

Chapter Objectives

When you finish reading this chapter you will:

- CO 1 Understand why it is important to know how consumers learn about products and services.
- CO 2 Understand that conditioning results in learning.
- CO 3 Understand that learned associations with brands generalize to other products, and know why this is important to marketers.
- CO 4 Understand that there is a difference between classical and instrumental conditioning, and that both processes help consumers to learn about products.
- CO 5 Understand that we can learn about products by observing others' behaviour.
- CO 6 Understand how the memory process works.
- CO 7 Understand that marketers use various measures to assess our memories about brands, products, and ads.

Chapter 3



Learning and Memory

THE LEARNING PROCESS ^{CO} 1

The development of vivid memories is relevant to the study of how brand attitudes are formed. Marketers realize that developing long-standing, learned connections between products and memorable experiences is a potent way to build and keep brand loyalty. In this chapter, we'll explore how learned associations among feelings, events, and products—and the memories they evoke—are an important aspect of consumer behaviour.

Learning refers to a relatively permanent change in behaviour that is caused by experience. This experience does not have to affect the learner directly; we can learn *vicariously* by observing events that affect others.¹ We also learn even when we are not trying. Consumers recognize many brand names and can hum many product jingles, even for product categories they themselves do not use. This casual, unintentional acquisition of knowledge is known as *incidental learning*.

Learning is an ongoing process. Our knowledge about the world is constantly being revised as we are exposed to new stimuli and receive ongoing feedback that allows us to modify behaviour in other similar situations at a later time. The concept of learning covers a lot of ground, ranging from a consumer's simple association between a stimulus such as a product logo (Sprite) and the concept of a "refreshing soft drink" to a complex series of cognitive activities (writing an essay on learning for a consumer behaviour exam). Psychologists who study learning have advanced several theories to explain the learning process. These theories range from those focusing on simple stimulus-response connections (behavioural theories) to perspectives that regard consumers as complex problem solvers who learn abstract rules and concepts by observing others (cognitive theories). Understanding these theories is important to marketers as well since basic learning principles are at the heart of many consumer purchase decisions.

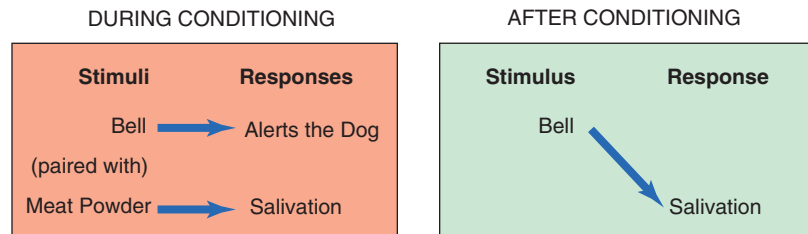
BEHAVIOURAL LEARNING THEORIES

Behavioural learning theories assume that learning takes place as the result of responses to external events, as opposed to internal thought processes. Psychologists who subscribe to this viewpoint do not focus on internal cognitive processes. Instead, they approach the mind as a "black box" that cannot be directly investigated and emphasize the observable aspects of behaviour. These observable aspects consist of things that go into the box (the stimuli or events perceived from the outside world) and things that come out of the box (the responses or reactions to these stimuli). Take for example, a McDonald's Big Mac as the stimulus and salivating in reaction to this as a response.

This view is represented by two major approaches to behavioural learning: classical conditioning and instrumental conditioning. Consumers respond to brand names, scents, jingles, and other marketing stimuli on the basis of the learned associations or connections they have formed over time. Similarly, people also learn that actions they take result in rewards and

FIGURE 3-1

Diagram of the Classical Conditioning Process



punishments, and this feedback influences the way they will respond in similar situations in the future. Consumers who receive compliments on a product choice will be more likely to buy that brand again (i.e., a form of positive reinforcement), while those who get food poisoning at a new restaurant will not likely eat there in the future (i.e., a form of punishment).

Classical Conditioning

CO 2 **Classical conditioning** occurs when a stimulus that elicits a response is paired with another stimulus that initially does not elicit a response on its own. Over time this second stimulus causes a similar response because it is associated with the first stimulus. This phenomenon was first demonstrated in dogs by Ivan Pavlov, a Russian physiologist doing research on digestion in animals, and is shown in Figure 3-1.

