries to get a piece of these boisterous pregame rituals.³⁵

- Coleman introduced a special tailgating grill and a complete RoadTrip line.
- The *American Tailgater* catalog sells tailgate flags, tents, and even a gas-powered margarita blender.
- Ragu sponsors training camps, whereas Jack Daniels stages parking-lot contests.
- The NFL sells \$100 million a year of tailgating merchandise, including keg-shaped grills. The Buffalo Bills provide showers and changing rooms in the parking lot, and the Denver Broncos pick a "most valuable tailgater" at each home game. The Houston Texans sponsor "Tailgating 101" classes at a local sporting goods store.
- And for the truly hard core: California customizer Galpin Motors sells a tailgaters' pickup truck complete with a huge grill, taps for two beer kegs, a blender, and a flip-down TV screen for "only" \$70,000.

newlyweds substitute soap bubbles, jingling bells, or butterflies because birds eat the rice, which expands inside their bodies with nasty results.³⁹

Many businesses benefit because they supply **ritual artifacts** to consumers. These are items we need to perform rituals, such as wedding rice, birthday candles, diplomas, specialized foods and beverages (e.g., wedding cakes, ceremonial wine, or even hot dogs at the ball park), trophies and plaques, band uniforms, greeting cards, and retirement watches.⁴⁰ In addition, we often follow a *ritual script* to identify the artifacts we need, the sequence in which we should use them, and who uses them. Examples include graduation programs, fraternity manuals, and etiquette books.

Grooming Rituals

Whether you brush your hair 100 strokes a day or give yourself a pep talk in the mirror before a big date, virtually all of us practice private **grooming rituals**. These ceremonies help us to transition from our private self to our public self, or back again. Grooming rituals help to inspire confidence before we face the world, and they "cleanse" us of impurities. When consumers talk about their grooming rituals, some of the dominant themes that emerge from these stories reflect the almost mystical qualities we attribute to grooming products and behaviors. Many people emphasize a before-and-after phenomenon, whereby the person feels magically transformed after she uses certain products (similar to the Cinderella myth).⁴²

Some companies that make personal care products understand the power of these rituals and supply the artifacts we need to make them happen. Nair, the depilatory maker, expanded its customer base when it targeted younger girls with its Nair Pretty product—a market the industry calls "first-time hair removers." Researchers conducted focus groups with mothers and their daughters, where they learned that "When a girl removes hair for the first time, it's a life-changing moment." Some of the respondents actually held hair removal slumber parties, where the moms bought products for the teens to remove their hair. So, instead of a focus on boys or romance, ads for Nair Pretty suggest that the depilatory is a stubble-free path to empowerment. "I am a citizen of the world," reads the ad copy. "I am a dreamer. I am fresh. I am so not going to have stubs sticking out of my legs."⁴³

Grooming rituals express two kinds of binary opposition: *private/public* and *work/leisure*. Many beauty rituals reflect a transformation from a natural state to the social world (as when a woman "puts on her face") or vice versa. To her, a bath may be a cleansing time—a way to wash away the "sins" of the profane world.⁴⁴ In these daily rituals, women reaffirm the value their culture places on personal beauty and the quest for eternal youth.⁴⁵ This cleansing ritual is clear in ads for Oil of Olay Beauty Cleanser that proclaim, "And so your day begins. The Ritual of Oil of Olay."

JC Penney partners with a Web site to offer a virtual wedding planner that facilitates nuptial rituals.

Source: Courtesy of JC Penney & ourweddingday.com.

Gift-Giving Rituals

In a **gift-giving ritual**, we procure the perfect object, meticulously remove the price tag, carefully wrap the object (where we symbolically change the item from a commodity to a unique good), and deliver it to the recipient.⁴⁶ Gifts can be store-bought objects, homemade items, or services. Some recent research even argues that music file-sharing systems such as Napster, KaZaa, or Morpheus really are all about gifting. This work finds, for example, clear evidence of the gift-giving norm of *reciprocity*; people who download files but who don't leave their own files available to others are "leeches."⁴⁷

Researchers view gift-giving as a form of *economic exchange* where the giver transfers an item of value to a recipient, who in turn must reciprocate. However, gift-giving also involves *symbolic exchange*; for example, when a giver like Karin wants to acknowledge her friend Melissa's intangible support and companionship. In fact, researchers who analyzed the personal memoirs of World War II concentration camp inmates found that even in such a brutal environment where people had to focus on their survival, a need to express humanity through generosity prevailed. The authors find that gift-giving, which symbolized recognition of others' plight as well as one's own, was an act of defiance against the dehumanizing existence the camps forced on their prisoners.⁴⁸

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TABLE 15.2 Gift Giving and Relationships

Relational Effect	Description	Example
Strengthening	Gift-giving improves the quality of a relationship	An unexpected gift such as one given in a romantic situation
Affirmation	Gift-giving validates the positive quality of a relationship	Usually occurs on ritualized occasions such as birthdays
Negligible Effect	Gift-giving has a minimal effect on perceptions of relationship quality	Informal gift occasions and those in which the gift may be perceived as charity or too good for the current state of the relationship
Negative Confirmation	Gift-giving validates a negative quality of a relationship between the gift giver and receiver	The selection of gift is inappropriate indicating a lack of knowledge of the receiver; alternatively, the gift is viewed as a method of controlling the receiver
Weakening	Gift-giving harms the quality of the relationship between giver and receiver	When there are “strings attached” or the gift is perceived as a bribe, a sign of disrespect, or offensive
Severing	Gift-giving harms the relationship between the giver and receiver to the extent that the relationship is dissolved	When the gift forms part of a larger problem, such as in a threatening relationship; also when a relationship is severed through the receipt of a “parting” gift

Source: Adapted from Julie A. Ruth, Cele C. Otnes, and Frederic F. Brunel, “Gift Receipt and the Reformulation of Interpersonal Relationships,” *Journal of Consumer Research* 25 (March 1999): 385–402, Table 1, 389.

Marketing Opportunity



Nestlé's Kit Kat candy bar and its ad agency JWT Japan won the Media Grand Prix at the 2009 Cannes

Lions International Advertising Festival—they devised a clever way to capitalize on a Japanese gift-giving ritual. The Japanese translation of Kit Kat is *Kitto Katso*, which means “surely win.” Parents in Japan traditionally send students good luck wishes before they take their rigorous higher education entrance exams. So, Nestlé partnered with the Japanese postal service to create “Kit Kat Mail.” Sold only in post offices, it resembles a postcard—but it's edible. The promotion was such a huge hit that Nestlé continues to sell the product. As a brand manager observed, “Exams are over but people still send it to wish good luck on any occasion.”⁵²

Some research indicates that gift-giving evolves as a form of social expression. It is more exchange oriented (instrumental) in the early stages of a relationship (where we keep track of exactly what we give and receive to be sure we're not getting ripped off), but it becomes more altruistic as the relationship develops.⁴⁹ Table 15.2 lists the ways giving a gift affects a relationship.

Every culture prescribes certain occasions and ceremonies to give gifts, whether for personal or professional reasons. The birthday gift ritual alone is a significant contributor to our economy. Each American on average buys six birthday gifts a year—about 1 billion gifts in total.⁵⁰ Business gifts are an important way to define and maintain professional relationships. Expenditures on business gifts exceed \$1.5 billion per year, and givers take great care to ensure that they purchase the appropriate gifts (sometimes with the aid of professional gift consultants). Most executives believe that corporate gift-giving provides both tangible and intangible results, including improved employee morale and higher sales.⁵¹

The gift-giving ritual proceeds in three distinct stages:⁵³

- 1 During *gestation* the giver procures an item to mark some event. This event may be either *structural* (i.e., prescribed by the culture, as when people buy Christmas presents) or *emergent* (i.e., the decision is more personal and idiosyncratic).
- 2 The second stage is *presentation*, or the process of gift exchange. The recipient responds to the gift (either appropriately or not), and the donor evaluates this response.
- 3 In the *reformulation* stage the giver and receiver redefine the bond between them (either looser or tighter) to reflect their new relationship after the exchange. Negativity can arise if the recipient feels the gift is inappropriate or of inferior quality. For example, the hapless husband who gives his wife a vacuum cleaner as an anniversary present is just asking to sleep on the couch, and the new suitor who gives his girlfriend intimate apparel probably won't score many points. The donor may feel the response to the gift was inadequate or insincere or a violation of the **reciprocity norm**, which obliges people to return the gesture of a gift with one of equal value.⁵⁴

Japanese gift-giving rituals show how tremendously important these acts are in that culture, where the wrapping is as important (if not more so) than the gift itself.

The Japanese view gifts as an important aspect of one's duty to others in one's social group. Giving is a moral imperative (*giri*). Highly ritualized acts occur when a person gives both household/personal gifts and company/professional gifts. Each individual has a well-defined set of relatives and friends with which he shares reciprocal gift-giving obligations (*kosai*). People give personal gifts on social occasions, such as at funerals, for a hospitalization, to mark movements from one life stage to another (e.g., weddings, birthdays), and as greetings (e.g., when one meets a visitor). They give company gifts to commemorate the anniversary of a corporation's founding, the opening of a new building, or the announcement of new products. In keeping with the Japanese emphasis on saving face, the recipient doesn't open the present in front of the giver so that he won't have to hide any disappointment with what he gets.⁵⁶

Holiday Rituals

On holidays, we step back from our everyday lives and perform ritualistic behaviors unique to those occasions.⁵⁷ Each cultural celebration typically relates to the adventures of one or more special characters, such as St. Patrick in Ireland or Yue Lao in China. These special events require tons of ritual artifacts and scripts. The Thanksgiving holiday script includes serving (in gluttonous portions) foods such as turkey and cranberry sauce that many of us consume only on that day, complaining about how much we've eaten (yet rising to the occasion to find room for dessert), and (for many) a postmeal trip to the couch for the obligatory football game.

Most holidays commemorate a cultural myth, often with a historical (e.g., Miles Standish on Thanksgiving) or imaginary (e.g., Cupid on Valentine's Day) character as the story's hero. These holidays persist because their basic elements appeal to our deep-seated needs.⁶⁰

- **Christmas**—Myths and rituals fill the Christmas holiday, from Santa's adventures at the North Pole to others' adventures under the mistletoe. The meaning of Christmas evolved quite dramatically during the past few hundred years. In colonial times, Christmas celebrations resembled carnivals and public rowdiness was the norm. Most notable was the tradition of "wassailing"—roving packs of rowdy young men laid siege to the rich and demanded food and drink. By the end of the 1800s, the mobs were so unruly that city fathers in Protestant America invented a tradition where families conducted Christmas gatherings around a tree, a practice they "borrowed" from early pagan rites.

In an 1822 poem Clement Clarke Moore, the wealthy son of a New York Episcopal bishop, invented the modern-day myth of Santa Claus. The Christmas ritual slowly changed to a focus on children and gift-giving.⁶¹ One of the most

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It's no secret that a lot of guys are clueless when they have to choose the right gifts for their significant others. Retailers say that while lingerie is one of the most popular Christmas gifts for women it's also among the most likely to be returned in January. The British retailer Marks & Spencer found that only a third of its female customers were happy with the underwear their partners bought for them, and only a third of the men correctly identified their wife or girlfriend's size or favorite color. Marks & Spencer enlisted its sales force to enlighten male shoppers in the month before Christmas. It deployed salesmen (figuring that men would prefer to talk to a man about such an intimate purchase) who wore purple sashes that say "Stocking Fella—How Can I Help?" to counsel the guys. They educate the shoppers on buying strategies, such as choosing shades like silver or brown since men typically go straight to red items. Who said buying a gift is easy?⁵⁵

At this Web site jilted women vent about their former boyfriends—and perhaps make a little money as they sell gifts they received from them.

Source: Courtesy of www.ExBoyfriendJewelry.com; accessed 3/10/09.



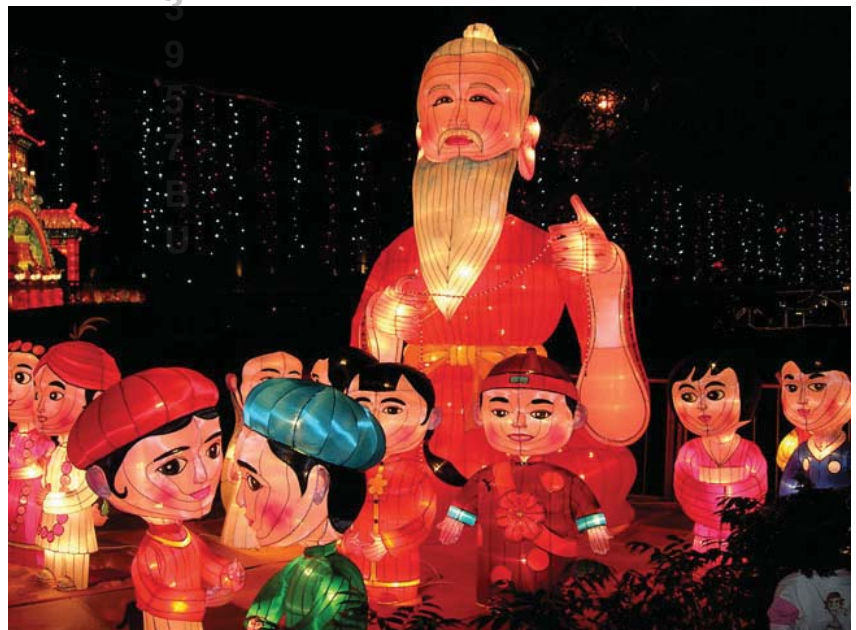
The Tangled Web



The courtship process often involves gift-giving from men to women, but what happens when the relationship ends? The founders of the Web site ExBoyfriendJewelry.com provide a market for jilted women who want to make some money and perhaps vent about their ex-partners. The site proclaims “You don’t want it. He can’t have it back.” Users sell, auction, trade, or simply give away the refuse of their former romances—but they also have to share the story behind every gift.

Cupid plays a lead role in the Valentine’s Day holiday, while in China the mythical figure of Yue Lao performs a similar function.

Source: a. Courtesy of Private Collection/Photo © Christie’s Images/The Bridgeman Art Library International. b. Photo by Dawn Sin/Courtesy of Dawn Sin Hui Jie.



important holiday rituals of course stars Santa, a mythical figure for whose arrival children eagerly await (even if their house doesn’t have a fireplace). Indeed, an Australian study that analyzed the letters children write to Santa found they specify their brand preferences quite carefully and often employ sophisticated request strategies to be sure they get what they want from the Big Guy.⁶² In opposition to Christ, Santa is a champion of materialism. Perhaps it is no coincidence, then, that he appears in stores and shopping malls—secular temples of consumption. Whatever his origins, the Santa Claus myth socializes children as it reaches them to expect a reward when they are good and that people get what they deserve (which may be a lump of coal).

- **Halloween**—Halloween began as a pagan religious ceremony, but it’s clearly a secular event today. However, in contrast to Christmas, the rituals of Halloween (e.g., trick-or-treating and costume parties) primarily involve nonfamily members. Halloween is an unusual holiday because its rituals are the opposite of many other cultural occasions. In contrast to Christmas, it celebrates evil instead of good and death rather than birth. It encourages revelers to extort treats with veiled threats of “tricks” rather than rewards for the good.

Because of these oppositions, Halloween is an **antifestival**—an event that distorts the symbols we associate with other holidays. For example, the Halloween witch is an inverted mother figure. The holiday also parodies the meaning of Easter because it stresses the resurrection of ghosts, and it mocks Thanksgiving as it transforms the wholesome symbolism of the pumpkin pie into the evil jack-o-lantern.⁶³ Furthermore, Halloween provides a ritualized, and therefore socially sanctioned, context that allows people to *deindividuate* (see Chapter 10) and try on new roles: Children can go outside after dark, stay up late, and eat all the candy they like for a night. The otherwise geeky guy who always sits in the back of class dresses as Jason in *Friday the Thirteenth* and turns out to be the life of the party.

- **Valentine’s Day**—On Valentine’s Day, we relax our standards about sex and love and we express feelings we may hide during the rest of the year (in Japan, it’s the women who send gifts to the men). A study that investigated Valentine’s Day rituals explored how marketing communications help to shape the holiday. The authors identify five familiar classes of rituals:
 - Exchanging gifts and cards
 - Showing affection

- Going out
- Preparing and consuming food and drink
- Special attention to grooming and clothing

Many of their informants (primarily men) understood the holiday as an obligatory occasion for them to buy their partners expensive, “romantic” gifts. One guy posted this warning: “If you want her happy always remember: the gift has to shine or smell [good] or she should be able to wear it! Otherwise, you’re doomed.” Some informants expressed negative associations with the holiday, including painful emotions because of broken or a lack of relationships and aversion to the “forced” consumption and artificial displays of affection the day requires.⁶⁴ But, as much as some of us may grumble about it, this holiday ritual is too powerful to ignore (unless you like sleeping on the couch).

Rites of Passage

What does a dance for recently divorced people have in common with a fraternity Hell Week? Both are modern **rites of passage**—rituals we perform to mark a change in social status. Every society, both primitive and modern, sets aside times for these changes. Some may occur as a natural part of our life cycles (e.g., puberty or death), whereas others are more individual (e.g., getting divorced and reentering the dating market). As Karin’s son discovered when he bombed his driving test, the importance of a rite of passage becomes more obvious when you fail to undergo it at the prescribed time.

Much like the metamorphosis of a caterpillar into a butterfly, a rite of passage consists of three phases. Let’s see how this works for a young person who changes his social status to become a college student:⁶⁵

- 1 In the first stage, *separation*, he detaches from his original group or status as a high school kid and leaves home for campus.
- 2 *Liminality* is the middle stage, where he is in limbo between statuses. Think of those bewildered new first-year students who try to find their way around campus during orientation.
- 3 In the *aggregation* stage, he returns to society with his new status. Our hero returns home for Thanksgiving break as a cocky college “veteran.”



ECONsumer Behavior



The greeting card industry occasionally invents cultural events to conveniently stimulate demand for more of its products. Some of its creations include Secretaries’ Day and Grandparents’ Day (as your parents will tell you, *everyday* is Kids’ Day!).⁵⁸ Hallmark’s latest ad campaign plays to the frail economy—the card maker touts sending greeting cards as “the biggest little thing you can do.” Its ads promote a 99-cent line of cards the company has sold for many years that’s getting a bigger push in this lean time. Hallmark’s advertising director explains, “This is a way of reminding people that you can get this sort of emotional reaction from a small gesture of sending a card.” One of the ad agency executives adds, “We look at it from a cultural view, which is that people are turning inward right now. They really need each other to get through these kinds of times.”⁵⁹

This McDonald’s ad from Hong Kong celebrates a holiday. The literal translation is “April Fool’s Day: The best day to take the piss out of your friends.”

Source: Courtesy of DDB Hong Kong.

Many types of people undergo rites of passage, including fraternity pledges, recruits at boot camp, or novitiates at a convent. We observe a similar transitional state when people prepare for occupational roles. For example, athletes and fashion models typically undergo a “seasoning” process. They leave their normal surroundings (athletes go to training camps, young models move to Paris or New York), they get indoctrinated into a new subculture, and then return to the real world in their new roles (if they successfully pass the trials of their initiation and don’t “get cut”).

Death also involves rites of passage. Funeral ceremonies help the living organize their relationships with the deceased. Action is tightly scripted, down to the costumes (e.g., the ritual black attire, black ribbons for mourners, the body laid out in its best clothes) and specific behaviors (e.g., sending condolence cards or holding a wake). Passing motorists award special status to the *cortege* (the funeral motorcade) when they obey the strong social norm that prohibits cutting in as the line of cars proceeds to the cemetery.⁶⁶

Forward-thinking funeral directors recognize their role as ritual stagers, so some redefine themselves as party planners. One entrepreneur opened the first nationwide funeral concierge service—for a fee he coordinates tasks that include writing the obituary to negotiating prices with undertakers. Some wealthy people seize the opportunity to go out with a bang: Robert Tisch, who ran the Loews Corporation, had a marching band at his memorial service, and mourners at perfume magnate Estée Lauder’s funeral consoled themselves with chocolate-covered marshmallows that waiters passed on silver trays. Other ordinary folks arrange their own special

Cremations will account for a projected 38 percent of all deaths this year, compared with 26 percent in 2000. Consumers can choose to customize their urns, like this one that holds the ashes of a Red Sox fan until the end.

Source: Courtesy of Landov Media/Photo by Boston Globe/John Tlumacki.



send-offs: At a funeral for a former ice cream vendor the deceased's old ice cream truck led the cortege and then it dispensed Popsicles to guests after the ceremony.⁶⁷

Funeral practices vary across cultures, but they're always rich in symbolism. For example, a study of funeral rituals in Ghana found that the community there determines a person's social value *after* he dies; this status depends on the type of funeral his family gives him. One of the main purposes of death rituals is to negotiate the social identities of deceased persons. This occurs as mourners treat the corpse with a level of respect that indicates what they think of him. The Asante people who were the subjects of the study don't view death as something to fear; it's just part of a broader, ongoing process of identity negotiation.⁶⁸

4

OBJECTIVE

Why do we describe products as either sacred or profane, and why do some products move back and forth between the two categories?

Sacred and Profane Consumption

As we saw when we discussed the structure of myths, many types of consumer activities involve the demarcation, or binary opposition, of categories, such as good versus bad, male versus female—or even regular cola versus diet. One of the most important distinctions we find is between the sacred and the profane. **Sacred consumption** occurs when we “set apart” objects and events from normal activities and treat them with respect or awe. Note that in this context the term *sacred* does not necessarily carry a religious meaning

although we do tend to think of religious artifacts and ceremonies as “sacred.” **Profane consumption** in contrast describes objects and events that are ordinary or everyday; they don't share the “specialness” of sacred ones. Again, note that in this context we don't equate the word *profane* with obscenity although the two meanings do share some similarities.

