# CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

## A EUROPEAN OUTLOOK

### Second Edition

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**10.** Clive Thompson, 'The Play's the Thing', *New York Times Magazine*, 11 November 2004, 49ff.

**11.** Maslow, 'A Theory of Human Motivation', 380.

**12.** Ibid.

**13.** Ibid.

**14.** See, for example, David C. McClelland, *Studies in Motivation* (New York: Appleton Century Crofts, 1955); David C. McClelland, 'Business Drive and National Achievement', *Harvard Business Review*, July–August 1962; 'Achievement Motivation Can Be Developed', *Harvard Business Review*, 5, 24, November–December 1965; and Abraham K. Korman, *The Psychology of Motivation* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1974).

# CHAPTER 6
## PERSONALITY AND CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

Marketers have long tried to appeal to consumers in terms of their personality characteristics. They have intuitively felt that what consumers purchase and when and how they consume are likely to be influenced by personality factors. For this reason, advertising and marketing people have frequently depicted (or incorporated) specific personality traits or characteristics in their marketing and advertising messages. A recent example is an appeal to individuality for the Harley-Davidson motorcycle where the headline says, 'We're all created equal. But after that, it's up to you.'

This chapter is designed to provide the reader with an understanding of how personality and self-concept are related to various aspects of consumer behaviour. It examines what personality is, reviews several major personality theories, and describes how these theories have stimulated marketing interest in the study of consumer personality. The chapter considers the important topics of brand personality, how the related concepts of self and self-image influence consumer attitudes and behaviour and concludes with an exploration of virtual personality or self.

# WHAT IS PERSONALITY?

The study of **personality** has been approached by theorists in a variety of ways. Some have emphasised the dual influence of heredity and early childhood experiences on personality development; others have stressed broader social and environmental influences and the fact that personalities develop continuously over time. Some theorists prefer to view personality as a unified whole; others focus on specific traits. The wide variation in viewpoints makes it difficult to arrive at a single definition. However, we propose that personality be defined as those inner psychological characteristics that both determine and reflect how a person responds to his or her environment.

The emphasis in this definition is on inner characteristics – those specific qualities, attributes, traits, factors and mannerisms that distinguish one individual from other individuals. As discussed later in the chapter, the deeply ingrained characteristics that we call personality are likely to influence the individual's product choices: they affect the way consumers respond to marketers' promotional efforts, and when, where and how they consume particular products or services. Therefore, the identification of specific personality characteristics associated with consumer behaviour has proved to be highly useful in the development of a firm's market segmentation strategies.

## The nature of personality

In the study of personality, three distinct properties are of central importance:

1. personality reflects individual differences;
2. personality is consistent and enduring; and
3. personality can change.

### Personality Reflects Individual Differences

Because the inner characteristics that constitute an individual's personality are a unique combination of factors, no two individuals are exactly alike. Nevertheless, many individuals may be similar in terms of a single personality characteristic but not in terms of others. For instance, some people can be described as 'high' in venturesomeness (e.g. willing to accept the risk of doing something new or different, such as skydiving or mountain climbing), whereas others can be described as 'low' in venturesomeness (e.g. afraid to buy a recently introduced product). Personality is a useful concept because it enables us to categorise consumers into different groups on the basis of one or even several traits. If each person were different in terms of all personality traits, it would be impossible to group consumers into segments, and there would be little reason for marketers to develop products and promotional campaigns targeted to particular segments.

### Personality Is Consistent and Enduring

An individual's personality tends to be both consistent and enduring. Indeed, the mother who comments that her child 'has been impulsive from the day he was born' is supporting the contention that personality has both consistency and endurance. Both qualities are essential if marketers are to explain or predict consumer behaviour in terms of personality.

Although marketers cannot change consumers' personalities to conform to their products, if they know which personality characteristics influence specific consumer responses they can attempt to appeal to the relevant traits inherent in their target group of consumers.

Even though consumers' personalities may be consistent, their consumption behaviour often varies considerably because of the various psychological, sociocultural, environmental and situational factors that affect behaviour. For instance, although an individual's personality may

be relatively stable, specific needs or motives, attitudes, reactions to group pressures, and even responses to newly available brands may cause a change in the person's behaviour. Personality is only one of a combination of factors that influence how a consumer behaves.

### Personality Can Change

Under certain circumstances personalities change. For instance, an individual's personality may be altered by major life events, such as the birth of a child, the death of a loved one, a divorce or a significant career promotion. An individual's personality changes not only in response to abrupt events but also as part of a gradual maturing process – 'She's growing up, she is much calmer,' says an aunt after not seeing her niece for five years.