Pavlov induced classically conditioned learning by pairing a neutral stimulus (a bell) with a stimulus known to cause a salivation response in dogs (he squirted dried meat powder into their mouths). The powder was an **unconditioned stimulus (UCS)**, because it was naturally capable of causing the response. Over time, the bell became a **conditioned stimulus (CS)**; it did not initially cause salivation, but the dogs learned to associate the bell with the meat powder and began to salivate at the sound of the bell only. The drooling, caused by a sound now linked to feeding time, was a **conditioned response (CR)**.

This basic form of classical conditioning demonstrated by Pavlov applies primarily to responses controlled by the autonomic (e.g., salivation) and nervous (e.g., eye-blink) systems. That is, it focuses on visual and olfactory cues that induce physiological responses such as hunger, thirst, or sexual arousal. When these cues are consistently paired with conditioned stimuli, such as brand names, consumers may learn to feel hungry, thirsty, or aroused when later exposed to the brand cues.

Classical conditioning effects can also emerge when a product that is originally neutral (e.g., a conditioned stimulus) is paired over time with a product that produces an emotion-inducing responses (i.e., an unconditioned stimulus). In one study, for example, participants viewed pens paired with either pleasant or unpleasant mood-inducing music; and they were much more likely to later select the pen that appeared with pleasant music.² Researchers have shown that classical conditioning effects can be triggered by unconditioned stimuli such as the *Star Wars* theme song or pleasant pictures paired with conditioned stimuli such as geometric shapes, colas, and toothpaste.³

Associative Learning

Classical conditioning is a form of **associative learning** in which consumers learn associations between stimuli in a rather simple fashion without more complex processes such as memory or cognition taking place.⁴ Associative learning can occur for more complex reactions to stimuli as well. Even a credit card becomes a conditioned cue that triggers greater spending, especially since it is a stimulus present only in

← Many classic advertising campaigns consist of product slogans that have been repeated so many times that they are etched in consumers' minds. Sleep Country's slogan is well known, and consumers can finish the tune once they hear the beginning of the jingle "Why buy a mattress . . .".

Courtesy of Sleep Country Canada. www.sleepcountry.ca

situations in which consumers are spending money. Over time, people may make associations between credit cards and the ability to make larger purchases; and consequently have been found to leave larger tips than they do when using cash.⁵ Small wonder that American Express reminds us, "Don't leave home without it."

REPETITION

Associative learning effects are more likely to occur after a conditioned stimulus and an unconditioned stimulus have been paired a number of times.⁶ Repeated exposures increase the strength of stimulus–response associations and prevent the **decay** of these associations in memory. Research indicates that the interval between exposures may influence the effectiveness of this strategy as well as the type of medium used to communicate the stimulus–response associations; the most effective repetition strategy seems to be a combination of spaced exposures that alternate in terms of media that are more and less involving, such as TV advertising complemented by print media.⁷ Many classic advertising campaigns consist of product slogans that have been repeated so many times they are etched in consumers' minds.

Associative learning will not occur or will take longer if the paired stimuli are only occasionally presented with one another. One result of this lack of association may be **extinction**, which happens when the effects of prior conditioning are reduced and finally disappear. This can occur, for example, when a product is *overexposed* in the marketplace, or forms new associations such that the brand is no longer consistently paired with the original stimulus. For example, Coach has done an excellent job of pairing their brand with high-end, luxury imagery. When Nicole "Snookie" Polizzi from MTV's *Jersey Shore* began to become well known for always being photographed with her Coach purse, Coach became worried that their former luxury-brand association might wear off. The news media reported that Coach had carefully orchestrated a change in her behaviour. By sending her their competition's (Gucci's) products, Coach hoped to decrease the undesirable associations of Snookie being seen using their brand!

STIMULUS GENERALIZATION

- CO 3 Stimulus generalization** refers to the tendency of stimuli similar to a CS to evoke similar conditioned responses.⁹ For example, Pavlov noticed in subsequent studies that his dogs would sometimes salivate when they heard noises that only resembled the sound of a bell (e.g., keys jangling). People react to other similar stimuli in much the same way as they respond to an original stimulus. A drug store's bottle of private-brand mouthwash deliberately packaged to resemble Listerine mouthwash may evoke a similar response among consumers who assume that this "me-too" product shares other characteristics of the original.