Again, often we're unaware of the distinction between these two domains—until they conflict with one another. Then, the sparks fly—sort of like the collision between matter and antimatter on *Star Trek*. A conflict in Thailand illustrates this process. It seems that several Bangkok nightclubs, inspired by the film *Coyote Ugly* about women who dance seductively on a New York bar, began to feature their own “Coyote Girls” dancers. The trend caught on and soon the dancers showed up at auto shows, in shopping malls, and at outdoor festivals. That's when the trouble started: Thailand's queen learned of one performance the girls put on near a Buddhist temple on a holy day that marks the end of a 3-month period where Buddhists refrain from impure thoughts and deeds (sort of like the Christian season of Lent). When the queen saw TV news reports about a motorcycle shop that hired Coyote Girls to promote its wares, she was outraged by the intrusion of profane activity into a sacred domain. Coyote Girls are now banned from dancing in public places.⁷⁰

Sacralization

Sacralization occurs when ordinary objects, events, and even people take on sacred meaning. Many consumers regard events such as the Super Bowl and people such as Michael Jackson as sacred. Indeed, virtually anything can become sacred. Skeptical? Consider the Web site that sells *unlaundered* athletic wear that members of the Dallas Cowboys football team have worn. Former quarterback Troy Aikman's shoes sold for \$1,999, and an unwashed practice jersey that retains the sweat of an unknown player goes for \$99. Used socks fly out the door at \$19.99 a pair. Says the owner, “Fans who have never been able to touch the Cowboys before now have an opportunity.”⁷¹

Objectification occurs when we attribute sacred qualities to mundane items (such as smelly socks). One way that this process occurs is via **contamination**, where objects we associate with sacred events or people become sacred in their own right. This explains the desire by many fans for items that belonged to (or were even touched by) famous people. Even the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC,

Marketing Opportunity



Wedding rituals are going green, at least for some brides and grooms who want to rewrite the script to embrace sustainable practices. Some couples calculate the mileage their guests travel to attend the event and offset their carbon dioxide emissions with donations to programs that plant trees or preserve rain forests. Others substitute hydrangeas, berries, and other local and seasonal flowers for the bride's bouquet and table centerpieces instead of burning up fuel to transport flowers from faraway farms. A bride might choose a vintage dress to avoid the waste of a wedding gown she will never wear again. You can even select a caterer who serves organic food on biodegradable plates made of sugar cane fiber. At greenweddings.net or The Sierra Club's *The Green Life* you can find even more advice for “ecosavvy brides and grooms.”⁶⁹

maintains a display that features such “sacred items” as the ruby slippers from *The Wizard of Oz*, a phaser from *Star Trek*, and Archie Bunker’s chair from the television show *All in the Family*—all reverently protected behind sturdy display glass.

In addition to museum exhibits that display rare objects, we often set apart mundane, inexpensive things in *collections*; when we do so we transform them from profane items to sacred ones. An item is sacralized as soon as it enters a collection, and it takes on special significance to the collector that outsiders may find hard to comprehend. For example, you may know someone who collects matchbooks that mark their visits to out-of-town restaurants: Just try to use one of these books if you actually need to light a match.

Collecting refers to the systematic acquisition of a particular object or set of objects. We distinguish this from **hoarding**, which is merely unsystematic collecting.⁷² Hoarding is a problem in some cities where residents’ refusal to discard things properly results in fires, eviction, and even the removal of children from the home. A dozen cities run hoarding task forces to combat this problem.⁷³

Collecting typically involves both rational and emotional components. On the one hand, avid collectors carefully organize and exhibit their treasures.⁷⁴ On the other hand, they are ferociously attached to their collections. A teddy bear collector summed up this fixation: “If my house ever burns down, I won’t cry over my furniture, I’ll cry over the bears.”⁷⁵

Some consumer researchers feel that collectors acquire their “prizes” to gratify their materialism in a socially acceptable manner. When he systematically amasses a collection, the collector “worships” material objects but he doesn’t have to feel guilty or petty. Another perspective argues that collecting is actually an aesthetic experience; for many collectors the pleasure comes from creating the collection. Whatever the motivation, hard-core collectors often devote a great deal of time and energy to maintaining and expanding their collections, so for many this activity becomes a central component of their extended selves (see Chapter 5).⁷⁶

Name an item, and the odds are that a collector lusts after it. You can find collections of just about anything, from movie posters, rare books, and autographs to *Star Wars* dolls, Elvis memorabilia, old computers, and even junk mail.⁷⁷ The 1,200 members of the McDonald’s collectors’ club trade “prizes” such as sandwich wrappers and Happy Meal trinkets—rare ones like the 1987 Potato Head Kids Toys sell for \$25.⁷⁸ And other consumers collect experiences rather than products: Consider the man who visited more than 10,000 McDonald’s restaurants. He keeps a list of unusual menu items and decor, and he defends his hobby this way: “I’m not an oddball or weirdo. I’m a collector of the McDonald’s dining experience. So many issues from the last half of the twentieth century can be understood, at least partially, from a seat inside a McDonald’s. What could be more quintessentially American?” Supersize that?⁷⁹

Domains of Sacred Consumption

Sacred consumption events permeate many aspects of our lives. We find ways to “set apart” all sorts of places, people, and events. In this section, we’ll look at ways that “ordinary” consumption is sometimes *not* so ordinary after all.

Sacred Places

A society “sets apart” sacred places because they have religious or mystical significance (e.g., Bethlehem, Mecca, Stonehenge) or because they commemorate some aspect of a country’s heritage (e.g., the Kremlin, the Emperor’s Palace in Tokyo, the Statue of Liberty, or, more recently, Ground Zero in Manhattan). *Contamination* makes these places sacred—something sacred happened on that spot, so the place itself takes on sacred qualities. Hard-core Yankees’ fans now can buy Yankees Sod—the first officially licensed grass. Although it will cost a few thousand dollars to fill out a good-sized lawn, proud fans can boast a lawn that grows from the same seeds the groundskeepers use at the stadium, and the sod comes with a certificate of



CB AS I LIVE IT

Amanda Deutchman, *The University of Arizona*

Material objects often are a source of security and expression of values or beliefs. In this way, one might say that the objects you choose to attach yourself to are a result of your culture. In my experience, it seems that *collecting* material objects and the subsequent *sacralization* of such items is a shared value and norm within a culture—a small culture, the family. Many people casually own a series of related items, often rationalized by adding deep meaning to the objects. On occasion, these may be justified as a symbol of an experience, keeping memories alive. This is the basis behind souvenir purchases. However, for some, this act is purely an interest that results in adding value or meanings to objects, meaning that others may not understand.

Family, as an example, can lead to a subculture of values and beliefs, including collecting. Many members of my extended family collect various items, mostly related to pop culture memorabilia. This sense of valuing material objects related to entertainment was passed down as a norm within our family culture for at least three generations. My father collects soundtracks, and my uncle and grandfather collect Disney memorabilia, as well as other items. I collect many things as well, including T-shirts that remind me of places I've been, events I have experienced, or particular stages of my life. These act as a reminder of my past. However, other collections are based on the simple worship of material items that hold no personal

historical value. I collect anything and everything that has to do with the television show *Friends*. This includes books, DVDs, posters, autographs, and games. My interest in the show and interest in working in television led me to begin this collection. This was, in fact, a way of acquiring related objects that illogically held emotional value. I allow myself to value these objects, which results in certain consumption patterns that others without these same cultural collecting values may not follow.

Such collecting and sacralization of a specific set of objects can be used as a way to express oneself by portraying interests to others through material objects. It is an excuse to consume items that may not seem a reasonable or rational expense. This opens a door for marketers who gain the opportunity to build off of these obsessions and add value to items. First, sales of many collections have become an act of consumer-to-consumer sales with electronic resources such as eBay. Individuals market their personal collections, describing products in such a way that adds value to them, despite the value someone may not originally hold. This explanation of the importance of the goods may help the original consumer justify their prior worship of the objects, proving that these items have value. The explanation may also work to convince others who may have a slight interest in a set of objects to increase their interest. It can convince these consumers that such objects have value and *should* be worshipped, bringing them into the collecting culture.

Mass marketers (business-to-consumer marketers) can also exploit this cultural value within certain

families using a *tribal marketing strategy*. They can hold events to increase interest and convince “fans” of things or objects to “worship” these objects. The collector culture has also led to Web sites devoted to memorabilia, allowing businesses to reach the mass consumer who may choose one item and collectors who may purchase multiple items. These new businesses open up the opportunity to market to collectors and justify this sacralization as a common act, enough to justify entire Web sites devoted to this culture. Businesses and marketers can use the collecting habit to capitalize on this culture and create new products to increase profits. They can produce many objects with few moderations and sell, essentially, multiples of the same item. I own two complete sets of the *Friends* DVD sets, one as originally released season by season, and a “collector’s box” edition. Sales of the same product, but in different packaging, are a great tool marketers use in targeting collectors in addition to the mass consumers. Many consumers will buy the less expensive item version, while collectors may repurchase an item as each new version of the product is released. As a consumer, it is important to beware of personal interests and desires for objects versus the valuing of objects as a result of observing others actions, purchases, and values. Marketers can easily strengthen a weak or moderate interest and convince a consumer to create value around an object, leading to future expenditures and allow for multiple product sales leading to profits. One must also consider their family cultural influence on this action and how this affects personal purchases.

authenticity from Major League Baseball and a counterfeit-proof hologram that declares it the official grass of the New York Yankees.⁸⁰

Still other places start out as profane but we endow them with sacred qualities. Graumann's Chinese Theater in Hollywood, where movie stars leave their footprints in concrete for posterity, is one such place. Theme parks are a form of mass-produced fantasy that takes on aspects of sacredness. In particular, Disney World and Disneyland (and their outposts in Europe and Japan) are destinations for "pilgrimages" by consumers around the globe. Disney World displays many characteristics of more traditional sacred places. Some even believe it has healing powers, which helps to explain why a trip to the park is the most common "last wish" for terminally ill children.⁸¹

As the saying goes, "Home is where the heart is."⁸² In many cultures, the home is a particularly sacred place. It's a barrier between the harsh, external world and consumers' "inner space." Americans spend more than \$50 billion a year on interior decorators and home furnishings, and our home is a central part of our identity. People all over the world go to great lengths to create a feeling of "homeyness." They personalize their dwellings with door wreaths, mantle arrangements, and a "memory wall for family photos."⁸³ Even public places such as Starbucks cafés strive for a homelike atmosphere to shelter customers from the harshness of the outside world.

Sacred People

At her Web site livingoprah.com, superfan Robyn Okrant blogs about her devotion to Oprah Winfrey—and the year she spent living her life completely guided by Oprah's advice about what to eat, wear, and read. In her mission statement she speculates, "I wonder, will I find bliss if I commit wholeheartedly to her lifestyle suggestions?"⁸⁴

We idolize sacred people as we set them apart from the masses, and sometimes people believe they have "superhuman" abilities. Souvenirs, memorabilia, and even mundane items these celebrities touch acquire special meanings (the celebrities "contaminate" the items). Newspapers pay *paparazzi* hundreds of thousands of dollars for candid shots of stars or royalty. Indeed, many businesses thrive on our desire for products we associate with the famous. There is a flourishing market for celebrity autographs, and objects celebrities owned such as Princess Diana's gowns or John Lennon's guitars sell on eBay for astronomical prices.

Sacred Events

Sometimes public events resemble sacred, religious ceremonies—think about fans who hold their hands over their hearts and solemnly recite the "Pledge of Allegiance" before a ballgame, or how others reverently light matches (or hold up illuminated cell phones) during a rock concert.⁸⁵

The world of sports is sacred to many of us (recent doping and gambling scandals aside). We find the roots of modern sports events in ancient religious rites, such as fertility festivals (e.g., the original Olympics).⁸⁶ And it's not uncommon for teams to join in prayer prior to a game. The sports pages are like the scriptures (and we all know ardent fans who read them "religiously"), the stadium is a house of worship, and the fans are members of the congregation. Devotees engage in group activities, such as tailgate parties and the "Wave," where sections of the stadium take turns standing up. The athletes and coaches that fans come to see are godlike; devotees believe they have almost superhuman powers. One study documented more than 600 children whose parents named them after the legendary University of Alabama coach Paul "Bear" Bryant!⁸⁷

Athletes are central figures in a common cultural myth—the *hero tale*. In these stories, the player must prove himself under strenuous circumstances, and he achieves victory only through sheer force of will. On a more mundane level, devotees consume certain ritual artifacts during these ceremonies (such as hot dogs at

the ballpark). Sales of snack foods and beverages spike around the time of the Super Bowl—people spend \$10 million more on tortilla chips than during a normal 2-week period and more than \$15 million extra on beer in the weeks surrounding the big game.⁸⁸

Tourism is another example of a sacred experience. People occupy sacred time and space when they travel on vacation (though you may not think so if you get stuck sleeping on an airport floor because of a plane delay). The tourist searches for “authentic” experiences that differ from his normal world (think of Club Med’s motto, “The antidote to civilization”).⁸⁹ This traveling experience involves binary oppositions between work and leisure and being “at home” versus “away.” Often, we relax everyday (profane) norms regarding appropriate behavior as tourists—we participate in illicit or adventurous experiences we would never engage in at home (“What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas”).

The desire of travelers to capture these sacred experiences in objects forms the bedrock of the souvenir industry, which really sells sacred memories. Whether it’s a personalized matchbook from a wedding or New York City salt-and-pepper shakers, a souvenir represents a tangible piece of the consumer’s sacred experience.⁹⁰ In addition to personal mementos, such as ticket stubs you save from a favorite concert, these are some other sacred souvenir icons:⁹¹

- Local products (e.g., wine from California)
- Pictorial images (e.g., postcards)
- “Piece of the rock” (e.g., seashells, pine cones)
- Symbolic shorthand in the form of literal representations of the site (e.g., a miniature Statue of Liberty)
- Markers (e.g., Hard Rock Cafe T-shirts)

From Sacred to Profane, and Back Again

Just to make life interesting, some consumer activities move back and forth between the sacred and profane spheres over time.⁹² A recent study of tea preparation in Turkey illustrates this movement. Although we are more likely to think of thick Turkish coffee, in reality Turks consume more tea *per capita* than any other country. In Turkish culture people drink tea continuously, like (or instead of) water. Tea is an integral part of daily life; many households and offices boil water for tea in the traditional *çaydanlık* (double teapot) first thing in the morning, and keep it steaming all day so that the beverage is ready at any time. The tea drinking process links to many symbolic meanings—including the traditional glasses, clear to appreciate the tea’s color, and hourglass-shaped like a woman’s body—and rituals, such as blending one’s own tea, knowing how finely to grind the tea leaves, and how long to steep the tea for optimal flavor. When Lipton introduced the modern tea bag in 1984, Turkey was intent on modernization and soon consumers snapped up electric *çaydanlıks* and mugs instead of small, shapely tea glasses. Tea became a symbol of the quick and convenient, and the drinking act became more of a fashion statement. Now, many Turkish consumers opt to return to the sacred, traditional rituals as a way to preserve authenticity in the face of rapid societal changes.⁹³

The transition of Turkish tea to a mass market product illustrates the process of **desacralization**—this occurs when we remove a sacred item or symbol from its special place or duplicate it in mass quantities so that it loses its “specialness” and becomes profane. Souvenir reproductions of sacred monuments such as the Washington Monument or the Eiffel Tower, artworks such as the *Mona Lisa* or Michelangelo’s *David*, or reproductions of sacred symbols such as the American flag on T-shirts eliminate their special aspects—they become inauthentic commodities with relatively little value.

Guardian angel.

Assistant guardian angel.

PRIMITIVE SHARON

Fire and carbon monoxide are two of the biggest dangers in any home. Now, for the first time, there's an alarm that protects families from both: the combination Smoke/Carbon Monoxide alarm, only from First Alert. It's easy to install (use it to replace an old smoke alarm), and it'll be on guard for years. For more on home safety, visit www.firstalert.com. Protecting your family is easy. Why take chances? **We're watching out for your family.** **First Alert**

This ad for an alarm system uses sacred imagery to sell a profane product.

Source: Courtesy of First Alert Corp.

Religion itself has to some extent become desacralized. Religious symbols like stylized crosses or New Age crystals often pop up on fashion jewelry.⁹⁴ Critics often charge that Christmas has turned into a secular, materialistic occasion devoid of its original sacred significance. A similar process occurs in relatively Westernized parts of the Islamic Middle East, where the holy month of Ramadan (that people traditionally observe by fasting and praying) is starting to look like Christmas: People buy lights in the shape of an Islamic crescent moon, send Ramadan cards to one another, and attend lavish fast-breaking feasts at hotels.⁹⁵

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Now that you have finished reading this chapter you should understand why:

1 A culture is a society's personality; it shapes our identities as individuals.

A society's culture includes its values, ethics, and the material objects its members produce. It is the accumulation of shared meanings and traditions among members of a society. We describe a culture in terms of ecology (the way people adapt to their habitat), its social structure, and its ideology (including moral and aesthetic principles).

2 Myths are stories that express a culture's values, and in modern times marketing messages convey these values.

Myths are stories with symbolic elements that express the shared ideals of a culture. Many myths involve a binary

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opposition—they define values in terms of what they are and what they are not (e.g., nature versus technology). Advertising, movies, and other media transmit modern myths.

3 Many of our consumption activities including holiday observances, grooming, and gift-giving are rituals.

A ritual is a set of multiple, symbolic behaviors that occur in a fixed sequence and that we repeat periodically. Ritual is related to many consumption activities that occur in popular culture. These include holiday observances, gift-giving, and grooming.

A rite of passage is a special kind of ritual that marks the transition from one role to another. These passages typically entail the need to acquire ritual artifacts to facilitate the transition. Modern rites of passage include graduations, fraternity initiations, weddings, debutante balls, and funerals.



We describe products as either sacred or profane, and it's not unusual for some products to move back and forth between the two categories.

We divide consumer activities into *sacred* and *profane* domains. Sacred phenomena are “set apart” from everyday activities or products. *Sacralization* occurs when we set apart

everyday people, events, or objects from the ordinary. *Objectification* occurs when we ascribe sacred qualities to products or items that sacred people once owned. *Desacralization* occurs when formerly sacred objects or activities become part of the everyday, as when companies re-produce “one-of-a-kind” works of art in large quantities.

KEY TERMS

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REVIEW

- 1 What is culture? List three dimensions social scientists use to describe a culture and give an example of each.
- 2 A myth is a special kind of story. What makes it special? What is an example of a modern myth?
- 3 Give an example of a marketer that uses the principle of binary opposition.
- 4 What is a ritual? Describe three kinds of rituals and provide an example of each.
- 5 List the three stages of a ritual.
- 6 What is the difference between sacred and profane consumption? Provide one example of each.
- 7 How is a collection sacred? What is the difference between collecting and hoarding?

CONSUMER BEHAVIOR CHALLENGE

DISCUSS

- 1 A culture is a society's personality. If your culture were a person, how would you describe its personality traits?
- 2 This chapter argues that not all gift-giving is positive. In what ways can this ritual be unpleasant or negative?
- 3 For many, Disney is a sacred place. Do you agree? Why or why not?
- 4 Describe the three stages of the rite of passage associated with graduating from college.
- 5 Have you ever given yourself a gift? If so, why did you do it and how did you decide what to get?
- 6 “Fraternity hazing is simply a natural rite of passage that universities should not try to regulate.” Do you agree?
- 7 Identify the ritualized aspects of football that advertising uses.
- 8 “Christmas has become simply another opportunity to exchange gifts and stimulate the economy.” Do you agree? Why or why not?
- 9 Bridal registries specify very clearly the gifts that the couple wants. How do you feel about this practice—should people actually specify what you should buy for them, or should a gift be a more personal expression from you?
- 10 Rituals provide us with a sense of order and security. In a study of the drinking rituals of college students, the researchers found that drinking imposed order in students' daily lives—from the completion of assignments to what and when to eat. In addition, ritualizing an activity such as drinking provides security and fellowship at a time fraught with confusion and turbulent change. Obviously, though, there's a dark side to drinking rituals.

Consider the highly publicized death of an MIT student who died 3 days after he fell into an alcohol-induced coma as the result of a fraternity pledge.⁹⁶ Indeed, while binge drinking is a ritual many college students practice, critics have described it as the most significant health hazard on college campuses today.⁹⁷ What role does drinking play in the social life on your campus? Based on

your experience, how does it fit into rituals of college life? Should these practices be changed? If so, how?

- 11 The chapter describes a new wave of commercials that give voice to products and practices people didn't use to discuss in polite conversation. Are any products out-of-bounds to advertising? Can these messages boomerang if they turn off consumers?

■ APPLY

- 1 When you go out on a first date, identify the crevice norms that you follow. Write a report (preferably when the date is over) describing specific behaviors each person performed that made it clear you were on a first date. What products and services do those norms affect?
- 2 Interview people you know about any "magic" items they own (e.g., How many of your friends have a lucky charm or hang a St. Christopher's medal or some other object from their rearview mirrors?). Get them to describe their feelings about these objects and tell how they acquired their magical properties. How would they feel if they lost these special items?

- 3 Identify modern-day myths that corporations create. How do they communicate these stories to consumers?
- 4 Interview people you know who collect some kind of object. How do they organize and describe their collections? Do you see any evidence of sacred versus profane distinctions?
- 5 Ask friends to describe an incident where they received a gift they thought was inappropriate. Why did they feel this way, and how did this event influence the relationship between them and the gift giver?

Case Study

MOBILE PHONES INVADE THE WORLD

The cell phone is a marvel of modern technology, and consumers all over the world certainly welcome this high-tech accessory. According to Gartner, Inc., worldwide sales of mobile phones reached 1.28 billion units in 2008. As the popularity of these phones grows, their features also multiply. E-mail functions, calendars, Internet, GPS tracking, and cameras are built into many mobiles. But members of various cultures differ in the attributes they most desire in a phone, and how they choose which phone is best for them. A 2008 study by Mintel reported that the size, shape, and style of the phone are most important to American consumers. They rate BlackBerry and Apple as very stylish while many feel that Palm and Nokia are more traditional and behind the times.

Russia boasts a high level of cell phone penetration. Experts say that between 60 to 80 percent of Russians own phones. But, phone preferences there differ from the American market. Attributes like durability and reliability are extremely important. Incomes are lower in Russia and a traditional value of thriftiness prevails so consumers there tend to keep their phones for a longer period of time. On the other hand, in recent years the economy has boomed due to rising oil prices, so people value phones as status symbols—they are quick to jump to a higher-end product.

A different set of circumstances applies in Arab countries. In particular, the integration of the cell phone with a

personal camera hits a wall in cultures where picture-taking is frowned upon. Some Arabic countries impose strict penalties for people who use a camera phone in public. In conservative Saudi Arabia, the sexes are segregated in public places and women must be covered head-to-toe in public with veils and robes. So, it's not surprising that Saudi women are sensitive about being photographed, especially without their veils.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1 Why do you think that Saudi Arabia and other Middle Eastern countries have taken a stronger stance on regulating the use of camera phones? Discuss this question in the context of sacred and profane consumption.
- 2 Consumer choice for cell phones appears to be different in Russia. What do you think that this says about the culture in that country?
- 3 How might cell phones influence cultural rituals or introduce new ones? Can phone marketers boost phone usage (including video, texting, etc.) if they encourage the development of these rituals? How?