There is also evidence that personality stereotypes may change over time. More specifically, although it is felt that men's personality has generally remained relatively constant over the past 50 years, women's personality has seemed to become increasingly more masculine and should continue to do so over the next 50 years. This prediction indicates a convergence in the personality characteristics of men and women.[1] The reason for this shift is that women have been moving into occupations that have traditionally been dominated by men and, therefore, are being increasingly associated with masculine personality attributes.

# THEORIES OF PERSONALITY

This section briefly reviews three major theories of personality:

1.  **Freudian theory**.
2.  **neo-Freudian theory**, and
3.  **trait theory**.

These theories have been chosen for discussion from among many theories of personality because each has played a prominent role in the study of the relationship between consumer behaviour and personality.

## Freudian theory

Sigmund Freud's **psychoanalytic theory** of personality is a cornerstone of modern psychology. This theory was built on the premise that unconscious needs or drives, especially sexual and other biological drives, are at the heart of human motivation and personality. Freud constructed his theory on the basis of patients' recollections of early childhood experiences, analysis of their dreams and the specific nature of their mental and physical adjustment problems.

### Id, Superego and Ego

Based on his analyses, Freud proposed that the human personality consists of three interacting systems: the id, the superego and the ego. The *id* is conceptualised as a 'warehouse' of primitive and impulsive drives – basic physiological needs such as thirst, hunger and sex – for which the individual seeks immediate satisfaction without concern for the specific means of satisfaction.

In contrast to the id, the *superego* is conceptualised as the individual's internal expression of society's moral and ethical codes of conduct. The superego's role is to see that the individual satisfies needs in a socially acceptable fashion. Thus, the superego is a kind of brake that restrains or inhibits the impulsive forces of the id.

Finally, the *ego* is the individual's conscious control. It functions as an internal monitor that attempts to balance the impulsive demands of the id and the sociocultural constraints of the superego. Figure 6-1 represents the interrelationships among the three interacting systems. In addition to specifying a structure for personality, Freud emphasised that an individual's
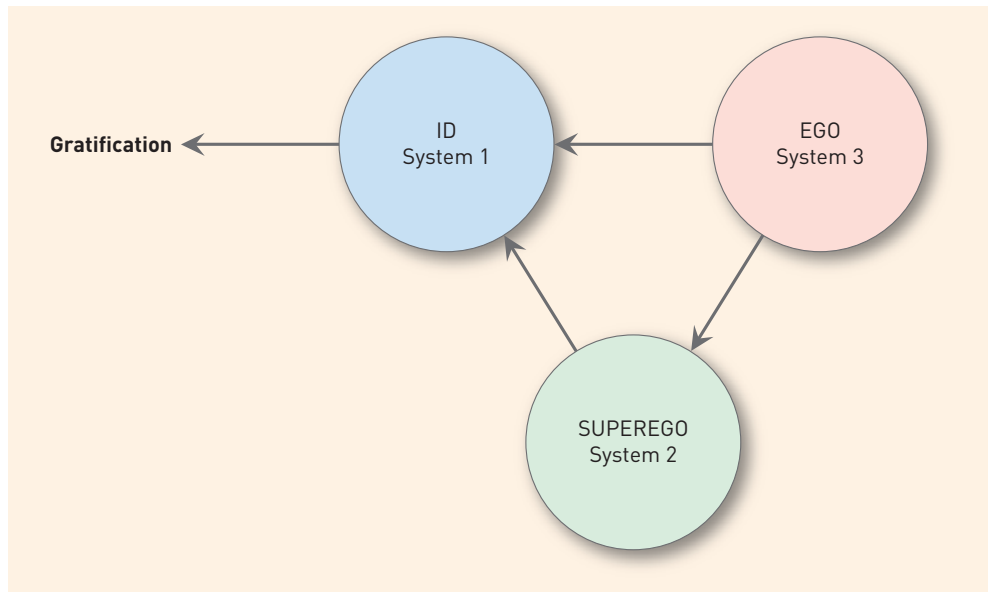
**FIGURE 6-1** A representation of the relationships among the id, ego and superego

personality is formed as he or she passes through a number of distinct stages of infant and childhood development. These are the oral, anal, phallic, latent and genital stages. Freud labelled four of these stages of development to conform to the area of the body on which he believed the child's sexual instincts are focused at the time.