Marketing Insight

How often should an advertiser repeat ads it places on websites? Recent research indicates the answer depends on whether the ad relates to the site's content, and whether there are also competing ads present on the site. The study found support for the general idea that repetitive ad messages resulted in higher recall and interest in learning more about the advertised product (in this case, a laptop). However, repeating the same ad was primarily effective when competitors also showed ads on the site. Otherwise it was better to vary the ad messages for the laptop (presumably because people tuned out the ad if it appeared repeatedly). And these ads were more effective when they appeared on a site where the content related to the advertised product.⁸

Indeed, consumers in one study on shampoo brands tended to rate those with similar packages as also being similar in quality and performance.¹⁰ This “piggybacking” strategy can cut both ways: When the quality of the me-too product turns out to be lower than that of the original brand, consumers may exhibit even more positive feelings toward the original; however, if the quality of the two competitors is perceived to be about equal, consumers may conclude the price premium they are paying for the original is not worth it.¹¹ In addition, consumers’ learned associations with a large corporation can influence what they believe about its products. The company’s overall reputation has been shown to have a particularly strong impact on brand evaluations. To a lesser extent the same is also true of the company’s reputation for social responsibility.¹²

STIMULUS DISCRIMINATION

Stimulus discrimination occurs when a stimulus similar to a CS is *not* followed by a UCS. In these situations reactions are weakened and will soon disappear. Part of the learning process involves learning to respond to some stimuli but not to other similar stimuli. Manufacturers of well-established brands commonly encourage consumers to discriminate by urging them not to buy “cheap imitations” because the results will not be what they expect.

In a recent twist on this principle some companies are using a strategy called **masked branding**, which deliberately hides a product’s true origin. For example, Rickard’s Red beer is positioned to compete with microbreweries, and the label lists the manufacturer as the Capilano Brewing Co. even though the beer is actually made by Molson Coors. In this case, the marketers have worked hard to encourage stimulus discrimination; they do not want consumers to have the same conditioned response to Rickard’s Red as they do to Coors Light, for example.

Marketing Applications of Conditioning

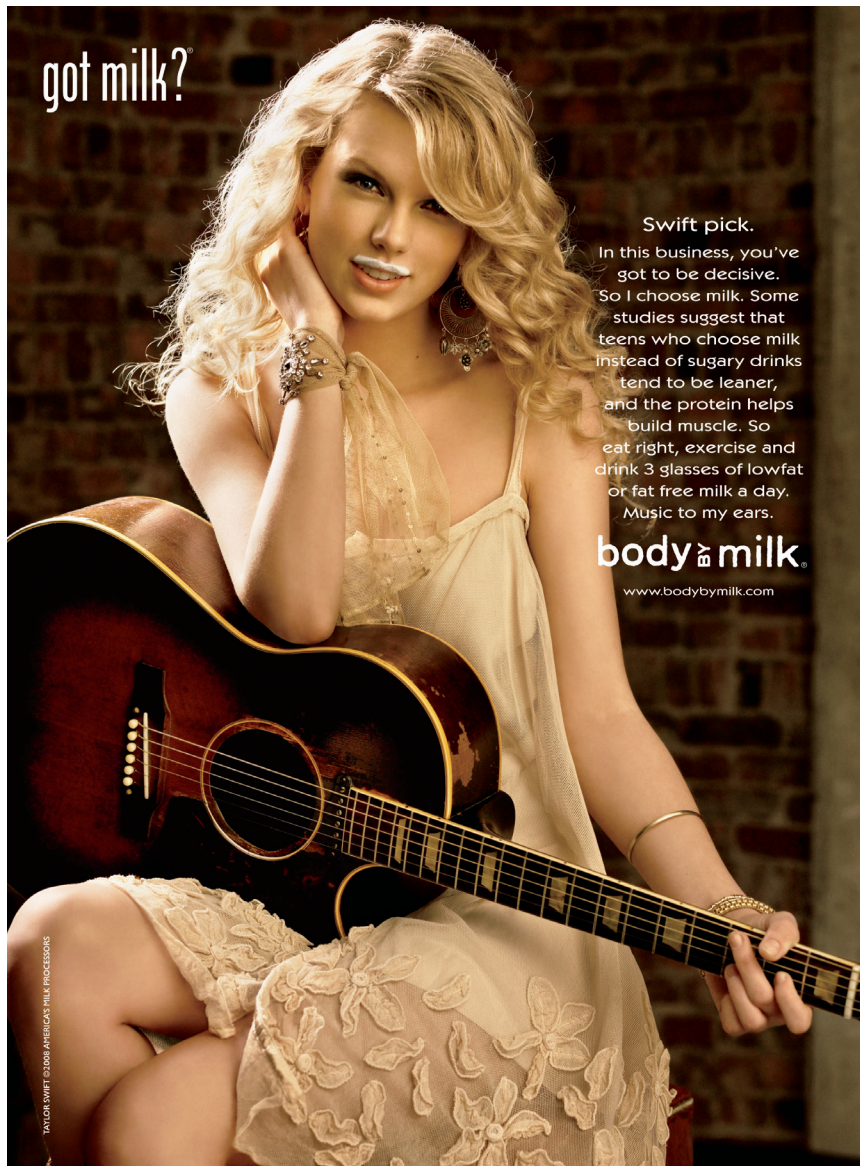
Many marketing strategies focus on the establishment of associations between stimuli and responses. Behavioural learning principles apply to many consumer phenomena, ranging from the creation of a distinctive brand image to the perceived link between a product and an underlying need.