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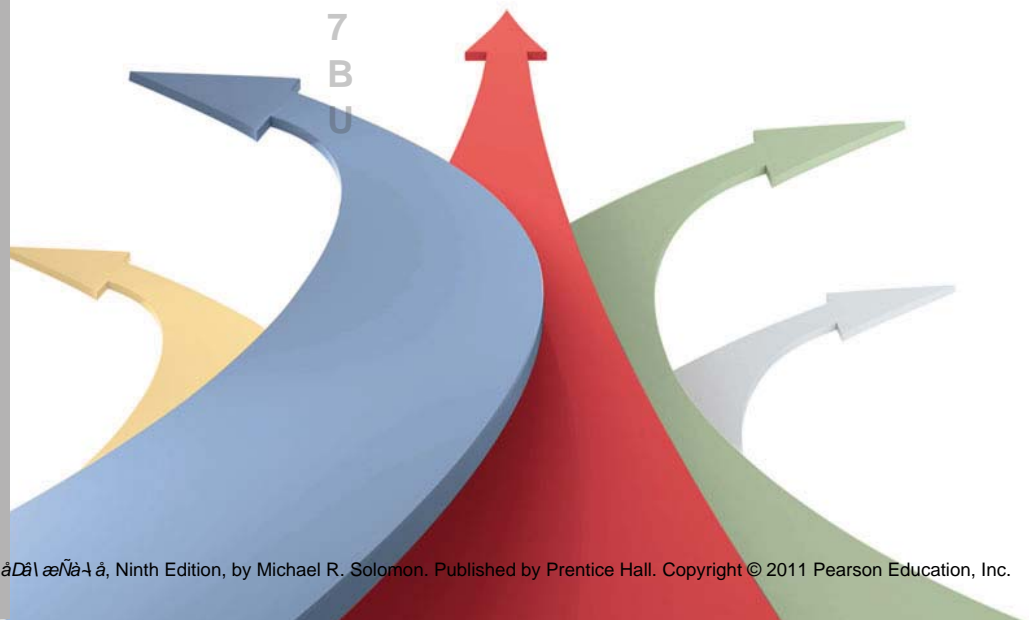
16

Global Consumer Culture

Chapter Objectives

When you finish this chapter you will understand:

- 1 Why are styles like mirrors that reflect underlying cultural conditions?
- 2 How do we distinguish between high and low culture?
- 3 Why are many modern marketers reality engineers?
- 4 How do new products, services, and ideas spread through a population? Why are different types of people more or less likely to adopt them?
- 5 How do many people and organizations play a role in the fashion system that creates and communicates symbolic meaning to consumers?
- 6 Why do fashions follow cycles?
- 7 Why is it that products that succeed in one culture may fail in another if marketers fail to understand the differences among consumers in each place?
- 8 How does Western (and particularly American) culture have a huge impact around the world, although people in other countries don't necessarily ascribe the same meanings to products as we do?





As Alexandra browses through the racks at her local Abercrombie & Fitch store in Wichita, Kansas, her friend Chloe yells to her, “Alex, check this out!

This pencil skirt and animal print blouse outfit is, like, so tight!”¹ From watching MTV, Alex knows *tight* means *cool*, and she agrees. As she takes the pants to the cash register, she looks forward to wearing them to school the next day. All of her girlfriends in junior high compete with each other to dress just like Rihanna, Ciara, Eve, and other hot hip-hop ladies—her friends just won’t believe their eyes when they see her tomorrow. Maybe some of the younger kids in her school will even think she’s fresh off the mean streets of New York City! Even though she has never been east of the Mississippi, Alex just knows she would fit right in with all of the Bronx “sistahs” she reads about in *Twist*, *J-14*, and *Yo! Raps*.

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OBJECTIVE

Why are styles like mirrors that reflect underlying cultural conditions?

Where Does Popular Culture Come From?

Even though inner-city teens represent only 8 percent of all people in that age group and have incomes significantly lower than their white suburban counterparts, their influence on young people's musical and fashion tastes is much greater than these numbers suggest. Turn on MTV, and it won't be long before a rap video fills the screen. Go to the newsstand, and magazines like *XXL* and *The Source* await you. Numerous Web sites such as allhiphop.com and undergroundhiphop.com pay homage to hip-hop culture.²

“Urban” fashion now is a mainstay in the heartland as major retail chains pick up on the craze and try to lure legions of young middle-class shoppers. Macy's and JCPenney carry Sean John and FUBU (“for us by us”); labels like Versace, Tommy Hilfiger, Enyce, Ecko, Nautica, and Affliction are standard issue for junior high kids. Web sites such as hiphopcapital.com sell other emblems of hip-hop such as “pimp cups,” gold plated “grillz,” and Bellagio spoke rims.³ Why does this subculture influence the mass market so strongly?

Outsider heroes—whether John Dillinger, James Dean, or Dr. Dre—who achieve money and fame without being hemmed in by societal constraints have always fascinated Americans. That helps to explain the devotion of many white suburban teens to the urban music scene. As one executive of a firm that researches urban youth noted, “People resonate with the strong anti-oppression messages of rap, and the alienation of blacks.”⁴

Ironically, the only time Alex experienced “oppression” was when her parents grounded her after her mom found a half-smoked cigarette in her room. She lives in a white middle-class area in the Midwest but “connects” symbolically with millions of other young consumers when she wears styles from “the hood”—even though the original meanings of those styles have little relevance to her. As a privileged member of “white bread” society, her hip-hop clothes mean something much different in her sheltered suburban world than they would to street kids in New York City or LA. In fact, these “cutting-edge” types might even decide that since a kid like Alex now wears their styles that's a sign it's time to move on to something else.

How did hip-hop music and fashions, which began as forms of expression in the African American urban subculture, make it to mainstream America? Here's a brief chronology:

- 1968: Bronx DJ Kool Herc invents hip-hop.
- 1973–1978: Urban block parties feature break dancing and graffiti.
- 1979: Sugar Hill becomes the first rap label.
- 1980: Manhattan art galleries feature graffiti artists.
- 1981: Blondie's song “Rapture” hits number one on the charts.
- 1985: Columbia Records buys the Def Jam label.
- 1988: MTV begins *Yo! MTV Raps*, featuring Fab 5 Freddy.
- 1990: Hollywood produces the hip-hop film *House Party*; Ice-T's rap album is a big hit on college radio stations; amid controversy, white rapper Vanilla Ice hits the big time; NBC launches a new sitcom, *Fresh Prince of Bel Air*.
- 1991: Mattel introduces its Hammer doll (a likeness of the rap star Hammer, formerly known as M. C. Hammer); designer Karl Lagerfeld shows shiny vinyl raincoats and chain belts in his Chanel collection; designer Charlotte Neuville sells gold vinyl suits with matching baseball caps for \$800; Isaac Mizrahi features wide-brimmed caps and takeoffs on African medallions; Bloomingdale's launches Anne Klein's rap-inspired clothing line with a rap performance in its Manhattan store.
- 1992: Rappers turn to low-fitting baggy jeans, sometimes worn backward; white rapper Marky Mark appears in a national campaign wearing Calvin Klein underwear, exposed above his hip-hugging pants; composer Quincy Jones launches *Vibe* magazine and it wins over many white readers.⁵

- 1993: Hip-hop fashions and slang continue to cross over into mainstream consumer culture. An outdoor ad for Coca-Cola proclaims, “Get Yours 24–7.” The company is confident that many viewers in its target market will know that the phrase is urban slang for “always” (24 hours a day, 7 days a week).⁶
- 1994: The (late) Italian designer Versace pushes oversized overalls. In one ad, he asks, “Overalls with an oversize look, something like what rappers and homeboys wear. Why not a sophisticated version?”⁷
- 1996: Tommy Hilfiger, a designer who was the darling of the preppie set, turns hip-hop. He gives free wardrobes to rap artists such as Grand Puba and Chef Raekwon, and in return they mention his name in rap songs—the ultimate endorsement. The September 1996 issue of *Rolling Stone* features the Fugees; several band members prominently display the Hilfiger logo. In the same year, the designer uses rap stars Method Man and Treach of Naughty by Nature as runway models. Hilfiger’s new Tommy Girl perfume plays on his name but also is a reference to the New York hip-hop record label Tommy Boy.⁸
- 1997: Coca-Cola features rapper LL Cool J in a commercial that debuts in the middle of the sitcom *In the House*, a TV show starring the singer.⁹
- 1998: In its battle with Dockers for an increased share of the khaki market, Gap launches its first global ad campaign. One of the commercials, “Khakis Groove,” includes a hip-hop dance performance set to music by Bill Mason.¹⁰
- 1999: Rapper turned entrepreneur Sean (Puffy) Combs introduces an upscale line of menswear he calls “urban high fashion.” New companies FUBU, Mecca, and Enyce attain financial success in the multibillion-dollar industry.¹¹ Lauryn Hill and the Fugees sing at a party upscale Italian clothier Emporio Armani sponsors and she proclaims, “We just wanna thank Armani for giving a few kids from the ghetto some great suits.”¹²
- 2000: 360hip-hop.com, a Web-based community dedicated to the hip-hop culture, launches. The site lets consumers purchase clothing and music online while they watch video interviews with artists such as Will Smith and Busta Rhymes.¹³
- 2001: Hip-hop dancing becomes the rage among China’s youth, who refer to it as *jiew*, or street dancing.¹⁴
- 2002–2003: Toy manufacturers mimic the hip-hop practice of using the letter *Z* instead of the letter *S* in names. This trend started with the 1991 film *Boyz n the Hood* (a title the movie borrowed from a 1989 song by the rap group N.W.A.). It caught on with other hip-hop terms such as *skillz*, *gangstaz*, and *playaz*. Musical artists including 504 Boyz, Kidz Bop Kidz, Xzibit, the Youngbloodz, and Smilez incorporate the popular *Z* into their names. During the 2002 Christmas season, Target creates its “Kool Toyz,” kids’ section where parents buy dolls with names such as Bratz (Girlz and Boyz), Diva Starz, and Trophy Tailz—and a Dinky Digz dollhouse to store them. There is a “Scannerz” toy; a Loud Lipz karaoke machine; Marble Moovz, a toddlers’ marble set, as well as Rescue Rigz, ControlBotz, 4Wheelerz, and American Patriotz action figures.¹⁵
- 2005–2006: Successful artists begin to expand their empires into other categories. Jay-Z uses his hip-hop fortune to become part owner of the New Jersey Nets basketball team, Nelly buys into the Charlotte Bobcats, and Usher does the same with the Cleveland Cavaliers.¹⁶ Nelly branches out into the beverage business with Pimp Juice, a hip-hop inspired energy drink, and 50 Cent invests in vitaminwater. Trina and Usher each create their own fragrances, and Gwen Stefani starts her own clothing line. *Esquire* names Andre 3000 of Outkast the world’s best-dressed man.
- 2007–2008: Hip-hop disengages from its American roots as artists around the world develop their own localized interpretations. An aboriginal Australian hip-hop dancer tells a crowd the FUBU brand shirt he is wearing means “full blood.”¹⁷ Home-grown European artists are popular, such as Jokeren and Den Gale Pose in Denmark, Static and NATiLL in Germany, and Sway in the United Kingdom. Central and eastern European countries develop their own hip-hop subculture with acts such as Parazitii in Romania and Bad Balance/Bad B. in Russia.¹⁸

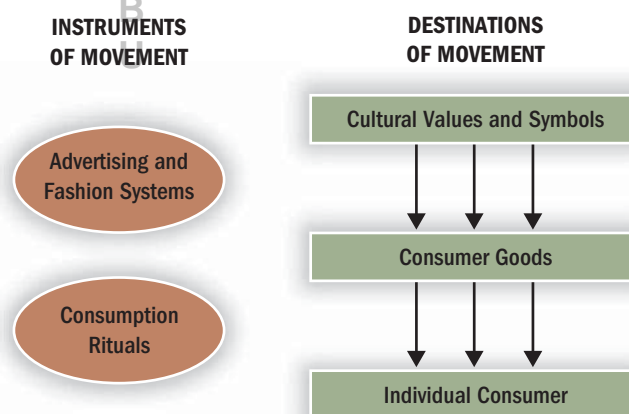
- 2009: *Vibe*, the flagship magazine of the hip-hop movement, ceases print publication after 16 years. Slow ad sales due to the recession, a decline in the number of chart-topping artists, and competition contributed to its demise. It was in a sense a victim of its own success; hip-hop is now so mainstream that fans no longer need a single, specialized outlet to access the coverage they crave.¹⁹

It's common for mainstream culture to modify symbols from "cutting-edge" subcultures for a larger audience to consume. As this occurs, these cultural products undergo a process of **cooptation**, where outsiders transform their original meanings.²⁰ One writer sees the white part of the "hip-hop nation" as a series of concentric rings. In the center are those who actually know African Americans and understand their culture. The next ring consists of those who have indirect knowledge of this subculture via friends or relatives but who don't actually rap, spray paint, or break dance. Then, there are those a bit farther out who simply play hip-hop between other types of music. Finally we have the more suburban "wiggers," who simply try to catch on to the next popular craze.²¹ The spread of hip-hop fashions and music is only one example of what happens when the marketing system takes a set of subcultural meanings, reinterprets them, and reproduces them for mass consumption.

The countercultures that originate these movements of course don't just sit still for this. They develop strategies to reclaim and repoliticize their symbols and practices. For example, large food manufacturers and retailers today recognize shifting consumer tastes as they co-opt vegan or organic food cultures and repackage food products for mainstream grocery shoppers. Wal-Mart sells organic food and the huge conglomerate ConAgra purchased Ben & Jerry's ice cream. In response adherents of a "locavore" lifestyle that emphasizes locally produced meat and vegetables may find alternative channels of distribution like farmers' markets to sell their "authentic" versions to true believers.²²

In this chapter we'll look at how our culture creates these meanings—which often reside in everyday products—and how these meanings move through a society. As Figure 16.1 shows, the advertising and fashion industries play a key role in this process; they link functional products with symbolic qualities such as sexiness, sophistication, or just plain "cool." These goods, in turn, impart their meanings to us as we use these products to create and express our identities.²³ Recall that in Chapter 1 we learned that "one of the fundamental premises of the modern field of consumer behavior [is that] people often buy products not for what they *do* but for what they *mean*." This closing chapter brings us full circle as we explore how product symbolism evolves and spreads through our culture.

Figure 16.1 THE MOVEMENT OF MEANING



How Do We Know What's “In?”

Aztec tats. Vuitton handbags. Cage-free eggs. Soulja Boy. High-tech furniture. Flash mobs. Postmodern architecture. Twittering. Nettops. Hybrid cars. Costa Rican eco-tours. Gladiator sandals. We inhabit a world that brims with different styles and possibilities. The food we eat, the cars we drive, the clothes we wear, the places we live and work, the music we listen to—the ebb and flow of popular culture and fashion influences all of them.

At times we may feel overwhelmed by the sheer number of choices available to us in the marketplace. A person who wants to choose something as routine as a necktie or a color of lipstick may look at hundreds of alternatives! Despite this seeming abundance, however, the options available to us at any point in time actually represent only a small fraction of the *total* set of possibilities. Figure 16.2 shows that when we select certain alternatives over others—whether automobiles, dresses, computers, recording artists, political candidates, religions, or even scientific methodologies—our choice actually is only the culmination of a complex filtration process that resembles a funnel. Many possibilities initially compete for adoption; most of them drop out of the mix as they make their way down the path from conception to consumption. We call this winnowing out process **cultural selection**.

We don't form our tastes and product preferences in a vacuum. The many images mass media present to us drive our choices, as well as our observations of those around us, and even our desires to live in the fantasy worlds marketers create in the ads we see all around us. These options constantly evolve and change. A clothing style or type of cuisine that is “hot” one year may be “out” the next.

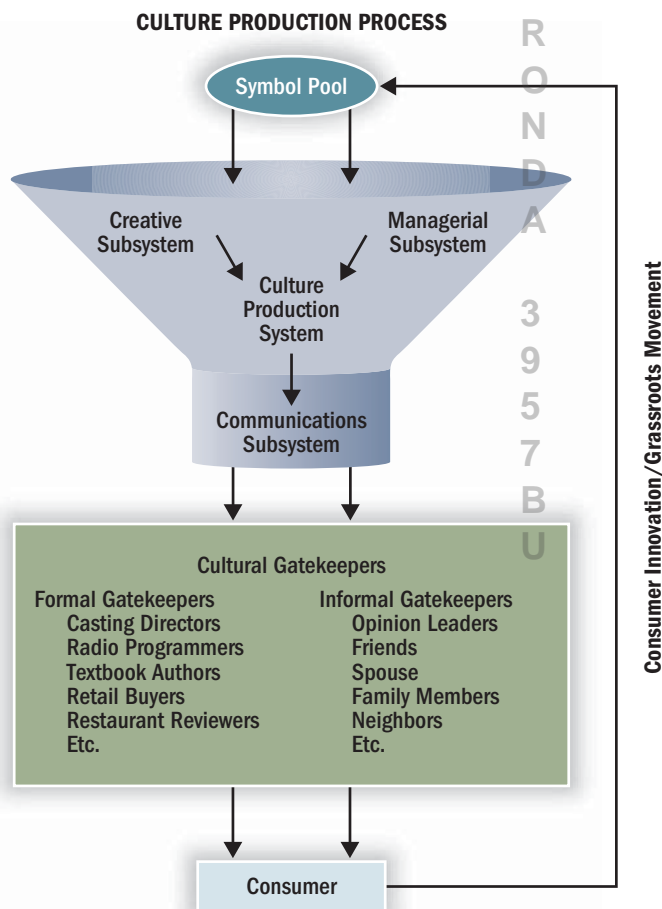


Figure 16.2 THE CULTURE PRODUCTION PROCESS

Alex's emulation of hip-hop style illustrates some of the characteristics of fashion and popular culture:

- Styles reflect more fundamental societal trends (e.g., politics and social conditions).
- A style begins as a risky or unique statement by a relatively small group of people and then spreads as others become aware of it.
- Styles usually originate as an interplay between the deliberate inventions of designers and businesspeople and spontaneous actions by ordinary consumers who modify these creations to suit their own needs. Designers, manufacturers, and merchandisers who anticipate what consumers want will succeed in the marketplace. In the process, they help to fuel the fire when they encourage distribution of the item—especially if they persuade opinion leaders to use it first.
- These cultural products travel widely, often across countries and even continents.
- Influential people in the media play a significant role in deciding which will succeed.
- Most styles eventually wear out as people continually search for new ways to express themselves and marketers scramble to keep up with these desires.
- The cultural selection process never stops, so when styles become obsolete others wait to replace them in popular culture.

No single designer, company, or advertising agency creates popular culture. Instead, many parties contribute to every hit CD, hot car, or new clothing style. A **culture production system (CPS)** is the set of individuals and organizations that create and market a cultural product.²⁴ The structure of a CPS determines the types of products it creates. Factors such as the number and diversity of competing systems and the amount of innovation versus conformity each influence the selection of products from which to choose at any point in time. For example, an analysis of the country/western music industry showed that the hit records it produces are similar to one another when a few large companies dominate the industry, but when a greater number of labels compete we see more diversity in musical styles.²⁵

A culture production system has three major subsystems:

- 1 A *creative subsystem* to generate new symbols and products
- 2 A *managerial subsystem* to select, make tangible, produce, and manage the distribution of new symbols and products
- 3 A *communications subsystem* to give meaning to the new product and provide it with a symbolic set of attributes

An example of the three components of a culture production system for a music release would be (1) a singer (e.g., rapper Akon, a creative subsystem); (2) a company (e.g., Umvd Labels that distributes Akon's CDs, a managerial subsystem); and (3) NYLA Entertainment Group, the PR agency that promotes the CDs (a communications subsystem). Table 16.1 illustrates some of the many cultural specialists that create a hit CD.

Many judges or “tastemakers” have a say in the products we consider. These **cultural gatekeepers** filter the overflow of information as it travels down the “funnel.” Gatekeepers include movie, restaurant, and car reviewers; interior designers; disc jockeys; retail buyers; and magazine editors. Collectively, social scientists call this set of agents the *throughput sector*.²⁶ These people play a role in decision making similar to the *surrogate consumers* we discussed in Chapter 8.

We've already encountered numerous examples of the minirevolution we call consumer-generated content; companies today pay attention to everyday people's opinions when they design new products, create advertising messages, or im-

TABLE 16.1 Cultural Specialists in the Music Industry

Specialist	Functions
Songwriter(s)	Compose music and lyrics; must reconcile artistic preferences with estimates of what will succeed in the marketplace
Performer(s)	Interpret music and lyrics; may be formed spontaneously, or may be packaged by an agent to appeal to a predetermined market (e.g., The Monkees, Menudo, and New Kids on the Block)
Teachers and coaches	Develop and refine performers' talents
Agents	Represent performers to record companies
A&R (artist & repertoire) executives	Acquire artists for the record label
Publicists, image consultants, designers, stylists	Create an image for the group that is transmitted to the buying public
Recording technicians, producers	Create a recording to be sold
Marketing executives	Make strategic decisions regarding performer's appearances, ticket pricing, promotional strategies, and so on
Video directors	Interpret the song visually to create a music video that will help to promote the record
Music reviewers	Evaluate the merits of a recording for listeners
Disc jockeys, radio program directors	Decide which records will be given airplay and/or placed in the radio stations' regular rotations
Record store owners	Decide which of the many records produced will be stocked and/or promoted heavily in the retail environment

prove on shopping experiences. The rise of social networking changes the basic process of innovation, as the consumer feedback loop in Figure 16.1 grows stronger and stronger. This shift from a top-down to a bottom-up process is a symptom of the transition from *marketerspace* where companies exert total control over the market.

Instead, we now live in *consumerspace*, where customers act as partners with companies to decide what the marketplace will offer.²⁷ Innovative companies understand the value of involving their most forward-thinking customers in business decisions before they introduce the final product. More than 650,000 customers tested a beta version of Microsoft Windows 2000. Many were even prepared to pay Microsoft a fee to do this because when they worked with the program they would understand how it could create value for their own businesses. The value of the research and development investment by customers to Microsoft was more than \$500 million. Similarly, Cisco gives its customers open access to its resources and systems so that they can solve the problems other customers encounter.