According to Freudian theory, an adult's personality is determined by how well he or she deals with the crises that are experienced while passing through each of these stages (particularly the first three). For instance, if a child's oral needs are not adequately satisfied at the first stage of development, the person may become fixated at this stage and as an adult display a personality that includes such traits as dependence and excessive oral activity (e.g. gum chewing and smoking). When an individual is fixated at the anal stage, the adult personality may display other traits, such as an excessive need for neatness.

### Freudian Theory and 'Product Personality'

Researchers who apply Freud's psychoanalytic theory to the study of consumer personality believe that human drives are largely unconscious and that consumers are primarily unaware of their true reasons for buying what they buy. These researchers tend to see consumer purchases and/or consumption situations as a reflection and an extension of the consumer's own personality. In other words, they consider the consumer's appearance and possessions – grooming, clothing, jewellery and so forth – as reflections of the individual's personality. Table 6-1 presents the results of a study of 19,000 consumers that examines the link between snack food perceptions and selected personality traits.[2] The findings of the research, for example, reveal that potato chips (crisps) are associated with being ambitious, successful, a high achiever and impatient with less than the best, whereas popcorn seems to be related to a personality that takes charge, pitches in often, is modest and self-confident but not a show-off. (The related topics of brand personality, and the self and self-images are considered later in the chapter.)

## Neo-freudian theory

Several of Freud's colleagues disagreed with his contention that personality is primarily instinctual and sexual in nature. Instead, these neo-Freudians believed that social relationships are

**TABLE 6-1** Snack foods and personality traits

| SNACK FOOD | PERSONALITY TRAITS |
|---|---|
| Potato chips | Ambitious, successful, high achiever, impatient with less than the best. |
| Tortilla chips | Perfectionist, high expectations, punctual, conservative, responsible. |
| Pretzels | Lively, easily bored with same old routine, flirtatious, intuitive, may overcommit to projects. |
| Snack crackers | Rational, logical, contemplative, shy, prefers time alone. |
| Cheese curls | Conscientious, principled, proper, fair, may appear rigid but has great integrity, plans ahead, loves order. |
| Nuts | Easygoing, empathetic, understanding, calm, even-tempered. |
| Popcorn | Takes charge, pitches in often, modest, self-confident but not a show-off. |
| Meat snacks | Gregarious, generous, trustworthy, tends to be overly trusting. |

*Source*: Adapted from *What Flavor is Your Personality? Discover Who You Are by Looking at What You Eat.* by Alan Hirsch, MD, Naperville, Il, Sourcebooks, 2001.

fundamental to the formation and development of personality. For instance, Alfred Adler viewed human beings as seeking to attain various rational goals, which he called style of life. He also placed much emphasis on the individual's efforts to overcome feelings of inferiority (i.e. by striving for superiority). Harry Stack Sullivan, another neo-Freudian, stressed that people continuously attempt to establish significant and rewarding relationships with others. He was particularly concerned with the individual's efforts to reduce tensions, such as anxiety.

Like Sullivan, Karen Horney was also interested in anxiety. She focused on the impact of child–parent relationships and the individual's desire to conquer feelings of anxiety. Horney proposed that individuals be classified into three personality groups: compliant, aggressive and detached (CAD).[3]

1. Compliant individuals are those who move towards others (they desire to be loved, wanted and appreciated).
2. Aggressive individuals are those who move against others (they desire to excel and win admiration).
3. Detached individuals are those who move away from others (they desire independence, self-reliance, self-sufficiency, and individualism or freedom from obligations).

A personality test based on Horney's CAD theory has been developed and tested within the context of consumer behaviour.[4] The initial CAD research uncovered a number of tentative relationships between college students' scores and their product and brand usage patterns. More recent research has found that children who scored high in self-reliance – who preferred to do things independently of others (i.e. detached personalities) – were less likely to be brand loyal and were more likely to try different brands.[5]

Many marketers use some of these neo-Freudian theories intuitively. For example, marketers who position their products or services as providing an opportunity to belong or to be appreciated by others in a group or social setting would seem to be guided by Horney's characterisation of the compliant individual.

## Trait theory

Trait theory constitutes a major departure from the qualitative measures that typify the Freudian and neo-Freudian movements (e.g. personal observation, self-reported experiences, dream analysis, projective techniques).

The orientation of trait theory is primarily quantitative or empirical; it focuses on the measurement of personality in terms of specific psychological characteristics, called traits. A trait is