These conditioned associations are crucial to many marketing strategies that rely on the creation and perpetuation of positive **brand equity**, in which a brand has strong positive associations in a consumer’s memory and commands a lot of loyalty as a result.¹³ As we will see in the following chapters, a product with brand equity holds a tremendous advantage in the marketplace.

REPETITION

One advertising researcher argues that scheduling more than three exposures is a waste. The first exposure creates awareness of the product, the second exposure demonstrates its relevance to the consumer, and the third exposure serves as a reminder of the product’s benefits.¹⁴ However, even this bare-bones approach implies that repetition is needed to ensure that the consumer is actually exposed to (and processes) the ad at least three times. As we saw in the last chapter, this exposure is by no means guaranteed since people often tune out or distort many marketing communications. Marketers attempting to condition a particular association must ensure that the consumers they have targeted will be exposed to the stimulus a sufficient number of times to make it “stick.”

On the other hand, it is possible to have too much of a good thing. Consumers can become so used to hearing or seeing a marketing stimulus that they no longer pay attention to it. This problem, known as **advertising wearout**, can be alleviated by varying the way in which the basic message is presented. For example, the marketer can maintain the themes



◀ The “Got Milk” campaign avoids advertising wearout by repeatedly creating positive associations with the product, but varying the execution of the advertisements.

MILKPEP

and associations conveyed by an advertising message, while varying the actual execution of the message itself. A good example of this is the “Got Milk” campaign, which pairs unconditioned stimuli (attractive celebrities) with the product (which presumably leads to the unconditioned response of positive affect), but varies the actual celebrities used to avoid consumers getting bored or blocking out the marketing message.

CONDITIONING PRODUCT ASSOCIATIONS

Advertisements often pair a product with a positive stimulus to create a desirable association. Various aspects of a marketing message, such as music, humour, or imagery, can affect conditioning.

Importantly, the order in which the conditioned stimulus and the unconditioned stimulus are presented can affect the likelihood that learning will occur. Generally speaking, the unconditioned stimulus should be presented prior to the conditioned stimulus. That is, it is more effective to play a jingle (UCS) and then follow this with

Marketing Insight



The choice of a great brand name is so important that companies often hire specialists called naming consultants to come up with a winning selection. These experts often try to find semantic associations that click because they evoke some desirable connection. That strategy brought us names such as Qualcomm ("quality" and "communications"), Verizon ("horizon," as in forward-looking), and Intel ("intelligent" and "electronics"). The name "Viagra" rhymes with "Niagara," the famous waterfall. People associate water with both sexuality and life, and Niagara Falls is a honeymoon mecca. Philip Morris has renamed itself Altria Group to convey its expansion beyond cigarettes into packaged foods and brewing.¹⁷