This approach is more prevalent in high-tech industries that routinely invite their most experienced and knowledgeable customers (or **lead users**) to suggest ideas. Indeed, it's common for these people to propose product improvements—because they have to live with the consequences. According to one estimate, users rather than manufacturers developed 70 percent of the innovations in the chemical industry!²⁸ Xerox uses **voice of the consumer** data in its R&D process, which means that it solicits feedback from end customers well before it puts a new product on the market. The company's standard development process is to design and build a prototype and *then* get customer feedback. Xerox is a pioneer in what the company calls "customer-led innovation" that encourages engineers to "dream with the customer." Company engineers meet face-to-face with some of the 1,500 to 2,000 customers who visit showrooms at the company's four global research facilities each year. Others work on-site for a week or two with corporate clients to understand how they behave with the product in real situations to see how they actually use the company's products.²⁹ Welcome to *consumerspace*.

As this AT&T ad demonstrates, many styles and products are destined to become obsolete.

Source: Courtesy of AT&T Archives and History Center.

There's one thing AT&T international long distance customers will never have to worry about.

These days, things seem to go obsolete before you can get them out of the box. Not so with AT&T International Long Distance. We're continually upgrading our Worldwide Intelligent Network, before you have time to even think about it. When we saw that global events were affecting telephone traffic, we expanded our Network Operations Center. Now events are continually monitored 24 hours a day, and traffic is routed accordingly. We also anticipated the growing demand for international voice, data and fax transmission, by developing the first transpacific and transatlantic fiber-optic cable systems.

So you'll enjoy fast international connections with unsurpassed clarity. We could list other examples of advances you'll never have to think about. But why not call 1 800 222-0400 ext. 1277, and let the innovations speak for themselves.

AT&T
The right choice.

2 OBJECTIVE

How do we distinguish between high and low culture?

3 High Culture and Popular Culture

Question: What do Beethoven and Kanye West have in common? Although we associate both the famous composer and the rap singer with music, many would argue that the similarity stops there. Culture production systems create many kinds of products, but we make some basic distinctions.

Arts and Crafts

An **art product** is an object we admire strictly for its beauty or because it inspires an emotional reaction in us (perhaps bliss, or perhaps disgust). In contrast, we admire a **craft product** because of the beauty with which it performs some function (e.g., a ceramic ashtray or hand-carved fishing lures).³⁰ A piece of art is original, subtle, and valuable, and typically we associate it with society's elite (see Chapter 12). A craft tends to follow a formula that permits rapid production.³¹

To appreciate this distinction, consider the phenomenal success of artist Thomas Kinkade. This painter has sold 10 million digital reproductions of his work. He manufactures the pictures at a factory in California, where workers reproduce a digital photograph of each original thousands of times onto thin plastic film they

glue to canvasses. Then “high-lighters” sit along an assembly line where they dab oil paint onto set spots. Each of the 10,000 pieces the factory produces each month is signed in ink that contains drops of the artist’s blood, although he never actually touches most of these works. Kinkade also licenses images that appear on coffee mugs, La-Z-Boy recliners, and even a romance novel cover.³²

High Art Versus Low Art

As Kinkade’s “formula for success” demonstrates, the distinction between high and low culture is not as clear as it used to be. In addition to the possible class bias that drives such a distinction (i.e., we assume that the rich have culture but the poor do not), today high and low culture blend together in interesting ways. In addition to the appliances, tires, and cereals it sells by the case, the warehouse club Costco stocks fine art, including limited-edition lithographs by Pablo Picasso, Marc Chagall, and Joan Miró.³³

Marketers often invoke high-art imagery to promote products. They may feature works of art on shopping bags or sponsor artistic events to build public goodwill.³⁴ When observers from Toyota watched customers in luxury car showrooms, the company found that these consumers view a car as an art object. The company then used this theme in an ad for the Lexus with the caption, “Until now, the only fine arts we supported were sculpture, painting, and music.”³⁵

Cultural Formulae

Mass culture, in contrast, churns out products specifically for a mass market. These products aim to please the average taste of an undifferentiated audience. Rather than being unique, they are predictable because they follow a well-defined pattern.

As this British ad illustrates, high art merges with popular art in interesting ways.

Source: Courtesy of Eddis Trailers c/o The Explorer Group.

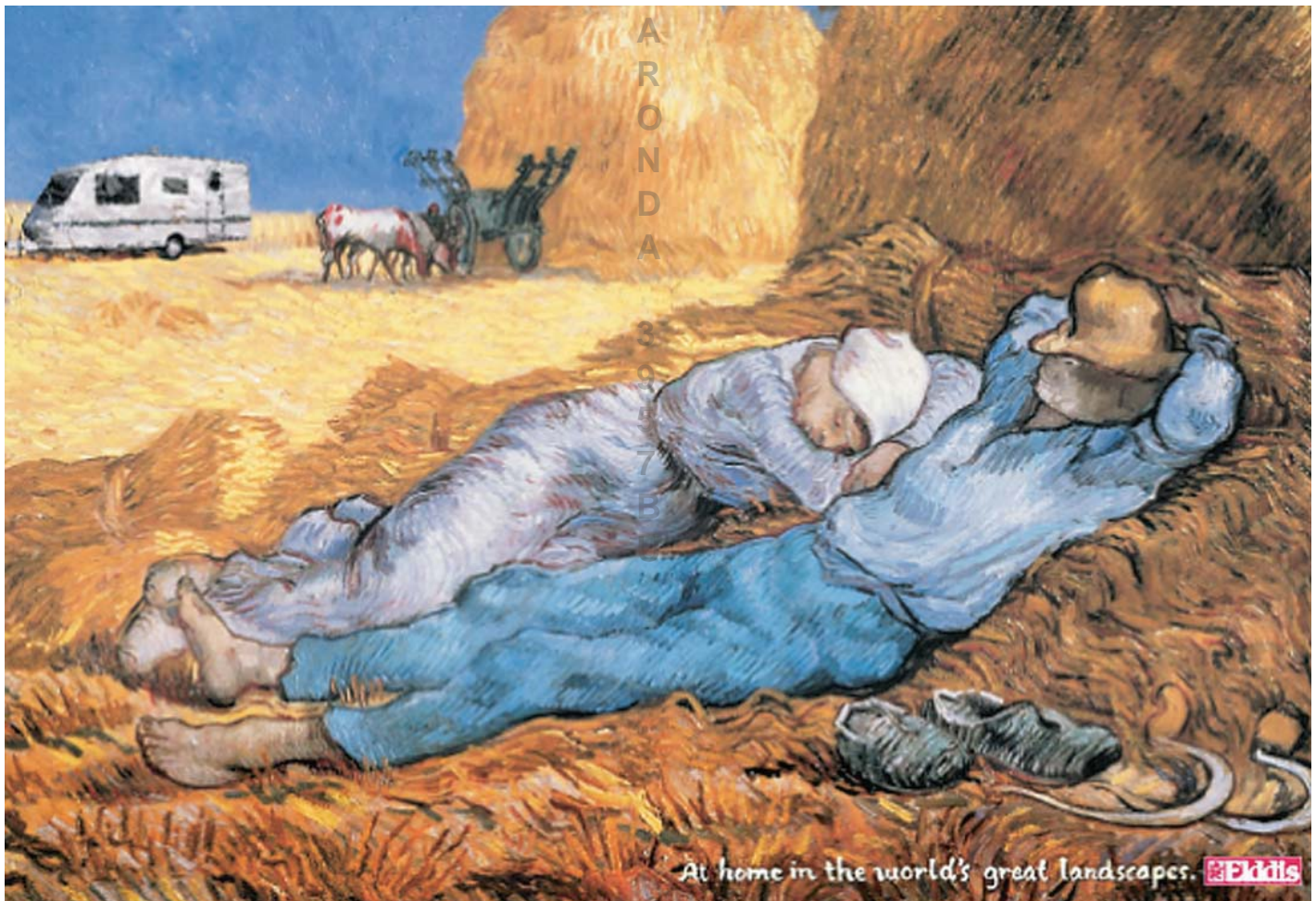


TABLE 16.2 Cultural Formulae in Public Art Forms

Art Form/Genre	Classic Western	Science Fiction	Hard-Boiled Detective	Family Sitcom
Time	1800s	Future	Present	Anytime
Location	Edge of civilization	Space	City	Suburbs
Protagonist	Cowboy (lone individual)	Astronaut	Detective	Father (figure)
Heroine	Schoolmarm	Spacegal	Damsel in distress	Mother (figure)
Villain	Outlaws, killers	Aliens	Killer	Boss, neighbor
Secondary characters	Townfolk, Indians	Technicians in spacecraft	Cops, underworld	Kids, dogs
Plot	Restore law and order	Repel aliens	Find killer	Solve problem
Theme	Justice	Triumph of humanity	Pursuit and discovery	Chaos and confusion
Costume	Cowboy hat, boots, etc.	High-tech uniforms	Raincoat	Regular clothes
Locomotion	Horse	Spaceship	Beat-up car	Station wagon
Weaponry	Sixgun, rifle	Rayguns	Pistol, fists	Insults

Source: Arthur A. Berger, *Signs in Contemporary Culture: An Introduction to Semiotics*, 2/e, p.118. Copyright © 1984 by Sheffield Publishing Company, Salem, Wisconsin. Reprinted with permission of the publisher.

Marketing Opportunity



The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation is a *reality engineer* for good causes—it helps to influence viewers' attitudes toward public health and HIV prevention when it shapes story lines and inserts prosocial messages in popular TV shows like *Law & Order: SVU*. The foundation recently made a deal with Viacom, the parent company of MTV and its sister networks VH1, Nickelodeon, and BET to expand this program. Instead of paying to have colas or cars featured in shows, marketers will sponsor messages that promote education and healthy living.⁴²

As Table 16.2 illustrates, many popular art forms, such as detective stories or science fiction, follow a **cultural formula**, where familiar roles and props occur consistently.³⁶ Romance novels are an extreme case of a cultural formula. Computer programs even allow users to “write” their own romances when they systematically vary certain set elements of the story.

As members of the creative subsystem rely on these formulae, they tend to *recycle* images as they reach back through time for inspiration. Thus, young people watch retro shows like *Gilligan's Island* as well as remakes such as *The Real Gilligan's Island*; designers modify styles from Victorian England or colonial Africa; hip-hop deejays sample sound bits from old songs and combine them in new ways; and Gap runs ads that feature (deceased) celebrities in khaki pants including Humphrey Bogart, Gene Kelly, and Pablo Picasso. With easy access to CD burners, digital cameras, and imaging software, virtually anyone can “remix” the past.³⁷



OBJECTIVE

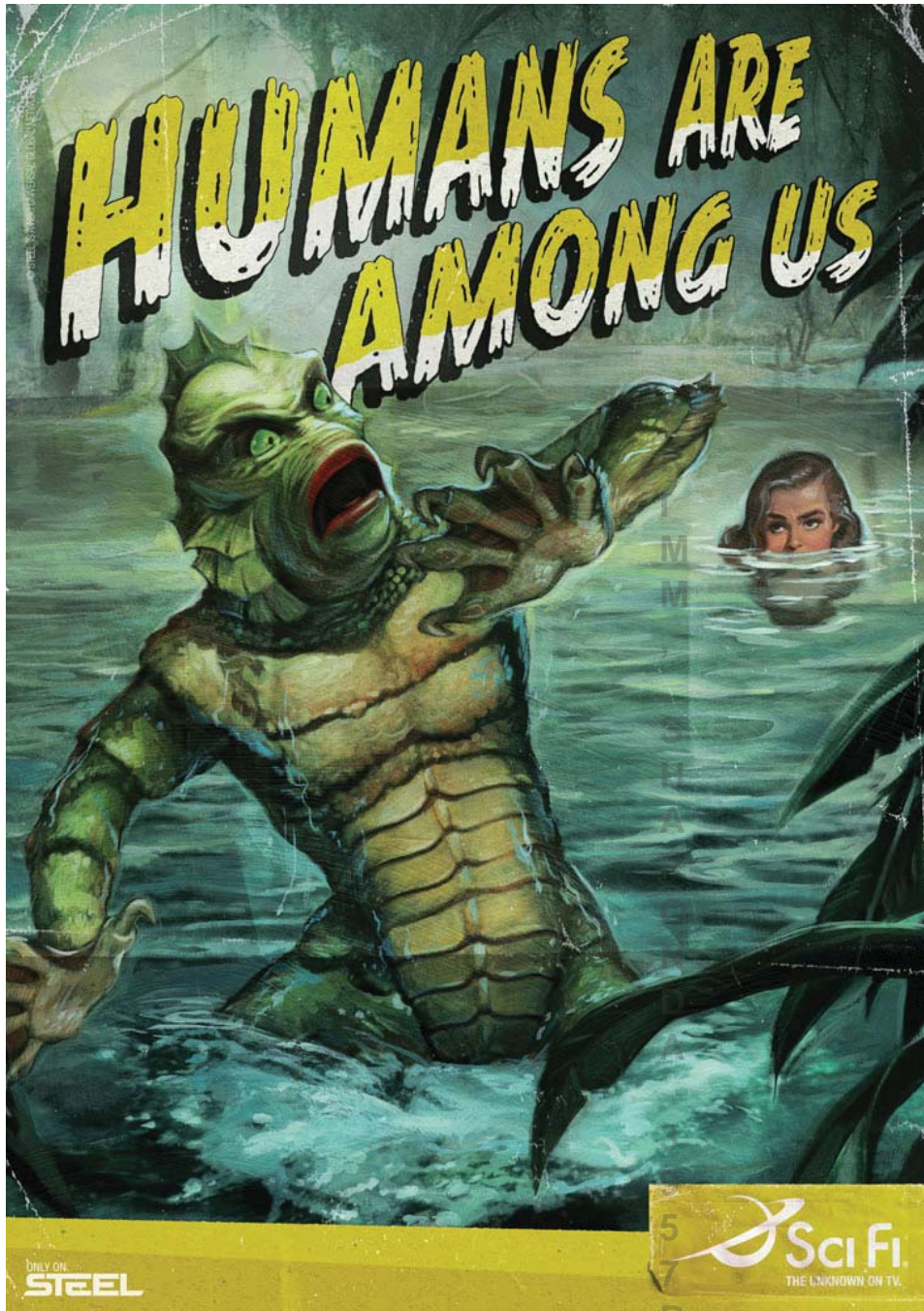
Why are many modern marketers reality engineers?

Reality Engineering

People love the GEICO caveman. He appears in commercials as a throwback who dresses in “yuppie” clothing as he struggles against GEICO’s insensitivity when its ads claim, “It’s so easy even a caveman can do it.” How much do viewers love him? ABC developed a (short-lived) sitcom about a group of caveman roommates who battle prejudice in modern-day America. GEICO receives hundreds of letters and e-mails about the characters,

and fans at college sporting events hold up signs that say “Beating [team name] is so easy, even a caveman can do it.” The cavemen continue to appear in commercials and in a music video by the band 3 Doors Down.³⁸ Similarly, the mythical Simpsons family debuted in real life as 7-Eleven transformed many of its stores into Kwik-E-Marts to promote the cartoon series’ movie. During the promotion customers snapped up Krusty O’s cereal, Buzz Cola, and ice Squishees, all products from the show.³⁹

Reality engineering occurs when marketers appropriate elements of popular culture and use them as promotional vehicles.⁴⁰ It’s hard to know what’s real anymore; specialists even create “used jeans” when they apply chemical washes, sandpaper, and other techniques to make a new pair of jeans look like they’re ready for retirement. The industry even has a term for this practice that sums up the contradiction: *new vintage*!⁴¹



Horror movies tend to follow a cultural formula.

Source: Courtesy of Saatchi & Saatchi, Milan © Steel is an NBC Universal Global Network.

Reality engineers have many tools at their disposal; they plant products in movies, pump scents into offices and stores, attach video monitors in the backs of taxicabs, buy ad space on police patrol cars, or film faked “documentaries” such as *The Blair Witch Project*.⁴³ This process is accelerating—historical analyses of Broadway plays, best-selling novels, and the lyrics of hit songs, for example, clearly show large increases in the use of real brand names over time.⁴⁴ Here are some examples of reality engineering:

- Bravo develops real-world products based on some of its TV programs that it promotes on air and sells on its Web site. These include pricey Kooba bags contestants on *The Fashion Show* created, *Top Chef*-themed flower arrangements from Teleflora, *Top Chef*-branded wines from Terlato Wines International, *Top*

Marketing Pitfall



One of the most controversial intersections between marketing and society occurs when companies provide “educational materials” to schools.⁶¹ Many firms including Nike, Hershey, Crayola, Nintendo, and Foot Locker provide free book covers swathed in ads. Standard art supplies, blocks, trucks, and dolls get supplemented with Milton Bradley and Care Bears worksheets, Purell hand-cleaning activities, and Pizza Hut reading programs. Walt Disney advertised its *Little Einsteins* DVDs for preschoolers on the paper liners of examination tables in 2,000 pediatricians’ offices, whereas Hasbro introduced the Play-Doh McDonald’s Restaurant Playset (with which kids can “extrude Play-Doh shakes and fries”) and the Play-Doh George Foreman Grill. Clearasil provides sample packets of its acne medication along with brochures to educate high school students about proper skin care; the handouts also direct students to the Clearasil Web site where they can also register for music downloads and iPods.

Other companies contract with schools to run focus groups with their students during the school day in order to get reactions to new product ideas. Some schools encourage kids to practice their math as they count Tootsie Rolls, and the kids use reading software that bears the logos of Kmart, Coke, Pepsi, and Cap’n Crunch cereal. Entire schools are branded—one in New Jersey awarded naming rights for its gym to the local ShopRite grocery store. Several Texas high schools sold naming rights to their football stadiums for more than a million dollars. At Vernon Hills High outside Chicago, fans watch their players run up and down Rust-Oleum Field.

Corporate involvement with schools is hardly new—in the 1920s Ivory Soap sponsored soap-carving competitions for students. But the level of intrusion is sharply increasing as companies scramble to compensate for the decrease in children’s viewership of television on Saturday mornings and weekday afternoons and they try to compete with videos and computer games for kids’ attention. Many educators argue that these materials are a godsend for resource-poor schools that otherwise could not provide computers and other goodies to their students. However, a California law bans the use of textbooks with brand names and company logos. This legislation was prompted by complaints from parents about a middle school math book that uses names such as Barbie, Oreos, Nike, and Sony PlayStation in word problems.

Chef knives from Master Cutlery, and online cooking classes conducted by *Top Chef* contestants.⁴⁵

- The Alibi Network provides “excuses” for people who need to cover their tracks. Clients can purchase a fake doctor’s note, a virtual travel service that furnishes a fake itinerary and receipts, and a rescue call service that gets you out of boring meetings (classes don’t qualify). Reputation Defender will scour the Web to identify your embarrassing entries and delete them (or you can just say no when you post all those photos on Facebook you’ll regret later).⁴⁶
- Actress Demi Moore and her fiancé heartthrob Ashton Kutcher appeared on the cover of *Star* magazine, under the headline “\$1 Million Wedding of the Year!” She’s wearing a sexy white fitted dress, and he’s decked out in a white suit. But wait—it turns out Ms. Moore’s dress was really chocolate brown and Mr. Kutcher’s suit was really pink. The magazine digitally altered the colors before it went to press.⁴⁷
- A father named his baby boy ChamberMaster after a software company won the naming rights in a charitable auction. In one survey, about half of the respondents said they would consider accepting money from corporations in exchange for naming rights to their babies. Others do it for free: In 2000, the latest year for which data are available, 571 babies in the United States were named Armani, 55 were named Chevy, and 21 were named L’Oréal.⁴⁸
- A New York couple funded their \$80,000 wedding when they sold corporate plugs; they inserted coupons in their programs and tossed 25 bouquets from 1-800-FLOWERS.
- The TV series *Trust Me* chronicles life in a fictional Chicago advertising agency that competes for accounts against real agencies like Leo Burnett and DDB. The clients are real as well—some like the Dove line of hair care products sold by Unilever also happen to sponsor the show. A real-life brand manager for Dove hair care appears on the show, and to promote the series viewers can play an online game where they pretend to be creative directors for Dove.⁴⁹

Product Placement

Back in the day, TV networks demanded that producers “geek” (alter) brand names before they appeared in a show, as when *Melrose Place* changed a Nokia cell phone to a “Nokio.”⁵⁰ Today, real products pop up everywhere. Many are well-established brands that lend an aura of realism to the action, while others are upstarts that benefit tremendously from the exposure. For example, in the movie version of *Sex and the City* Carrie’s assistant admits that she “borrows” her expensive pricey handbags from a rental Web site called Bag Borrow or Steal. The company’s head of marketing commented, “It’s like the *Good Housekeeping* Seal of Approval. It gives us instant credibility and recognition.”⁵¹

Bag Borrow or Steal got a free plug (oops, they got another one here!). In many cases, however, these “plugs” are no accident. **Product placement** is the insertion of real products in fictional movies, TV shows, books, and plays. Many types of products play starring (or at least supporting) roles in our culture; the most visible brands range from Coca-Cola and Nike apparel to the Chicago Bears football team and the Pussycat Dolls band.⁵² The TV shows that feature the most placements include *The Biggest Loser* (it showed about 4,000 brands in just a three-month period), *American Idol* (how subtle is that Coca-Cola glass each judge holds?), *The Apprentice*, *America’s Next Top Model*, and *One Tree Hill*. This practice is so commonplace (and profitable) now that it’s evolved into a new form of promotion we call **branded entertainment**, where advertisers showcase their products in longer-form narrative films instead of brief commercials. For example, *SportsCenter* on ESPN showed installments of “The Scout presented by Craftsman at Sears,” a 6-minute story about a washed-up baseball scout who discovers a stunningly talented stadium groundskeeper.⁵³

Product placement is by no means a casual process: Marketers pay about \$25 billion per year to plug their brands in TV and movies. Several firms specialize in ar-



A dining room influenced by the TV show *Dexter* that features a serial killer.

Source: Photo by Adam Chinitz/Courtesy of A C Imaging, LLC.

ranging these appearances; if they're lucky they manage to do it on the cheap when they get a client's product noticed by prop masters who work on the shows. For example, in a cafeteria scene during an episode of *Grey's Anatomy* it was no coincidence that the character Izzie Stevens happened to drink a bottle of Izzie Sparkling Pomegranate fruit beverage. The placement company that represents PepsiCo paid nothing to insert the prop in that case, but it probably didn't get off so easily when the new brand also showed up in HBO's *Entourage*, *Big Bang Theory*, and *The New Adventures of Old Christine* on CBS.⁵⁴

Today most major releases brim with real products, even though a majority of consumers believe the line between advertising and programming is becoming too fuzzy and distracting (though as we might expect, concerns about this blurring of boundaries are more pronounced among older people than younger).⁵⁵ A study reported that consumers respond well to placements when the show's plot makes the product's benefit clear. Similarly, audiences had a favorable impression of when a retailer provided furniture, clothes, appliances, and other staples for struggling families who get help on ABC's *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*.⁵⁶

Although we hear a lot of buzz today about product placement, in reality it's a long-standing cinematic tradition. The difference is that today the placements are more blatant and financially lucrative. In the heyday of the major Hollywood studios, brands such as Bell telephone, Buick, Chesterfield cigarettes, Coca-Cola, De Beers diamonds, and White Owl cigars regularly appeared in films. For example, in a scene in the classic *Double Indemnity* (1944) that takes place in a grocery store, the director Billy Wilder made some products such as Green Giant vegetables face the camera whereas others "mysteriously" were turned around to hide their labels. Indeed, the practice dates at least as far back as 1896, when an early movie shows a cart bearing the brand name Sunlight (a Lever Brothers brand) parked on a street.⁵⁸ Perhaps the greatest product placement success story was Reese's Pieces; sales jumped by 65 percent after the candy appeared in the film *E.T.*⁵⁹

Some researchers claim that product placement aids consumer decision making because the familiarity of these props creates a sense of cultural belonging while they generate feelings of emotional security. Another study found that placements consistent with a show's plot do enhance brand attitudes, but incongruent placements that aren't consistent with the plot affect brand attitudes *negatively* because they seem out of place.⁶⁰

Marketing Pitfall



The product placement industry has come under government scrutiny as pressure grows from consumer groups to let viewers know when companies pay to use their products as props. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) is considering whether it should regulate this practice. Currently shows have to disclose this information but only at the end of the show and in small print. An FCC official says, "You shouldn't need a magnifying glass to know who's pitching you."⁵⁷

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Advergaming

If you roar down the streets in the *Need for Speed Underground 2* video racing game, you'll pass a Best Buy store as well as billboards that hawk Old Spice and Burger King.⁶² *America's Army*, produced by the U.S. government as a recruitment tool, is one of the most successful advergaming. Twenty-eight percent of those who visit the *America's Army* Web page click through to the recruitment page.

About three-quarters of American consumers now play video games, yet to many marketers the idea of integrating their brands with the stories that games tell is still a well-kept secret. Others including Axe, Mini Cooper, and Burger King have figured this out—they create game narratives that immerse players in the action. Orbitz offers playable banner-games that result in the highest click-through rate of any kind of advertising the online travel site does. Even though the game industry brings in more revenue than feature films or music sales, only about 10 percent of marketers execute any promotions in this space.

Even so, it's likely that the future is bright for **advergaming**—where online games merge with interactive advertisements that let companies target specific types of consumers. These placements can be short exposures such as a billboard that appears around a racetrack, or they can take the form of branded entertainment and integrate the brand directly into the action. For example, a game that Dairy Queen helped to create called *DQ Tycoon* lets players run their own fast-food franchise. The game requires players to race against the clock to prepare Peanut-Buster Parfaits, take orders, restock the refrigerator, and dip cones.⁶³

The mushrooming popularity of user-generated videos on YouTube and other sites creates a growing market to link ads to these sources as well. This strategy is growing so rapidly that there's even a new (trademarked) term for it. **Plinking™** is the act of embedding a product or service link in a video.

Why is this new medium so hot?⁶⁴

- Compared to a 30-second TV spot, advertisers can get viewers' attention for a much longer time. Players spend an average of 5 to 7 minutes on an advergaming site.
- Physiological measures confirm that players are highly focused and stimulated when they play a game.
- Marketers can tailor the nature of the game and the products in it to the profiles of different users. They can direct strategy games to upscale, educated users, while they can gear action games to younger users.



Mead's branded video game attracted over 10 million players.

Source: Courtesy www.mediapost.com accessed 12/15/08.

- The format gives advertisers great flexibility because game makers now ship PC video games with blank spaces in them to insert virtual ads. This allows advertisers to change messages on the fly and pay only for the number of game players that actually see them. Sony Corp. now allows clients to directly insert online ads into PlayStation 3 videogames—the in-game ads change over time through a user's Internet connection.
- There's great potential to track usage and conduct marketing research. For example, an inaudible audio signal coded into Activision's *Tony Hawk's Underground 2* skating game on PCs alerts a Nielsen monitoring system each time the test game players view Jeep product placements within the game.

4

OBJECTIVE

How do new products, services, and ideas spread through a population? Why are different types of people more or less likely to adopt them?

The Diffusion of Innovations

The originators of skateboarding in 1970s Southern California (who were portrayed in the popular documentary *Dogtown and Z-Boys*) wouldn't recognize the sport today. At that time boarders were outlaws; as one of the main characters in the film says, "We get the beat-down from all over. Everywhere we go, man, people hate us."

Now skateboarding is about as countercultural as *The Simpsons*. More kids ride skateboards than play basketball, and many of them snap up pricey T-shirts, skate shoes, helmets, and other accessories. In fact, boarders spend almost

six times as much on "soft goods" such as T-shirts, shorts, and sunglasses (about \$4.4 billion in a year) than on hard-core equipment including the boards themselves.⁶⁵

The progression of skateboarding from a cult-like activity with rebellious undertones to a mainstream hobby mirrors the journey many products and services take through popular culture. **Diffusion of innovations** refers to the process whereby a new product, service, or idea spreads through a population. An **innovation** is any product or service that consumers perceive to be new. It may take the form of an activity (skateboarding), a clothing style (Ed Hardy T-shirts), a new manufacturing technique (the ability to design your own running shoe at nike.com), a new variation on an existing product (Parkay Fun Squeeze Colored Margarine in electric blue and shocking pink), a new way to deliver a product (ordering groceries online and having Peapod deliver them to your home), or a new way to package a current product (Campbell's Soup at Hand Microwaveable Soup that comes in a travel mug).⁶⁶

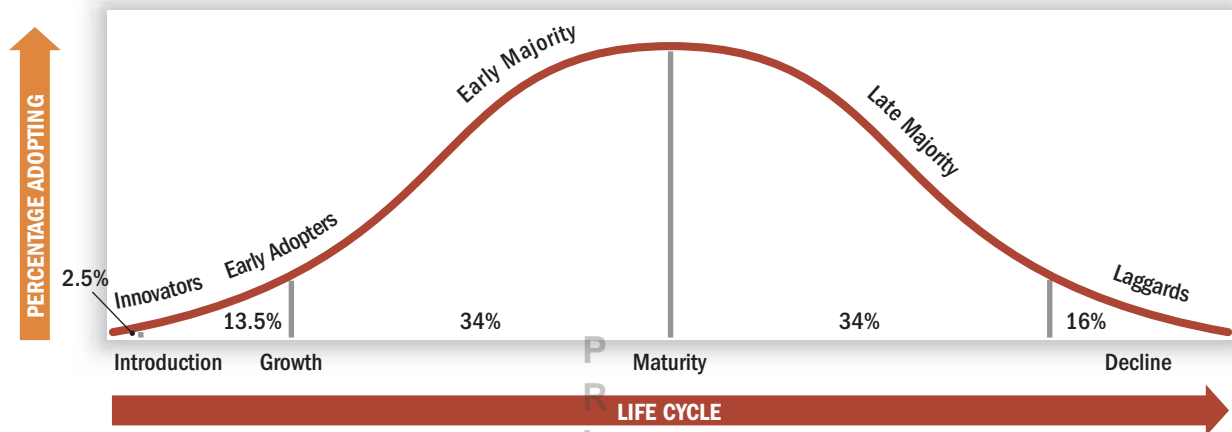
If an innovation is successful (most are not!), it spreads through the population. First only a trickle of people decides to try it. Then, more and more consumers decide to adopt it, until sometimes it seems that almost everyone is buying it—if it's a "hit." The rate at which a product diffuses varies. For example, within 10 years after introduction, 40 percent of U.S. households watched cable TV, 35 percent listened to compact disks, 25 percent used answering machines, and 20 percent bought color TVs. It took radio 30 years to reach 60 million users and TV 15 years to reach this number. In contrast, within 3 years 90 million of us surfed the Web.⁶⁷

How Do We Decide to Adopt an Innovation?

Our adoption of an innovation resembles the decision-making sequence we discussed in Chapter 8. We move through the stages of awareness, information search, evaluation, trial, and adoption. The relative importance of each stage differs, however, depending on how much we already know about an innovation as well as on cultural factors that affect our willingness to try new things.⁶⁸

A study of 11 European countries found that consumers in individualistic cultures are more innovative than consumers in collective cultures (see Chapter 15).⁶⁹ However, even within the same culture, not all people adopt an innovation at the

Figure 16.3 TYPES OF ADOPTERS



same rate. Some do so quite rapidly, and others never do at all. We place consumers into approximate categories based on the likelihood they will adopt something new.

As Figure 16.3 shows, roughly one-sixth of the population (innovators and early adopters) are very quick to adopt new products, and one-sixth (**laggards**) are very slow. The other two-thirds, so-called **late adopters**, are somewhere in the middle. These consumers are the mainstream public. They are interested in new things, but they do not want them to be *too* new. In some cases, people deliberately wait to adopt an innovation because they assume that the company will improve its technology or that its price will fall after it has been on the market awhile. (have you been holding off on that iPhone purchase to see what Apple will come up with next?)⁷⁰ Keep in mind that the proportion of consumers who fall into each category is an estimate—the actual size of each depends on such factors as the complexity of the product, its cost, and how much risk people associate with it.

Even though **innovators** represent only about 2.5 percent of the population, marketers are eager to identify them. These are the brave souls who are always on the lookout for novel products or services and who are first to try something new. Just as generalized opinion leaders do not appear to exist (see Chapter 10), innovators tend to be category-specific as well. A clotheshorse who prides himself as being on the cutting edge of fashion may have no conception of new developments in recording technology—he may still stubbornly cling to his antique phonograph albums even as he searches for the latest avant-garde clothing styles in trendy boutiques. Despite this qualification, we can summarize the profile of someone who's a good candidate to be an innovator.⁷¹ Not surprisingly, for example, he tends to be a risk-taker. He's also likely to have a relatively high educational and income level and to be socially active.

How do we locate innovators? Ad agencies and market research companies are always on the prowl for people who stay on top of developing trends. One ad agency surveys taxi drivers about what they see on the streets every day. Others get more sophisticated and use the Internet and their global networks to monitor what “people in the know” do. The agency DDB runs a service it calls SignBank, which collects thousands of snippets of information from its 13,000 employees around the world about cultural change in order to advise their clients on what it all means for them. For example, sign spotters in several markets noticed that dinner party guests tended to bring their hosts flowers instead of chocolate because of concerns about health and obesity—that's valuable information for a client that makes chocolate.⁷²

Early adopters share many of the same characteristics as innovators. But an important difference is their high degree of concern for social acceptance, especially with regard to expressive products such as clothing and cosmetics. Generally speaking, an early adopter is receptive to new styles because she is involved in the product category and she values being in fashion.



CB AS I SEE IT

Professor Gordon Bruner, Southern Illinois University

Several years ago, Professor Kumar (University of South Florida) and I were working with Sprint to develop a way for the company to measure a person's technological innovativeness such that it could be easily implemented in the surveys the company routinely conducted. Sprint's primary interest was in *innovators*—the small group of consumers who have a tendency to be among the first to adopt high-tech goods and services. At the same time, Dr. Kumar and I wanted to learn more about a similar group of adopters we called **gadget lovers**. The term *gadget lover* has been tossed around in our country for many decades but no scientific study of them had occurred. We wondered if they were pretty much the same

people as tech innovators or if they were different.

After we conducted several studies, the results were rather clear: While there is overlap between the two groups of consumers, there are also key differences. As a group, innovators adopt a little more quickly than gadget lovers. While gadget lovers tend to adopt much more rapidly than the average consumer, they don't all qualify as innovators. On the other hand, more gadget lovers qualify as *opinion leaders* than innovators. The reasons for this are not perfectly clear, but it seems that gadget lovers, as the name implies, genuinely enjoy playing with technology. That experience and expertise is visible to other consumers who then feel comfortable to seek the gadget lovers' advice. In contrast, innovators seem to be more interested in the status that comes from being first to adopt. Although

they like high-tech toys, they don't appear to be as expert at using them as are gadget lovers, nor do they tend to exhibit the infectious enthusiasm that gadget lovers do.

When the gadget lover scale was administered to a large nationally representative sample of U.S. consumers, the results indicated that males scored much higher than females, younger adults scored slightly higher than older adults, those with greater education scored higher than those with less education, and the major ethnic groups scored higher than white/non-Hispanics.

The bottom line is that even though gadget lovers are similar to innovators in several ways, we believe they are distinct enough to deserve as much or more attention from marketers of high-tech innovations, particularly because of the group's seemingly greater influence on what others do.⁷³

What appears on the surface to be a fairly high-risk adoption (e.g., wearing a skirt three inches above the knee when most people wear them below the knee) is actually not *that* risky. Innovators who truly took the fashion risk have already "field-tested" the style change. We're likely to find early adopters in "fashion-forward" stores that feature the latest "hot" designer brands. In contrast, we're more likely to find true innovators in small boutiques that carry merchandise from as-yet-unknown designers.

Behavioral Demands of Innovations

We categorize innovations by the degree to which they demand adopters to change their behavior. Researchers identify three major types of innovations, though these three categories are not absolutes. They refer, in a relative sense, to the amount of disruption or change they bring to people's lives.

A **continuous innovation** is a modification of an existing product, such as when General Mills introduces a Honey Nut version of Cheerios or Levi's promotes shrink-to-fit jeans. The company makes small changes to position the product, add line extensions, or merely to alleviate consumer boredom. Most product innovations are of this type; they are *evolutionary* rather than *revolutionary*.

When a consumer adopts this kind of new product, she only has to make minor changes in her habits. A typewriter company, for example, many years ago modified its product to make it more "user friendly" to secretaries. Its engineers made the tops of the keys concave because women told them it was hard to type with long fingernails on a flat surface. This change endures today on our computer keyboards.

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Some innovations present us with a new way to use an existing product. This may be more effective—but we still have to alter our habits to use it. A Japanese clothing company recently introduced a line of Shower Clean business suits that allow traveling executives to bypass the dry cleaner; they wash their suit in a warm shower and it needs no pressing. Similarly, R.J. Reynolds sells a cigarette in Japan it calls Kool Boost—it's made with a menthol-infused internal “powerball” that allows the smoker to choose his own level of menthol as he squeezes the filter.⁷⁴ As these examples suggest, a **dynamically continuous innovation** is a significant change to an existing product. When IBM introduced its Selectric typewriter that used a typing ball rather than individual keys, the new design permitted secretaries to instantly change the typeface of manuscripts as they replaced one Selectric ball with another.

A **discontinuous innovation** creates really *big* changes in the way we live. Major inventions, such as the airplane, the car, the computer, and the television, radically changed modern lifestyles. The personal computer replaced the typewriter, and it also allows some of us to “telecommute” from our homes. Of course, the cycle continues, as new continuous innovations (e.g., new versions of software) constantly update our computers. Dynamically continuous innovations such as the Nintendo Wii and now Microsoft's motion sensitive control for Xbox offer new ways to maneuver in cyberspace.⁷⁵

Prerequisites for Successful Adoption

Regardless of how much we have to change what we do, a successful innovation should possess these attributes:⁷⁶

- **Compatibility**—The innovation should be compatible with consumers' lifestyles. A manufacturer of personal care products tried unsuccessfully several years ago to introduce a cream hair remover for men as a substitute for razors and shaving cream. This formulation was similar to what many women use to remove hair from their legs. Although the product was simple and convenient to use, it failed because men were not interested in a product they perceived to be too feminine and thus a threat to their masculine self-concepts.
- **Trialability**—Because we think an unknown product is risky, we're more likely to adopt an innovation if we can experiment with it prior to making a commitment. To reduce this risk, companies may spend a lot of money to distribute free “trial-size” samples of new products.
- **Complexity**—The product should be low in complexity. All things being equal, we will choose a product that's easier to understand and use rather than a more complex one. This strategy requires less effort from us and it also lowers our perceived risk. Manufacturers of DVD recorders, for example, put a lot of effort into simplifying usage (e.g., on-screen programming) to encourage nontechnies to adopt them.
- **Observability**—Innovations that are readily apparent are more likely to spread because we can learn about them more easily. The rapid proliferation of fanny packs (pouches people wear around the waist in lieu of wallets or purses) was a result of their high visibility. It was easy for others to see the convenience this alternative offered (even if they were a bit nerdy).
- **Relative Advantage**—Most importantly, the product should offer relative advantage over other alternatives. The consumer must believe that it will provide a benefit other products cannot offer. For example, the Bugchaser is a wristband that contains insect repellent. Mothers with young children like it because it's nontoxic and nonstaining—these are clear advantages over alternatives. In contrast, the Crazy Blue Air Freshener, which emits a fragrance when you turn on your car wipers, fizzled: People didn't see the need for the product and felt there were simpler ways to freshen their cars.

5

OBJECTIVE

How do many people and organizations play a role in the fashion system that creates and communicates symbolic meaning to consumers?

The Fashion System

The **fashion system** includes all the people and organizations that create symbolic meanings and transfer those meanings to cultural goods. Although we often equate fashion with clothing, it's important to keep in mind that fashion processes affect *all* types of cultural phenomena, including music, art, architecture, and even science (i.e., certain research topics and individual scientists are “hot” at any point in time). Even business practices are subject to the fashion process—they evolve and change depending on which management techniques are in

vogue, such as TQM (total quality management), JIT (just-in-time inventory control), or MBWO (managing by walking around).

It helps to think of fashion as a *code*, or a language, that helps us to decipher these meanings.⁷⁷ Unlike a language, however, fashion is *context-dependent*. Different consumers interpret the same style differently.⁷⁸ In semiotic terms (see Chapter 2), fashion products are *undercoded*. There is no one precise meaning but rather plenty of room for interpretation among perceivers.

At the outset, let's distinguish among some confusing terms. **Fashion** is the process of social diffusion by which some group(s) of consumers adopts a new style. In contrast, *a fashion* (or style) is a particular combination of attributes (say, stovepipe jeans women wear with a tunic top). And to be *in fashion* means that some reference group positively evaluates this combination (i.e., *Vogue* endorses this look as “in” for this season). Thus, the term *Danish Modern* refers to particular characteristics of furniture design (i.e., a fashion in interior design); it does not necessarily imply that Danish Modern is a fashion that consumers currently desire.⁷⁹

Cultural Categories

The meanings we give to products reflect underlying **cultural categories** that correspond to the basic ways we characterize the world (like the schemas we discussed way back in Chapter 2).⁸⁰ Our culture distinguishes between different times of day (brunch, happy hour), between leisure and work, and between genders. The fashion system provides us with products that signify these categories. For example, the



Fashion is a key part of popular culture. This fashion show, hosted by Target at Grand Central Terminal in Manhattan, used digital holograms instead of live human models to display the latest styles by Isaac Mizrahi and other major designers.

Source: Photo by Jacob Silberberg/Reuters/
Courtesy of Landov Media.

apparel industry gives us clothing to denote certain situations (e.g., evening wear, resort wear); it differentiates between leisure clothes and work clothes, and it offers masculine versus feminine styles.

These cultural categories affect many different kinds of products. As we saw in Chapter 15, the way that companies design and market their products reflects the dominant values of a culture at a point in time. This concept is a bit hard to grasp because on the surface a clothing style has little in common with a piece of furniture or a car. However, an overriding concern with a value such as achievement or environmentalism determines the types of products consumers look for across many industry sectors. These underlying themes then surface in a variety of designs. A few examples of this interdependence demonstrate how a dominant fashion *motif* reverberates across industries.

- Costumes that politicians or movie and rock stars wear affect the fortunes of the apparel and accessory industries. A movie appearance by actor Clark Gable without a T-shirt (unusual at that time) dealt a severe setback to the men's apparel industry; whereas Jackie Kennedy's famous pillbox hat prompted a rush for hats by women in the 1960s. Other cross-category effects include the craze for ripped sweatshirts the movie *Flashdance* (1983) instigated, a boost for cowboy boots from the movie *Urban Cowboy* (1980), and the large number of women who wear lingerie on the street due to the singer Madonna. . . . More recently Michelle Obama single-handedly sent J.Crew's sales through the roof as she and her kids wear their clothes in many public settings. When the First Lady wore a J.Crew outfit to breakfast with the British Prime Minister and his wife while in London, it sold out on the company's Web site by 10:00 that morning.⁸¹
- The architect I. M. Pei's remodeling of the Louvre in Paris included a controversial glass pyramid at the entrance. Shortly thereafter, several clothing designers unveiled pyramid-shaped dresses at Paris fashion shows.⁸²
- In the 1950s and 1960s, America was preoccupied with science and technology. The Russians' launching of the *Sputnik* satellite fueled a sense of urgency as people feared that the United States was falling behind in the technology race (and that we were also losing the Cold War). The theme of technical mastery of nature and of futuristic design became a motif that cropped up in many aspects of American popular culture—from car designs with prominent tail fins to high-tech kitchen styles.
- At any point in time a small number of colors dominate in the design world. Many companies actually buy color forecasts from specialists, such as Pantone, that rank the top 10 fashion colors for each season. These charts influence mass-market fashion companies, as well as other industries such as automotive, home furnishings, and home appliances. A dominant color often takes years to emerge. For example, when black was prominent during the 1980s and 1990s, designers snubbed brown as a “dirty” color. Then, Starbucks began to take off and espresso, latte, and other coffee colors seeped into mass culture. In addition, consumers rediscovered gourmet chocolates such as Godiva and (at least in some circles) fur regained its popularity. Color forecasts put brown back on the fast track. Sure enough, now the United Parcel Service asks, “What can Brown do for You?” while BMW's 2009 Mini Cooper Clubman hit the streets in its new “Hot Chocolate” color.⁸³

Remember that creative subsystems within a culture production system succeed when they anticipate the tastes of the buying public. Despite their unique talents, however, members of this subsystem also live in the same culture as do their customers—and they often go to the same schools, see the same movies, read the same magazines, and listen to the same music as do their competitors. Cultural gatekeepers draw from a common set of cultural categories, so it's not surprising that their choices often converge—even though they compete against one another to offer the consumer something new or different. **Collective selection** is the process by which CPS members choose some symbolic alternatives over others.⁸⁴

Although rivals within each category compete for acceptance, we can usually group

them because they follow a dominant theme or motif—be it “The Western Look,” “New Wave,” “Danish Modern,” or “Nouvelle Cuisine.”

Behavioral Science Perspectives on Fashion

Fashion is a very complex process that operates on many levels. At one extreme, it's a societal phenomenon that affects many of us simultaneously. At the other, it exerts a very personal effect on individual behavior. Many of us desire to be in fashion, and this motivates us as to what we buy. Fashion products also are aesthetic objects—they reflect a culture's artistic traditions and history. For this reason, there are many perspectives on the origin and diffusion of fashion. Let's summarize some major approaches.⁸⁵

Psychological Models of Fashion

Many psychological factors help explain what motivates us to be fashionable. These include conformity, desires for variety seeking, the need to express personal creativity, and sexual attraction. For example, many consumers seem to have a “need for uniqueness”: They want to be different (though not necessarily *too* different!).⁸⁶ As a result people may conform to the basic outlines of a fashion, but still improvise to make a personal statement within these general guidelines.

One of the earliest theories of fashion argued that “shifting *erogenous zones*” (sexually arousing areas of the body) accounted for fashion changes and that different zones become the object of interest because they reflect societal trends. J. C. Flugel, a disciple of Freud, proposed in the 1920s that sexually charged areas wax and wane as we grow bored with them; clothing styles change to highlight or hide the parts that currently are the focus of attention. For example, it was common for Renaissance-era women to drape their abdomens in fabrics in order to give a swollen appearance—successful childbearing was a priority in the disease-ridden fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Now, some suggest that the current prevalence of the exposed midriff in women's fashion reflects the premium our society places on fitness.⁸⁷

Economic Models of Fashion

Economists approach fashion in terms of the model of supply and demand. Items in limited supply have high value, whereas our desire decreases for readily available products. Rare items command respect and prestige. As we discussed in Chapter 12, the writer Thorstein Veblen argued that the wealthy practice *conspicuous consumption* to display their prosperity. As we also noted, this approach is somewhat outdated; upscale consumers today engage in *parody display* where they deliberately buy inexpensive products (especially during a recession). Other factors also influence the demand curve for fashion-related products. These include a *prestige-exclusivity effect*, where high prices still create high demand, and a *snob effect*, whereby lower prices actually reduce demand (“If it's that cheap, it can't be any good”).⁸⁸

Sociological Models of Fashion

The *collective selection model* we discussed previously is a sociological approach to fashion. This perspective focuses on a subculture's adoption of a fashion (idea, style, etc.) and its subsequent diffusion into society as a whole. This process often begins with youth subcultures such as the hip-hop segment. The integration of Goth culture into the mainstream is another current example. This fashion started as an expression of rebellion by young outcasts who admired nineteenth-century romantics and who defied conventional styles with their black clothing (often including over-the-top fashion statements such as Count Dracula capes, fishnet stockings, studded collars, and black lipstick) and punk music from bands such as Siouxsie & the Banshees and Bauhaus. Today, music stores sell vampire-girl lunchboxes, and mall outlets sell tons of clunky cross jewelry and black lace. You can find a T-shirt that looks like a corset at Kmart. At the Hot Topic Web site, teen surfers can buy a “multiring choker.” Hard-core Goths are not amused, but hey, that's fashion for you.⁸⁹

Trickle-down theory, which the sociologist Georg Simmel first proposed in 1904, is one of the most influential fashion perspectives. It states that there are two conflicting

This ad for Maidenform illustrates that fashions have accentuated different parts of the female anatomy throughout history.

Source: Courtesy of Maidenform Inc.

ISN'T IT NICE TO LIVE IN A TIME WHEN WOMEN
AREN'T BEING PUSHED AROUND SO MUCH ANYMORE?

Women have spent the last ten centuries conforming to their lingene. Fortunately, lingerie has finally gotten around to conforming to women.

MAIDENFORM

Maidenform, Inc. 1990 Printed in U.S.A. M205

SHARON

forces that drive fashion change. First, subordinate groups adopt the status symbols of the groups above them as they attempt to climb up the ladder of social mobility. Dominant styles thus originate with the upper classes and *trickle down* to those below.

Now the second force kicks in: Those people in the superordinate groups keep a wary eye on the ladder below them to be sure followers don't imitate them. When lower-class consumers mimic their actions, they adopt new fashions to distance themselves from the mainstream. These two processes create a self-perpetuating cycle of change—the machine that drives fashion.⁹⁰

The integration of hip-hop phrases into our vocabulary illustrates how people who set fashions resist mainstream adoption by the broader society. The street elite shunned some slang terms such as *bad*, *fresh*, and *jiggy* once they became too mainstream. The rap community even held a funeral (with a eulogy by Reverend Al Sharpton) for the word *defonce* the *Oxford English Dictionary* included it in its new edition.⁹¹

Trickle-down theory applies to a society with a stable class structure that allows us to easily identify lower- versus upper-class consumers. This task is no longer so easy. In contemporary Western society, we have to modify this theory to account for new developments in mass culture:⁹²

- A perspective we base on class structure can't account for the wide range of styles now available. We have many more choices today because of technological advances that let manufacturers drastically speed up production times and real-time media that keep us informed of style changes in minutes. Stores such as Zara and H&M can replenish their inventories in weeks rather than months. An adolescent like Alex simply watches MTV or chats on Facebook or Stardoll.com to stay on top of the latest trends; *mass fashion* thus replaces elite fashion because our media allows many market segments to learn about a style simultaneously.
- Consumers today are more influenced by opinion leaders who are similar to them—even if these innovators don't live in the same town or even country. As a result each social group has its own fashion innovators who determine fashion trends. It's more accurate to speak of a *trickle-across effect*, where fashions diffuse horizontally among members of the same social group.⁹³
- Finally, current fashions often originate with the lower classes and *trickle up*. Grassroots innovators typically are people who lack prestige in the dominant culture (e.g., urban youth). Because they are less concerned with maintaining the status quo, they are free to innovate and take risks.⁹⁴

A “Medical” Model of Fashion

For many years, the lowly Hush Puppy was a shoe for nerds. Suddenly—almost overnight—the shoe became a chic fashion statement even though its manufacturer did nothing to promote this image. Why did this style diffuse through the population so quickly? **Meme theory** explains this process with a medical metaphor. A *meme* is an idea or product that enters the consciousness of people over time—examples include tunes, catch-phrases (“You’re fired!”), or styles such as the Hush Puppy.

In this view, memes spread among consumers in a geometric progression just as a virus starts off small and steadily infects increasing numbers of people until it becomes an epidemic. Memes “leap” from brain to brain via a process of imitation. The memes that survive tend to be distinctive and memorable, and the hardiest ones often combine aspects of prior memes. For example, the *Star Wars* movies evoke prior memes that relate to the legend of King Arthur, religion, heroic youth, and 1930s adventure serials. Indeed, George Lucas studied comparative religion and mythology as he prepared his first draft of the *Star Wars* saga, *The Story of Mace Windu*.⁹⁵

The diffusion of many products in addition to Hush Puppies seems to follow the same basic path. A few people initially use the product, but change happens in a hurry when the process reaches the moment of critical mass—what one author calls the **tipping point**. For example, Sharp introduced the first low-priced fax machine in 1984 and sold about 80,000 in that year. There was a slow climb in the number of users for the next 3 years. Then, suddenly in 1987 enough people had fax machines that it made sense for everyone to have one—Sharp sold a million units. Cell phones followed a similar trajectory.⁹⁶ Do you remember when you first heard about Twitter?

6

OBJECTIVE

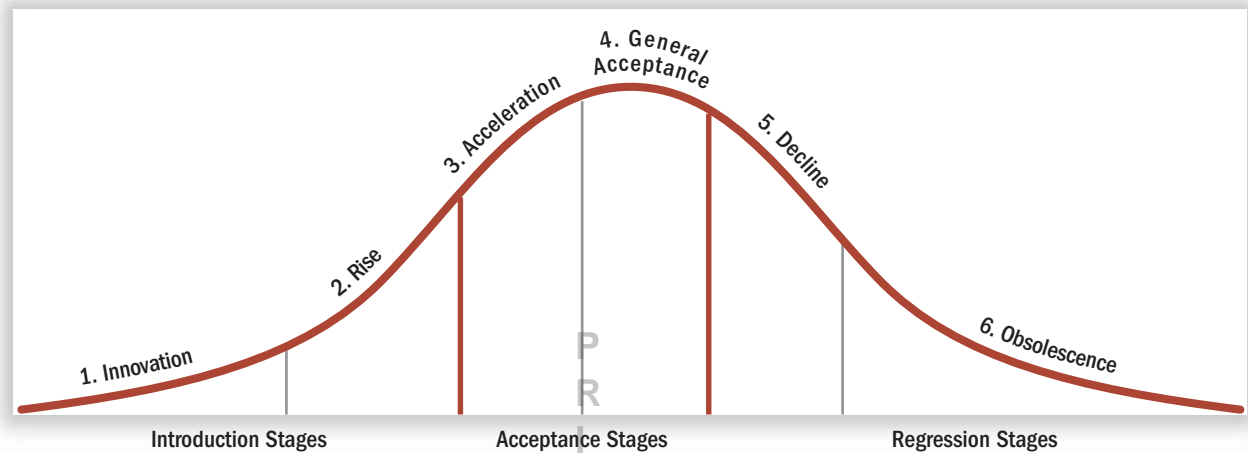
Why do fashions follow cycles?

Cycles of Fashion Adoption

In the early 1980s, Cabbage Patch dolls were all the rage among American children. Faced with a limited supply of the product, some retailers reported near-riots among adults as they tried desperately to buy the dolls for their children. A Milwaukee deejay jokingly announced that people should bring catcher's mitts to a local stadium because an airplane was going to fly overhead and drop 2,000 dolls. He told his listeners to hold up their American Express cards so their numbers could be photographed from the plane. More than two dozen anxious parents apparently didn't get the joke—they showed up in subzero weather, mitts in hand.⁹⁷

The Cabbage Patch craze lasted for a couple of seasons before it eventually died out, and consumers moved on to other things, such as Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, which grossed more than \$600 million in 1989. The Mighty Morphin Power

Figure 16.4 A NORMAL FASHION LIFE CYCLE



Rangers eventually replaced the Turtles, and Beanie Babies and Giga Pets in turn deposed them before the invasion of Pokémon followed by Yu-Gi-Oh! Cards, Webkinz, and now *Guitar Hero*.⁹⁸ What will be next?

Although the longevity of a particular style can range from a month to a century, fashions tend to flow in a predictable sequence. The fashion life cycle is quite similar to the product life cycle you (hopefully!) learned about in your basic marketing course. As Figure 16.4 shows, an item or idea progresses through basic stages from birth to death as it makes its way through the fashion life cycle.

The diffusion process we discussed earlier in this chapter applies to the popularity of fashion items. To illustrate how this process works, consider how the **fashion acceptance cycle** works in the popular music business. In the *introduction stage*, a small number of music innovators hear a song. Clubs or college radio stations may play it—which is how “grunge rock” groups such as Nirvana got their start. Increasingly, the band posts its songs on MySpace and recruits “friends” who will help it get known. During the *acceptance stage*, the song enjoys increased social visibility as large segments of the population start to check it out. Top 40 stations may start to give it wide airplay as it climbs the charts “like a bullet.” In the *regression stage*, the song reaches a state of social saturation as Top 40 stations play it once an hour for several weeks. At some point listeners tire of it and focus their attention on newer releases. The former hit record eventually winds up in the discount rack at the local record store.

Figure 16.5 illustrates that fashions begin slowly, but if they “make it,” they diffuse rapidly through a market, peak, and then retreat into obscurity. We identify different classes of fashion when we look at the relative length of their **acceptance cycles**. Many fashions have a moderate cycle—they take several months or even years to work their way through the stages of acceptance and decline; others are extremely long lived or short lived.

A **classic** is a fashion with an extremely long acceptance cycle. It is in a sense “antifashion” because it guarantees stability and low risk to the purchaser for a long period of time. Keds sneakers, introduced in 1917, appeal to those who are turned off by the high fashion, trendy appeal of Nike or Reebok. When researchers asked consumers in focus groups to imagine what kind of building Keds would be, a common response was a country house with a white picket fence. In other words, consumers see the shoes as a stable, classic product. In contrast, participants described Nikes as steel-and-glass skyscrapers to reflect their more modern image.⁹⁹

Fads: Here Today, Gone Tomorrow

A theme park in Japan offers “amusement baths” to visitors that include a wine bath, a green-tea bath, a coffee bath, a sake bath, and even a ramen-noodle bath. When

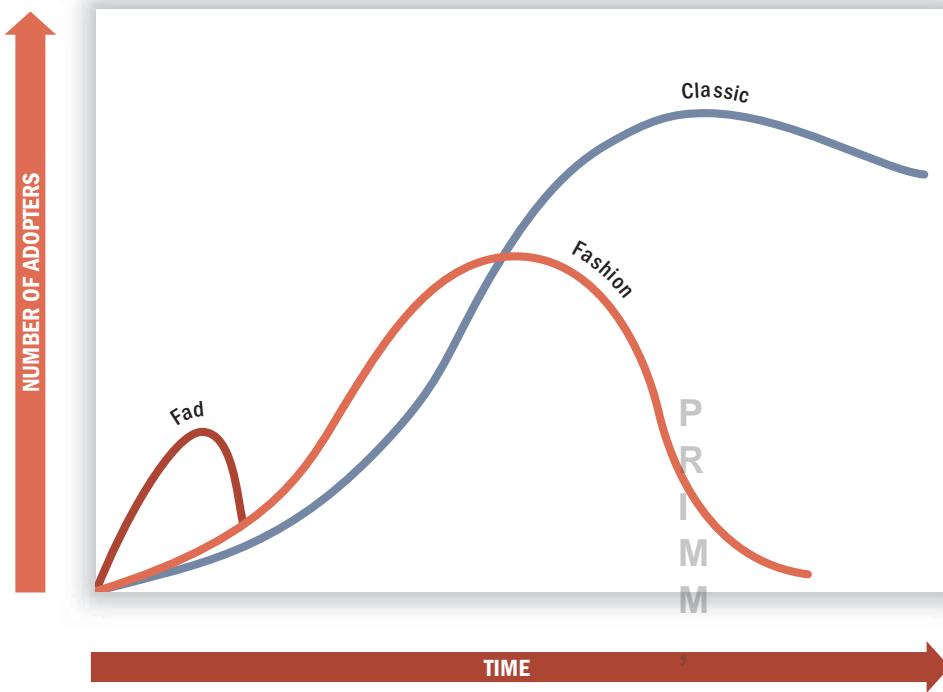


Figure 16.5 COMPARISON OF THE ACCEPTANCE CYCLES OF FADS, FASHIONS, AND CLASSICS

they don their bathing suits and jump into the ramen bath (which looks like a soup bowl), they frolic in pepper-flavored water that contains collagen and garlic extracts the Japanese believe will improve the skin. A man dressed as a chef dispenses noodle-shaped bath additives and soy sauce to everyone in the tub.¹⁰⁰ A **fad** is a very short-lived fashion. Relatively few people adopt a fad product, but it can spread very quickly. Adopters may all belong to a common subculture, and the fad “trickles across” members but rarely breaks out of that specific group. Figure 16.6 illustrates

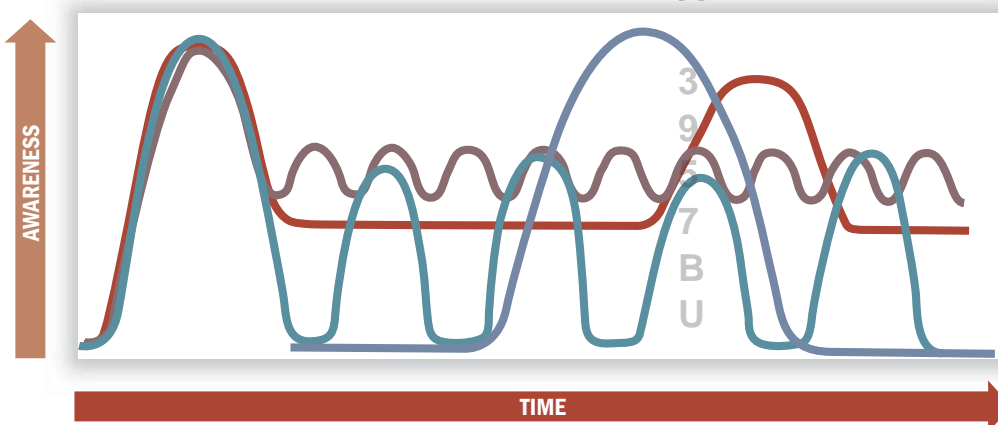


Figure 16.6 THE BEHAVIOR OF FADS

TRUE FAD	CYCLICAL FAD	FAD-TO-FRANCHISE	GENERATIONAL FAD
Life Span: One year or less	Life Span: One year or less at each spike	Life Span: One to five years	Life Span: One year or less at each spike
Top Sources: Toy/novelty, TV, dance/music, fashion	Top Sources: Toy/novelty	Top Sources: Toy/novelty, publishing, movies	Top Sources: Toy/novelty
Demographics: All	Demographics: All	Demographics: All	Demographics: Children and nostalgic adults
Example: Pet Rock	Example: Yo-yos	Example: Barbies	Example: Trolls

ISBN 1-256-36592-0

This Jim Beam ad illustrates the cyclical nature of fashion.

Source: Courtesy of Jim Beam Brands.

PRIMITIVE,
SHARONDA

3
9
5
7
BU

You always come back to the basics.

JIM BEAM
KENTUCKY STRAIGHT BOURBON WHISKEY
40% ALC. VOL. (80 PROOF)
JAMES BEAM DISTILLING CO. CLEMSON, MISSOURI

that some types of fads have longer life spans than others. Notable past fad products include hula hoops, snap bracelets, and pet rocks; to learn more about these and other “must have” products, visit badfads.com.¹⁰¹

Fads often involve frivolous or “weird” behavior, and many consumers may not conform (see Chapter 10) as they refuse to participate (this may make the fad even more appealing to devotees). A pair of researchers recently studied adults who resist the Harry Potter craze. They find some of these consumers avoid the Hogwarts world because they pride themselves on “not being taken in.” These adults react negatively to the “evangelical” enthusiasts who try to convert them to fandom. They recount the resentment of one newlywed on her honeymoon (as her new husband related in



A sommelier pours wine into a “Beaujolais Nouveau bath” at a Tokyo resort.

Source: Photo by Shizuo Kambayash/Courtesy of AP Wide World Photos.

an essay): “My new page turning obsession did not go down too well with my new life partner. When on our first night in the Maldives and expecting some form of conjugal rites [she found] herself in second place to a fictional 11-year-old trainee wizard and something called the Sorting Hat.”¹⁰²

The *streaking* fad hit college campuses in the mid-1970s. This term described students who ran nude through classrooms, cafeterias, dorms, and sports venues. Although the practice quickly spread across many campuses, it was primarily restricted to college settings. Streaking highlights several of a fad’s “naked truths:”¹⁰³

- The fad is nonutilitarian—it does not perform any meaningful function.
- The fad often spreads impulsively—people do not undergo stages of rational decision making before they join in.
- The fad diffuses rapidly, gains quick acceptance, and dies.

Fad or Trend?

Chrysler’s PT Cruiser was the talk of the town when it came out in 2000. With its 1930s-gangster getaway-car looks, cutely compact size, and innovative features—such as a panel in the back that you can use as a picnic table—the PT was hot. Chrysler sold 145,000 of them in 2001. By 2003, PT Cruiser sales slumped to 107,759 cars, and Chrysler offered discounts to keep the miniwagon moving. In fall 2005, Chrysler launched a revamped version—the grille and front end looked more like other new Chrysler models, and it upgraded the interior. The PT Cruiser’s sales curve—a 25 percent fall from peak to trough—suggests the market for funky, retro three-quarter-sized wagons generated a lot of excitement at the beginning. But instead of being a hot new model for young trendsetters, the car appealed to graying baby boomers—the median age of owners is 50 years old. Are retro cars a fad or a trend? The jury is still out—especially because General Motors also launched its Chevy HHR—a retro car that according to GM executives was inspired by a 1949 Chevrolet Suburban, *not* the PT Cruiser.¹⁰⁴

The first company to identify a trend and act on it has an advantage, whether the firm is Starbucks (gourmet coffee), Nabisco (Snackwells low-fat cookies and crackers), Taco Bell (value pricing), or Chrysler (retro cars). Nothing is certain, but

Johnny Earle turned his nickname—“Cupcake”—into a booming business. His T-shirts featured cupcakes in unlikely places (for example, one with a cupcake and crossbones) and became a popular fad.

Source: Courtesy of JohnnyCupcakes.com.



some guidelines help to predict whether the innovation will endure as a long-term trend or if it's just a fad destined to go the way of hula hoops, pet rocks, and little rubber spiders called Wally Wallwalkers that slowly crawled down walls.¹⁰⁵

- Does it fit with basic lifestyle changes? If a new hairstyle is hard to care for, this innovation isn't consistent with women's increasing time demands. However, the movement to shorter-term vacations is more likely to last because this innovation makes trip planning easier for harried (and broke) consumers who want to get away for a few days at a time.
- What are the benefits? The switch to poultry and fish from beef came about because these meats are healthier.
- Can we personalize it? Enduring trends tend to accommodate a desire for individuality, whereas styles such as Mohawk haircuts or the grunge look are inflexible and don't allow people to express themselves.
- Is it a trend or a side effect? An increased interest in exercise is part of a basic trend toward health consciousness, although the specific form of exercise that is “in” at any given time will vary (e.g., low-impact aerobics versus Pilates).
- What other changes occurred in the market? Sometimes *carryover effects* influence the popularity of related products. The miniskirt fad in the 1960s boosted hosiery purchases substantially. Now, sales of these items are in decline because of today's more casual styles.
- Who adopted the change? If working mothers, baby boomers, or some other important market segment don't adopt the innovation, it is not likely to become a longer-term trend.

7

OBJECTIVE

Why is that products succeed in one culture may fail in another if marketers fail to understand the differences among consumers in each place?

Global Diffusion

Innovations know no geographic boundaries; in modern times they travel across oceans and deserts with blinding speed. Just as Marco Polo brought noodles from China and colonial settlers introduced Europeans to the “joys” of tobacco, today multinational firms conquer new markets when they convince legions of foreign consumers to desire what they make.

As if understanding the dynamics of one’s culture weren’t hard enough, these issues get even more complicated when we consider what drives consumers in other cultures. The consequences of ignoring cultural sensitivities

can be costly. Think about problems a prominent multinational company such as McDonald’s encounters as it expands globally:

- During the 1994 soccer World Cup, the fast-food giant reprinted the Saudi Arabian flag, which includes sacred words from the Koran, on disposable packaging it used in promotions. Muslims around the world protested this borrowing of sacred imagery, and the company had to scramble to correct its mistake.
- In 2002, McDonald’s agreed to donate \$10 million to Hindu and other groups as partial settlement of litigation involving its mislabeling of French fries and hash browns as vegetarian (it cooked them in oil tainted with meat residue).
- Also in 2002, the company abruptly cancelled its plans to introduce its new McAfrika sandwich in its Norwegian restaurants. The CEO of McDonald’s in Norway acknowledged on national television that introducing this menu item at a time of growing famine in Africa was “coincidental and unfortunate.”
- In India, the company doesn’t sell any of its famous beef hamburgers. Instead, it offers customized entrees such as a Pizza McPuff, McAlloo Tikki (a spiced-potato burger), Paneer Salsa McWrap, and even a Crispy Chinese burger, to capitalize on the great popularity of Chinese food in India. It makes its mayonnaise without eggs, and all stores maintain separate kitchen sections for vegetarian and non-vegetarian dishes. Workers from the nonvegetarian section must shower before they cross over to the other area.
- In 2005, McDonald’s introduced the spicy Prosperity Burger in nine countries from South Korea to Indonesia in recognition of the Lunar New Year.
- The chain’s Big Tasty burger is an 840 calorie behemoth that consists of a 5.5 ounce beef patty slathered in smoky barbecue sauce and topped with three slices of cheese. The menu entrée was first introduced in Sweden, and it’s now available in other parts of Europe as well as in Latin America and Australia. McDonald’s worldwide operations are now far bigger than its U.S. domestic business, and it’s no longer the case that menu innovations originate here—regional operations are just as likely to create their own offerings.¹⁰⁶

In this section, we’ll consider some of the issues that confront marketers who want to understand the cultural dynamics of other countries. We’ll also consider the consequences of the “Americanization” of global culture. As U.S. (and to some extent, Western European) marketers continue to export Western popular culture to a globe full of increasingly affluent consumers, many customers eagerly replace their traditional products with the likes of McDonald’s, Levi’s, and MTV. But, as we’ll also see, there are plenty of obstacles to success for multinational firms—especially Yankee ones.

Rather than ignore the global characteristics of their brands, firms have to manage them strategically. That’s critical because future growth for most companies will come from foreign markets. In 2002, developed countries in North America, Europe, and East Asia accounted for 15 percent of the world’s population of 6.3 billion. By 2030, according to the World Bank, the planet’s population will rise to 9 billion—and

90 percent of these people will live in developing countries. And, the Web no longer concentrates in the West: According to Jupiter Research, by 2012 there will be 292 million Chinese Internet users compared to 241 million in the United States.

Think Globally, Act Locally

As corporations compete in many markets around the world, the debate intensifies: Should an organization develop separate marketing plans for each culture, or should it craft a single plan to implement everywhere? Let's briefly consider each viewpoint.

Adopt a Standardized Strategy

As Procter & Gamble strategizes about the best way to speak to consumers around the world, the company finds large segments in many countries who share the same outlooks, style preferences, and aspirations. These include teenagers, working women who try to juggle careers and families, and baby boomers. As the head of P&G's Global Health and Feminine Care division explains, "We're seeing global tribes forming around the world that are more and more interconnected through technology. If you focus on the similarities instead of the differences [in these tribes], key business opportunities emerge." Brand managers for example find that teenage girls everywhere have the same concerns and questions about puberty so the company can speak to them on its beinggirl.com Web site and make the same content available in 40 countries.¹⁰⁷

Proponents of a standardized marketing strategy argue that many cultures, especially those of industrialized countries, are now so homogenized that the same approach will work throughout the world. If it develops one approach for multiple markets, a company can benefit from economies of scale because it does not have to incur the substantial time and expense to develop a separate strategy for each culture.¹⁰⁸ This viewpoint represents an **etic perspective**, which focuses on commonalities across cultures. An etic approach to a culture is objective and analytical—it reflects impressions of a culture as outsiders view it.

Adopt a Localized Strategy

Unlike Disney World in Orlando, visitors to the Walt Disney Studios theme park at Disneyland Paris don't hear the voices of American movie stars narrating their guided tours. Instead, European actors such as Jeremy Irons, Isabella Rossellini, and Nastassja Kinski provide commentary in their native tongues.

Disney learned the hard way about the importance of being sensitive to local cultures after it opened its Euro Disney Park in 1992. The company got slammed because its new location didn't cater to local customs (such as serving wine with meals). Visitors to Euro Disney from many countries took offense, even at what seem to be small slights. For example, initially the park only sold a French sausage, which drew complaints from Germans, Italians, and others who believed their own local version to be superior. Euro Disney's CEO explains, "When we first launched there was the belief that it was enough to be Disney. Now we realize that our guests need to be welcomed on the basis of their own culture and travel habits."¹⁰⁹

Disney applies the lessons it learned in cultural sensitivity to its newer Hong Kong Disneyland. Executives shifted the angle of the front gate by 12 degrees after they consulted a *feng shui* specialist, who said the change would ensure prosperity for the park (see Chapter 13). Disney also put a bend in the walkway from the train station to the gate to make sure the flow of positive energy, or *chi*, did not slip past the entrance and out to the China Sea. Cash registers are close to corners or along walls to increase prosperity. The company burned incense as it finished each building, and it picked a lucky day (September 12) for the opening. One of the park's main ballrooms measures 888 square meters because eight is a lucky number in Chinese culture.

And because the Chinese consider the number four bad luck, you won't find any fourth-floor buttons in hotel elevators. Disney also recognizes that Chinese family dynamics are different so it revamped its advertising: Print ads showed a grandmother, mother, and daughter who wear tiaras at the park. In China, bonding between parents and children is difficult because of the culture's hierarchical nature so an executive explains, "We want to say it's OK to let your hair down." Camping out with stopwatches, the company's designers discovered that Chinese people take an average of 10 minutes longer to eat than Americans. So they added 700 extra seats to dining areas.

Ironically, some locals feel Disney tries *too* hard to cater to local customs—activists raised a ruckus when the company announced it would serve the traditional Chinese dish of shark's fin soup at wedding banquets held in the park. The species is endangered, and one group distributed T-shirts that depicted Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck holding knives and leering over three bleeding sharks. Nonetheless, Disney forges ahead with localized products. One of its latest ventures is in India, where it's making animated films with the voices of Bollywood stars. It's also making a Hindi version of its TV hit *High School Musical*—set against a backdrop of cricket instead of basketball.

Disney's experience supports the view of marketers who endorse an **emic perspective**, which stresses variations across cultures. They feel that each culture is unique, with its own value system, conventions, and regulations. This perspective argues that each country has a *national character*, a distinctive set of behavior and personality characteristics.¹¹⁰ A marketer must therefore tailor its strategy to the sensibilities of each specific culture. An emic approach to a culture is subjective and experiential—it attempts to explain a culture as insiders experience it.

Sometimes this strategy means a manufacturer has to modify what it makes or a retailer has to change the way it displays the product so that it's acceptable to local tastes. When Wal-Mart started to open stores abroad in the early 1990s, it offered a little piece of America to foreign consumers—and that was the problem. It promoted golf clubs in soccer-mad Brazil and pushed ice skates in Mexico. It trained its German clerks to smile at customers—who thought they were flirting. Now Wal-Mart tries to adapt to local preferences. Its Chinese stores sell live turtles and snakes and lure shoppers who come on foot or bicycle with free shuttle buses and home delivery for refrigerators and other large items.¹¹¹

In some cases, consumers in one place simply do not like some products that are popular elsewhere, or their different lifestyles require companies to rethink their designs. IKEA finally realized that Americans use a lot of ice in their drinks and so they didn't buy the smaller European glasses the stores stocked. The Swedish furniture chain also figured out that compared to Europeans, Americans sleep in bigger beds, need bigger bookshelves, and like to curl up on sofas rather than sit on them.¹¹² Snapple failed in Japan because the drink's cloudy appearance and the floating pulp in the bottles were a turnoff. Similarly, Frito-Lay stopped selling Ruffles potato chips (too salty) and Cheetos (the Japanese didn't appreciate orange fingers after they ate a handful).¹¹³ The company still makes Cheetos in China, but the local version doesn't contain any cheese, which is not a staple of the Chinese diet. Instead, local flavors come in varieties such as Savory American Cream and Japanese Steak.¹¹⁴

Cultural Differences Relevant to Marketers

So, which perspective is correct—the emic or the etic? As you might guess, the best bet probably is a combination of both. Some researchers argue that the relevant dimension to consider is **consumer style**—a pattern of behaviors, attitudes, and opinions that influences all of a person's consumption activities—including attitudes toward advertising, preferred channels of information and purchase, brand loyalty, and price consciousness. These researchers identified four major clusters of

The Tangled Web



The Web makes it difficult to confine marketing messages to a local area.

Absolut vodka and its global advertising agency TBWA discovered this when they ran a print ad they intended only for readers in Mexico City. The ad was a local execution of an international campaign called "In an Absolut World" that includes various depictions of what an ideal world would look like. In this case a map showed much of the United States as part of Mexico. American bloggers soon discovered the ad, and it wasn't long before it enraged U.S. anti-immigration groups and others who called for an Absolut boycott.¹¹⁵

consumer styles when they looked at data from the United States, the United Kingdom, France, and Germany:¹¹⁶

- 1 Price-sensitive consumers
- 2 Variety seekers
- 3 Brand-loyal consumers
- 4 Information seekers

Given the sizable variations in tastes within the United States alone, it is hardly surprising that people around the world develop their own unique preferences. Panasonic touted the fact that its rice cooker kept the food from getting too crisp—until the company learned that consumers in the Middle East like to eat their rice this way. Unlike Americans, Europeans favor dark chocolate over milk chocolate, which they think of as a children’s food. Sara Lee sells its pound cake with chocolate chips in the United States, raisins in Australia, and coconuts in Hong Kong. Crocodile handbags are popular in Asia and Europe but not in the United States.¹¹⁷

The language barrier is one obvious problem that marketers who wish to break into foreign markets must navigate. Travelers abroad commonly encounter signs in tortured English such as a note to guests at a Tokyo hotel that proclaims, “You are invited to take advantage of the chambermaid,” a notice at a hotel in Acapulco that reassures people that “The manager has personally passed all the water served here,” or a dry cleaner in Majorca who urges passing customers to “drop your pants here for best results.” And local product names often raise eyebrows to visiting Americans who might stumble on a Japanese coffee creamer called Creap, a Mexican bread named Bimbo, or even a Scandinavian product to unfreeze car locks named Super Piss.

Chapter 13 noted some gaffes U.S. marketers made when they advertised to ethnic groups in their own country. Imagine how these mistakes multiply outside the United States! One technique marketers use to avoid this problem is *back-translation*, where a different interpreter retranslates a translated ad back into its original language to catch errors. Here are some errors that could have used a bit of back-translation:¹¹⁸

- The Scandinavian company that makes Electrolux vacuum cleaners sold them in the United States with this slogan: “Nothing sucks like an Electrolux.”
- Colgate introduced Cue toothpaste in France—this also happens to be the name of a well-known porn magazine.
- When Parker marketed a ballpoint pen in Mexico, its ads were supposed to say, “It won’t leak in your pocket and embarrass you.” The translation actually said “It won’t leak in your pocket and make you pregnant.”
- Fresca (a soft drink) is Mexican slang for lesbian.
- Ford had several problems in Spanish markets. The company discovered that a truck model it called Fiera means “ugly old woman” in Spanish. Its Caliente model is slang for a streetwalker. In Brazil, Pinto is a slang term for “small male appendage.”
- When Rolls-Royce introduced its Silver Mist model in Germany, it found that the word *mist* translates as excrement. Similarly, Sunbeam’s hair-curling iron, called the Mist-Stick, translates as manure wand. To add insult to injury, Vicks is German slang for sexual intercourse, so the company had to change its name to Wicks in that country.
- Toyota encountered a similar problem in France, where its MR2 roadster sounds like “M-R-deux,” which sounds a lot like *merde*—crap.
- Recently, Buick had to scramble to rename its new LaCrosse sedan the Allure in Canada after discovering that the name comes awfully close to a Québécois word for masturbation.
- IKEA had to explain that the Gutvik children’s bunk bed is named “for a tiny town in Sweden” after German shoppers noted that the name sounded a lot like a

phrase that means “good f***.” IKEA has yet to issue an explanation for its Fartfull workbench or its Jerker computer table.¹¹⁹

Does Global Marketing Work?

So, what’s the verdict? Does global marketing work or not? Perhaps the more appropriate question is, “*When* does it work?” Although the argument for a homogenous world culture is appealing in principle, in practice it hasn’t worked out too well. One reason is that consumers in different countries have varying conventions and customs, so they simply do not use products the same way. Kellogg, for example, discovered that in Brazil people don’t typically eat a big breakfast—they’re more likely to eat cereal as a dry snack.

In fact, significant cultural differences even show up within the same country—we certainly feel that we’ve traveled to a different place as we move around the United States. Advertisers in Canada know that when they target consumers in French-speaking Quebec their messages must be much different from those they address to those in English-speaking regions. Ads in Montreal tend to be a lot racier than those in Toronto, reflecting differences in attitudes toward sexuality between consumers with French versus British roots.¹²⁰

Some large corporations such as Coca-Cola have successfully crafted a single, international image. Still, even the soft drink giant must make minor modifications to the way it presents itself in each culture. Although Coke commercials are largely standardized, the company permits local agencies to edit them so they highlight close-ups of local faces.¹²¹ To maximize the chances of success for these multicultural efforts, marketers must locate consumers in different countries who nonetheless share a common *worldview* (see Chapter 11). This is more likely to be the case among people whose frame of reference is relatively more international or cosmopolitan, or who receive much of their information about the world from sources that incorporate a worldwide perspective.

Who is likely to fall into this category? Two consumer segments are particularly good candidates: (1) affluent people who are “global citizens” and who come into contact with ideas from around the world through their travels, business contacts, and media experiences; and (2) young people whose tastes in music and fashion are strongly influenced by MTV and other media that broadcast many of the same images to multiple countries. For example, viewers of MTV Europe in Rome or Zurich can check out the same “buzz clips” as their counterparts in London or Luxembourg.¹²²

A large-scale study with consumers in 41 countries identified the characteristics people associate with global brands, and it also measured the relative importance of those dimensions when consumers buy products.¹²³ The researchers grouped consumers who evaluate global brands in the same way. They identified four major segments:

- 1 **Global citizens**—The largest segment (55 percent of consumers) uses the global success of a company as a signal of quality and innovation. At the same time, they are concerned whether companies behave responsibly on issues such as consumer health, the environment, and worker rights.
- 2 **Global dreamers**—The second-largest segment, at 23 percent, consists of consumers who see global brands as quality products and readily buy into the myths they author. They aren’t nearly as concerned with social responsibility as are the global citizens.
- 3 **Antiglobals**—Thirteen percent of consumers are skeptical that transnational companies deliver higher-quality goods. They dislike brands that preach American values, and they don’t trust global companies to behave responsibly. They try to avoid doing business with transnational firms.
- 4 **Global agnostics**—The remaining 9 percent of consumers don’t base purchase decisions on a brand’s global attributes. Instead, they evaluate a global product by the same criteria they use to judge local brands and don’t regard its global nature as meriting special consideration.

Marketing Opportunity



The huge popularity of a humble local product that Brazilian peasants traditionally wear—*Havaianas*, or flip-flops—illustrates the diffusion of global consumer culture as consumers hunger for fresh ideas and styles from around the globe. Brazilians associate the lowly shoes, which sell for \$2 a pair, so strongly with poor people that the expression *pe de chinelo*, or “slipper foot,” is a popular slang term for the downtrodden. The main buyers in Brazil continue to be blue-collar workers, but now fashionable men and women in cities from Paris to Sydney wear the peasant shoes to trendy clubs and in some cases even to work.

How did these flip-flops make the leap to fashion statement? In an attempt to boost profit margins, a company named Alpargatas introduced new models in colors such as lime green and fuchsia that cost twice as much as the original black- or blue-strapped sandal with a cream-colored sole. Then, it launched newer styles, including a masculine surf model. Middle-class Brazilians started to adopt the shoes and even the country’s president wore them in public. The fashion spread as a few celebrities, including supermodels Naomi Campbell, Kate Moss, and Brazil’s own Gisele Bündchen, discovered the flip-flops. Company representatives helped fuel the fire as they gave out free sandals to stars at the Cannes Film Festival. The result: Alpargatas’s international sales zoomed from virtually zero to more than 5 million sandals sold around the world.¹²⁷

Marketing Pitfall



Critics in other countries deplore the creeping Americanization of their cultures because of what

they view as excessive materialism. City officials in Oaxaca, Mexico, successfully fought to bar McDonald's from installing its arches in the town's central plaza.¹³² One French critic summarized this resistance to the diffusion of American culture; he described the Euro Disney theme park as "a horror made of cardboard, plastic, and appalling colors—a construction of hardened chewing gum and idiotic folklore taken straight out of a comic book written for obese Americans."¹³³ A lot of the criticism focuses on the unhealthy American diet—and its appeal to others.

In the United States, two-thirds of adults and almost one-third of children are overweight. In other countries with traditionally healthy diets, the invasion of fast food and candy has taken its toll. In Greece, considered the birthplace of the Mediterranean diet that emphasizes olive oil, fresh produce, and fish, authorities struggle with an epidemic of obesity (three-quarters of the adult population is overweight or obese) and obesity rates for children skyrocket. Today even small towns overflow with pizza and fast-food outlets. Italy and Spain are not far behind, with more than 50 percent of adults overweight.¹³⁴

The Diffusion of Consumer Culture

Coca-Cola is the drink of choice among young people in Asian countries, and McDonald's is their favorite restaurant.¹²⁴ The National Basketball Association sells \$500 million of licensed merchandise every year *outside* of the United States.¹²⁵ Walk the streets of Lisbon or Buenos Aires, and the sight of Nike hats, Gap T-shirts, and Levi's jeans will accost you at every turn. The allure of American consumer culture spreads throughout the world.

However, it's not simply about exporting American culture. In a global society, people are quick to borrow from *any* culture they admire. For example, the cultural scene in Japan influences many Koreans because they believe the Japanese are sophisticated consumers. Japanese rock bands are more popular in Korea than Korean bands, and shoppers eagerly snap up other exports such as comic books, fashion magazines, and game shows. A Korean researcher explains, "Culture is like water. It flows from stronger nations to weaker ones. People tend to idolize countries that are wealthier, freer, and more advanced, and in Asia that country is Japan."¹²⁶

A survey in Beijing found that nearly half of all children under 12 think McDonald's is a domestic Chinese brand!¹²⁸ The West (and especially the United States) is a net exporter of popular culture. Many consumers equate Western lifestyles in general and the English language in particular with modernization and sophistication, and numerous American brands slowly but surely insinuate themselves into local cultures. Indeed, some global brands are so widespread that many are only vaguely aware of their countries of origin. In surveys, consumers routinely guess that Heineken is German (it's really Dutch) and that Nokia is Japanese (it's Finnish).¹²⁹

American television inspires knockoffs around the world. But to be fair, many U.S. viewers don't realize that American reality show hits such as *Big Brother* and *American Idol* started out as European concepts that U.S. producers imported. In fact the U.K. version of *Big Brother* briefly went off the air after a fight broke out and housemates threatened to kill each other. The German version attracted accusations of "shameless voyeurism" after a female contestant had her nipple pierced on live TV—without anesthetic.¹³⁰

Still, American TV formats attract many imitators. Some local shows "borrow" from American programs; the German hit *Das Traumschiff* (the "Dream Ship") is a remake of the old American hit *Love Boat*. Versions of *The Apprentice* appear all over the globe—though elsewhere Donald Trump is replaced by local figures such as a German soccer-team manager, a billionaire Arab entrepreneur, and a Brazilian ad agency CEO. Each local version reflects the country's culture—contestants sell flowers in London, hot dogs in Frankfurt, and rolled fish in Finland.¹³¹ Not everyone is treated quite as harshly as the American losers either—in Finland contestants are gently told, "You're free to leave."



OBJECTIVE

How does Western (and particularly American) culture have a huge impact around the world, though people in other countries don't necessarily ascribe the same meanings to products as we do?

Emerging Consumer Cultures in Transitional Economies

In the early 1980s the Romanian Communist government broadcast the American TV show *Dallas* to point out the decadence of Western capitalism. This strategy backfired: The devious (but rich!) J. R. Ewing became a revered icon in parts of Eastern Europe and the Middle East. A popular tourist attraction outside of Bucharest includes a big white log gate that announces (in English) the name, "South Fork Ranch."¹³⁵ Western "decadence" appears to be infectious.¹³⁶

More than 60 countries have a gross national product of less than \$10 billion, and there are at least 135 transnational companies with revenues greater than that. The dominance of these marketing powerhouses creates a **globalized consumption ethic**. Tempting images of luxury cars, glam rock stars on MTV, and mod-

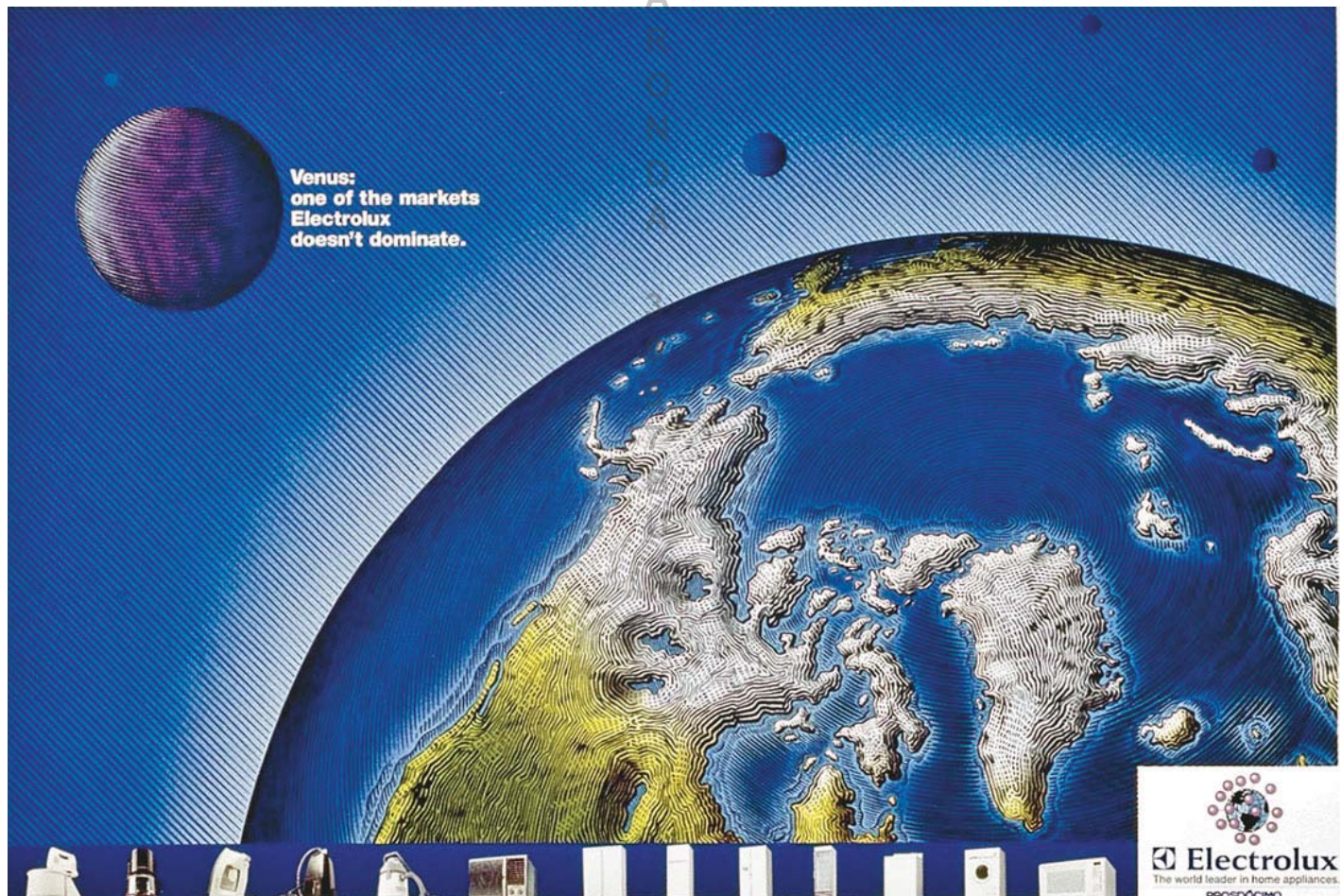
ern appliances that make life easier surround us wherever we turn. People the world over begin to share the ideal of a material lifestyle and value well-known brands that symbolize prosperity. Shopping evolves from a wearying, task-oriented struggle to locate even basic necessities to a leisure activity. Possessing these coveted items becomes a mechanism to display one's status (see Chapter 12)—often at great personal sacrifice.

After the downfall of communism, Eastern Europeans emerged from a long winter of deprivation into a springtime of abundance. The picture is not all rosy, however. It's not easy for many people who live in **transitional economies** to attain consumer goods. This term describes countries such as China, Portugal, and Romania that struggle as they adapt from a controlled, centralized economy to a free-market system. In these situations rapid changes occur on social, political, and economic dimensions as the populace suddenly is exposed to global communications and external market pressures.¹³⁷

Some of the consequences of the transition to capitalism include a loss of confidence and pride in the local culture, as well as alienation, frustration, and increased stress as citizens sacrifice their leisure time to work ever harder to buy consumer goods. The yearning for the trappings of Western material culture is perhaps most evident in parts of Eastern Europe, where citizens who threw off the shackles of communism now have direct access to coveted consumer goods from the United States and Western Europe—if they can afford them. One analyst observed, “As former subjects of the Soviet empire dream it, the American dream has very little to do with liberty and justice for all and a great deal to do with soap operas and the Sears Catalogue.”¹³⁸ A study that looked at how Chinese consumers think about Western brands showed that their interpretations depended on how they think about the

As this Brazilian ad reminds us, globalization is an integral part of the marketing strategy of most major corporations.

Source: Courtesy of Electrolux.



history of relations between China and the West. The researchers in fact identified four different narratives in their sample: West as liberator, as oppressor, as subjugated, and as partner. Depending on the narrative they endorse, people view Western brands as instruments of democratization, domination, a way to erase past Chinese humiliations, or as instruments of economic progress.¹³⁹ A somewhat similar approach identifies various ways that people regard technology in their lives:¹⁴⁰

- *The Techtopian* sees technology as social progress.
- *The Work Machine* regards it as an economic engine to drive growth and development.
- *The Green Luddite*, blames technology for the destruction of craftsmanship and traditional ways of life.
- *The Techpressive* regards technology as a way to attain pleasure.

As the global consumption ethic spreads, rituals and product preferences in different cultures become homogenized. For example, some urbanites in Muslim Turkey now celebrate Christmas though gift-giving is not customary in many parts of the country—even on birthdays. In China, Christmas fever grips China's newly rising urban middle class as an excuse to shop, eat, and party. People there snap up Christmas trees, ornaments, and Christian religious objects (even though the street vendors who peddle photos of Jesus and Mary can't always identify who they are). Chinese consumers embrace Christmas because to them the holiday is international and modern, not because it's a traditional Christian celebration. The government encourages this practice because it stimulates consumer spending. To make the holiday even merrier, China exports about \$1 billion worth of Christmas products every year, and its factories churn out \$7.5 billion of the toys people worldwide put under their trees.¹⁴¹

Does this homogenization mean that in time consumers who live in Nairobi, New Guinea, or the Netherlands will all be indistinguishable from those in New York or Nashville? Probably not, because the meanings of consumer goods mutate to blend with local customs and values. For example, in Turkey some urban women use their ovens to dry clothes and their dishwashers to wash muddy spinach. Or a person in Papua New Guinea may combine a traditional clothing style such as a *bilum* with Western items such as Mickey Mouse shirts or baseball caps.¹⁴² These processes make it unlikely that global homogenization will overwhelm local cultures, but it is likely that there will be multiple consumer cultures, each of which blends global icons such as Nike's pervasive "swoosh" with indigenous products and meanings. In Vietnam for example local fast-food chains dominate the market as they duplicate a McDonald's approach—but add a local flavor. The country's hugely successful Kinh Do red and yellow outlets sell specialties like dried squid buns. In the Philippines, the Jollibee Foods Corp. burger chain also copies the McDonald's look—and it outsells McDonald's there.¹⁴³

Creolization occurs when foreign influences integrate with local meanings. Chapter 15 pointed out that modern Christianity adapted the pagan Christmas tree into its own rituals. In India handicapped beggars sell bottles of Coke from tricycles, and Indipop, a popular music hybrid, mixes traditional styles with rock, rap, and reggae.¹⁴⁴ As we saw in Chapter 13, young Hispanic Americans bounce between hip-hop and *Rock en Español*, blend Mexican rice with spaghetti sauce, and spread peanut butter and jelly on tortillas.¹⁴⁵ In Argentina, Coca-Cola launched *Nativa*, a soft drink flavored with the country's traditional *yerba mate* herbal tea, as part of a strategy to broaden its portfolio with products it makes from indigenous ingredients.¹⁴⁶

The creolization process sometimes results in bizarre permutations of products and services when locals modify them to be compatible with their customs. Consider these creolized adaptations, for example:¹⁴⁷

- In Peru, Indian boys carry rocks they paint to look like transistor radios.
- In highland Papua New Guinea, tribespeople put Chivas Regal wrappers on their drums and wear Pentel pens instead of nosebones.

- Bana tribespeople in the remote highlands of Kako, Ethiopia, pay to watch *Pluto the Circus Dog* on a View-Master.
- When an African Swazi princess marries a Zulu king, she wears a traditional costume of red touraco wing feathers around her forehead and a cape of window-bird feathers and oxtails. But guests record the ceremony on a Kodak movie camera while the band plays “The Sound of Music.”
- The Japanese use Western words as a shorthand for anything new and exciting, even if they do not understand what they mean. They give cars names such as Fairlady, Gloria, and Bongo Wagon. Consumers buy *deodoranto* (deodorant) and *appuru pai* (apple pie). Ads urge shoppers to *stoppu rukku* (stop and look), and products claim to be *yuniku* (unique).¹⁴⁸ Coca-Cola cans say, “I feel Coke & sound special,” and a company called Cream Soda sells products with the slogan, “Too old to die, too young to happy.”¹⁴⁹ Other Japanese products with English names include Mouth Pet (breath freshener), Pocari Sweat (“refreshment water”), Armpit (electric razor), Brown Gross Foam (hair-coloring mousse), Virgin Pink Special (skin cream), Cow Brand (beauty soap), and Mymorning Water (canned water).¹⁵⁰

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Now that you have finished reading this chapter you should understand why:

1 Styles are like mirrors that reflect underlying cultural conditions.

The styles prevalent in a culture at any point in time reflect underlying political and social conditions. We term the set of agents responsible for creating stylistic alternatives a culture production system (CPS). Factors such as the types of people involved in this system and the amount of competition by alternative product forms influence the choices that eventually make their way to the marketplace for consideration by end consumers.

2 We distinguish between high and low culture.

Social scientists distinguish between high (or elite) forms and low (or popular) forms of culture. Products of popular culture tend to follow a cultural formula and contain predictable components. However, these distinctions blur in modern society as marketers increasingly incorporate imagery from “high art” to sell everyday products.

3 Many modern marketers are reality engineers.

Reality engineering occurs when marketers appropriate elements of popular culture to use in their promotional strategies. These elements include sensory and spatial aspects of everyday existence, whether in the form of products that appear in

movies, scents pumped into offices and stores, billboards, theme parks, or video monitors they attach to shopping carts.

4 New products, services, and ideas spread through a population. Different types of people are more or less likely to adopt them.

Diffusion of innovations refers to the process whereby a new product, service, or idea spreads through a population. Innovators and early adopters are quick to adopt new products, and laggards are very slow. A consumer’s decision to adopt a new product depends on his or her personal characteristics as well as on characteristics of the innovation itself. We are more likely to adopt a new product if it demands relatively little behavioral change, is easy to understand, and provides a relative advantage compared to existing products.

5 Many people and organizations play a role in the fashion system that creates and communicates symbolic meanings to consumers.

The fashion system includes everyone involved in creating and transferring symbolic meanings. Many different products express common cultural categories (e.g., gender distinctions). Many people tend to adopt a new style simultaneously in a process of collective selection. According to meme theory, ideas spread through a population in a geometric progression much as a virus infects many people until it reaches epidemic proportions. Other perspectives on motivations for adopting new styles include psychological, economic, and sociological models of fashion.

6 Fashions follow cycles.

Fashions follow cycles that resemble the product life cycle. We distinguish the two extremes of fashion adoption, classics and fads, in terms of the length of this cycle.

7 Products that succeed in one culture may fail in another if marketers fail to understand the differences among consumers in each place.

Because a consumer’s culture exerts such a big influence on his or her lifestyle choices, marketers must learn as much as possible about differences in cultural norms and preferences when they do business in more than one country. One important issue is the extent to which we need to tailor our marketing strategies to each culture. Followers of an etic perspective believe people in many cultures appreciate the same universal messages. Believers in an emic perspective argue that individual cultures are too unique to permit such standardization; marketers must instead adapt their

approaches to local values and practices. Attempts at global marketing have met with mixed success; in many cases this approach is more likely to work if the messages appeal to basic values or if the target markets consist of consumers who are internationally rather than locally oriented.

8 Western (and particularly American) culture has a huge impact around the world, although people in other countries don’t necessarily ascribe the same meanings to products as we do.

The United States is a net exporter of popular culture. Consumers around the world eagerly adopt American products, especially entertainment vehicles and items they link to an American lifestyle (e.g., Marlboro cigarettes, Levi’s jeans). Despite the continuing “Americanization” of world culture, some people resist globalization because they fear it will dilute their own local cultures. In other cases, they practice creolization as they integrate these products with existing cultural practices.

KEY TERMS

- | | | |
|----------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|
| Acceptance cycles, 596 | Cultural selection, 577 | Globalized consumption ethic, 606 |
| Advergaming, 586 | Culture production system (CPS), 578 | Innovation, 587 |
| Art product, 580 | Diffusion of innovations, 587 | Innovators, 588 |
| Branded entertainment, 584 | Discontinuous innovation, 590 | Laggards, 588 |
| Classic, 596 | Dynamically continuous innovation, 590 | Late adopters, 588 |
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| Cultural formula, 582 | Gadget lovers, 589 | Trickle-down theory, 593 |
| Cultural gatekeepers, 578 | | Voice of the consumer, 579 |

REVIEW

- 1 What is collective selection? Give an example.
- 2 Describe a culture production system (CPS) and list its three components. What is an example of a CPS with these three components?
- 3 Define a cultural gatekeeper, and give three examples.
- 4 Describe the difference between arts and crafts.
- 5 What is a cultural formula? Give an example.
- 6 What is “new vintage?” How is this an example of reality engineering?
- 7 Define product placement and list three examples of it. How is this practice the same or different from branded entertainment?
- 8 What is advergaming? Give an example.
- 9 What is the diffusion of innovations?
- 10 Who are innovators? Early adopters? Laggards?
- 11 Describe the differences among continuous innovations, dynamically continuous innovations, and discontinuous

- innovations, and provide an example of each. Which type are consumers least likely to adopt as an innovation?
- 12 What are the differences among *fashion*, *a fashion*, and *in fashion*?
 - 13 What are cultural categories and how do they influence product designs?
 - 14 Summarize some of the major approaches we can use to understand fashion from the perspectives of psychologists, economists, and sociologists.
 - 15 What is an example of a meme?
 - 16 What is the trickle-down effect? List some reasons why it is no longer as valid as it used to be.
 - 17 What is the difference between a fad, a fashion, and a classic fashion life cycle?
 - 18 What is the difference between an emic and an etic perspective on globalization?
 - 19 Why is the United States a net exporter of popular culture?
 - 20 What country provides an example of a transitional economy?
 - 21 Define creolization and provide an example.

CONSUMER BEHAVIOR CHALLENGE

■ DISCUSS

- 1 Watchdog groups have long decried product placements because they blur the line between content and advertising without adequately informing viewers. And the networks themselves appear to be divided on how far they want to open the gate. According to one study, the effectiveness of product placements varies by product category and type of placement. Consumers indicate product placements have the most influence on their grocery, electronics, and apparel purchases. The most common platform for a placement is to get a brand shown on a T-shirt or other piece of an actor's wardrobe.¹⁵¹ What do you think about this practice—under what conditions is product placement likely to influence you and your friends? When (if ever) is it counterproductive?
- 2 The chapter described a few instances where consumers sold their kids' "naming rights" to corporations—mostly for charitable purposes. Would you do this—why or why not?
- 3 Is advertising an art or a craft? Which should it be?
- 4 Movie companies often conduct market research when they produce big-budget films. If necessary they will reshoot part of a movie when viewers say they don't like it. Some people oppose this practice—they claim that movies, or books, songs, plays, or other artistic endeavors should not conform to what the market wants, lest they sacrifice their integrity. What do you think?
- 5 The chapter describes the traditional acceptance cycle for hit songs. How has the availability of music online altered this cycle? What are the ramifications of these changes for the music acceptance cycle?
- 6 Because of higher competition and market saturation, marketers in industrialized countries try to develop Third World markets. Asian consumers alone spend \$90 billion a year on cigarettes, and U.S. tobacco manufacturers push relentlessly into these markets. We find cigarette advertising, that often depicts glamorous Western models and settings, just about everywhere—on billboards, buses, storefronts, and clothing—and tobacco companies sponsor many major sports and cultural events. Some companies even hand out cigarettes and gifts in amusement areas, often to preteens. Should governments allow these practices, even if the products may be harmful to their citizens or divert money poor people should spend on essentials? If you were a trade or health official in a Third World country, what guidelines, if any, might you suggest to regulate the import of luxury goods from advanced economies?
- 7 Comment on the growing practice of reality engineering. Do marketers "own" our culture? Should they?
- 8 Critics of the cultural consequences of standardization often point to Starbucks as an example of a company that succeeds because it obliterates local customs and drives small competitors out of business.¹⁵² Where do you stand on patronizing mom-and-pop stores versus national chains?
- 9 If you worked in marketing research for a cosmetics firm, how might you apply the lead user concept to help you identify new product opportunities?
- 10 Boots with 6-inch heels were a fashion rage among young Japanese women a few years ago. Several teens died after they tripped over their shoes and fractured their skulls. However, followers of the style claim they are willing to risk twisted ankles, broken bones, bruised faces, and other dangers the platform shoes cause. One teenager said, "I've fallen and twisted my ankle many times, but they are so cute that I won't give them up until they go out of fashion."¹⁵³ Many consumers around the world seem willing to suffer for the sake of fashion. Others argue that we are merely pawns in the hands of designers, who conspire to force unwieldy fashions down our throats. What do you think? What is and what should be the role of fashion in our society? How important is it for people to be in style? What are the pros and cons of keeping up with the latest fashions? Do you believe that we are at the mercy of designers?

APPLY

- 1 The chapter mentions the Hush Puppy shoe fad. Clearly, it's a matter of time before consumers tire of these shoes and move on. What can the company do to prolong the life of this brand?
- 2 If you were a consultant to a toy company, what would you forecast as the next big trend in this market? Survey toy stores and watch what kids play with to help you with your prediction.
- 3 How might the rise of peer-to-peer music sharing influence the structure of the music CPS? One guess is that this method erodes the dominance of the big labels because

- listeners are more likely to access music from lesser-known groups. Survey your friends to determine whether this in fact is happening—do they listen to a wider variety of artists or simply download more from the big-time groups?
- 4 Read several romance or action novels to see if you can identify a cultural formula at work. Do you see parallels among the roles different characters play (e.g., the hero, the evildoer, the temptress, etc.)?
- 5 Watch 12 hours of TV and keep a log of all product placements you see. What are the dominant products shows insert?

Case Study

SLUMDOG: FAD OR FASHION?

“And the Oscar goes to . . . *Slumdog Millionaire*.” This line was delivered eight times in Hollywood at the 81st Annual Academy Awards. Not bad for a film produced on a mere shoestring by Hollywood standards (budget of \$15 million). It is the story of a young man from the slums of Mumbai who overcomes all odds to beat a television quiz show—the Indian equivalent of the show *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?* and wins an award of 20,000,000 rupees.

The movie was a hit with worldwide critics, but the audience reaction in India was mixed. Many Indians claim that this movie cannot be considered a credit to India because its director is British, and the lead actor, Dev Patel is also from England. However, Indians are proud of A. R. Rahman, a well-known Indian musician, for his Oscar-winning film score.

It's hard to deny that the film turned the world's attention to India. Some were excited by the global interest, but others were not pleased. They felt that the film did not depict the “real” India. Many from Dharavi, the Mumbai slum featured in the film, protested that the name “Slumdog” was derogatory. In an interview, director Danny Boyle responded, “. . . basically it's a hybrid of the word ‘underdog’—and everything that means in terms of rooting for the underdog and validating his triumph—and the fact that he obviously comes from the slums.”

Whatever one's attitudes toward the filmmakers' rights to portray poverty and injustice in India, it's clear that the

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film increased awareness of what UNICEF estimates as 11 million children who currently live on the streets of India. *Slumdog* has, in fact, been credited with inspiring a boost in donations to organizations that fight homelessness in India including Railway Children, SOS, Children's Villages of India, and Save the Children. Railway Children reports Web site visits at 10 times what they were before the film, and many groups report an increase in donations.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1 Can you give specific examples of how *Slumdog Millionaire* is part of the culture production system? Specifically, what are the three major subsystems, and who are the cultural gatekeepers in this context?
- 2 What does it mean that critics of the film are concerned about India's underlying “cultural category”?
- 3 How do you predict the film's success will influence the popularity of Bollywood productions—will it spark a fad or a fashion?

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SECTION 5 MINTEL MEMO AND DATASET EXERCISE

Mintel Memo

TO: Consumer Research Dept.
 FROM: The Big Boss
 RE: Sacred food segmentation and positioning

We need to try to expand our presence in the kosher food market. Are we positioning ourselves in this category as effectively as we could? Are we aiming for the right target segments?

Please provide us with actionable recommendations for segmentation and positioning strategies based on this information. As you analyze the data in the tables provided, remember to focus on general trends with an eye on specific subgroups (e.g., age, household income, education, etc.) that show a statistically significant difference in their responses—especially when there is some reason based on what you have learned in this section about consumer behavior to believe that this difference is important.

When you write your memo, please try to incorporate relevant concepts and information you learned when you read the designated chapters!

What can we learn from the following data to help our company position itself in the kosher food market?

Number of Respondents		1,538	441	240	341	335
Respondent Categories		Household Income			Education	
Respondent Sub-categories		Total	\$25,000–\$49,999	\$100,000+	High School or Less	College Graduate
			(A)	(B)	(A)	(B)
Question	Answers	%	%	%	%	%
How much do you know about kosher food? (Comparison of Column Proportions)	Know a lot	13	11	18	9	14
				A		A
	Know some	58	52	65	50	61
				A		A
	Know nothing	30	37	17	40	24
				B		B

Comparison of Column Proportions results are based on two-sided tests with significance level $p < 0.05$. Letters appearing in the column category denote a significant difference between the number immediately above the letter and the category associated with that particular letter. For example, the “B” in the High School or Less category above denotes a significant difference between the percentage of participants with an educational level of high school or less who specify knowing nothing about kosher (40%) and the percentage of participants who had graduated from college (24%).

To access the complete Mintel questionnaires and datasets, go to MyMarketingLab at www.mypearsonmarketinglab.com. If you are not using MyMarketingLab, visit this book's Companion Website at www.pearsonhighered.com/solomon.

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