Appropriate semantic combinations are getting harder to find, so some consultants are trying to appeal to consumers' more basic instincts by focusing on links between the raw sounds of vowels and consonants (called *phonemes*) and emotional responses. To get at these associations, researchers usually give subjects pairs of nonsense names that differ in only a single phoneme, such as Paressa and Taressa, where the phonemes that differ are *p* and *t*, and ask which word sounds faster, more daring, nicer, and so on. They have found that sounds that come to a full stop (*p*, *b*, *t*, and *d*) connote slowness, while *f*, *v*, *s*, and *z* are fast. The words "Prozac" and "Amazon" convey a sense of speed (of recovery or of delivery). When naming consultants were asked to label a new handheld personal digital assistant (PDA), they first thought of "StrawBerry," because the little keyboard buttons resembled seeds. They liked the "berry" part of the name because they knew that people associated the letter *b* with reliability, and a berry communicated smallness compared to other PDAs. But a linguist pointed out that "straw" is a slow syllable, and the product needed to have a fast connotation. Voila! The BlackBerry was born.¹⁸

the presentation of a soft drink (CS). The technique of *backward conditioning*, such as showing a soft drink (the CS) and then playing a jingle (the UCS), is generally not effective.¹⁵

Just as product associations can be formed, they can also be *extinguished*. Because of the danger of extinction, a classical conditioning strategy may not be as effective for products that are frequently encountered, since there is no guarantee they will be consistently accompanied by the CS. A bottle of Pepsi paired with the refreshing sound of a carbonated beverage being poured over ice may seem like a good example of conditioning. Unfortunately, the product would also be seen in many other contexts in which this sound was absent, reducing the effectiveness of the conditioning strategy. By the same reasoning, a novel tune should be chosen over a popular one to pair with a product, since the popular song might also be heard in many situations in which the product is not present.¹⁶

APPLICATIONS OF STIMULUS GENERALIZATION

The process of stimulus generalization is often central to branding and packaging decisions that attempt to capitalize on consumers' positive associations with an existing brand or company name. The marketing value of an admired stimulus is clearly demonstrated at universities with winning sports teams, where loyal fans snap up merchandise, from clothing to bathroom accessories, emblazoned with the school's name. This business did not even exist 40 years ago, when schools were reluctant to commercialize their images. Today, it's a different story. Many university administrators crave the revenue they receive from sales of products that range from sweatshirts to drink coasters. Strategies based on stimulus generalization include the following:

- *Family branding*, in which a variety of products capitalize on the reputation of a company name. Companies such as Google, Virgin, Campbell, Heinz, and General Electric rely on their positive corporate images to sell different product lines.
- *Product-line extensions*, in which related products are added to an established brand. Dole, which is associated with fruit, was able to introduce refrigerated juices and juice bars, while Sun-Maid went from raisins to raisin bread. Meanwhile, Procter & Gamble is cleaning up with its Mr. Clean brand of liquid cleanser, aggressively putting the name on products such as Mr. Clean Magic Eraser, for removing crayon marks from walls and scuff marks from chair rails, and Mr. Clean AutoDry, for leaving a freshly washed car spot-free without hand drying.¹⁹
- *Licensing*, in which well-known names are "rented" by others. This strategy is increasing in popularity as marketers try to link their products and services with well-established brands. *Prevention* magazine introduced vitamins, and *Runner's World* magazine attempted to put its name on jogging suits. *Maxim* magazine brought out its own brand of hair colour for men, and at one point considered putting its name on night clubs and frozen food.
- *Look-alike packaging*, in which distinctive packaging designs create strong associations with a particular brand. This link is often exploited by makers of generic or private-label brands that wish to communicate a quality image by putting their products in similar packages. Imitating the look of an existing successful brand is common in today's crowded marketplace. However, one study found that a negative experience with an imitator brand increased evaluations of the original brand. A positive experience with the imitator had the opposite effect of decreasing evaluations of the original brand.²⁰ Another study found that consumers tend to react positively to "copycat brands" as long as the imitator doesn't make grandiose claims that it can't fulfil.²¹

Of course, this strategy can make a lot of work for lawyers if the copycat brand gets *too* close to the original. Marketers of distinctive brands work hard to protect their designs and logos, and every year companies file numerous lawsuits that hinge on the issue of

“consumer confusion”—how likely is it that one company’s logo, product design, or package is similar enough to another that the typical shopper would mistake one for the other. For example, Levi Strauss has sued almost 100 other apparel manufacturers that it claims have borrowed its trademark pocket design or the distinctive tab sewn into its garments’ vertical seams.²²

Companies with a well-established brand image try to encourage stimulus discrimination when they promote the unique attributes of their brand. One big issue arises when fake products masquerade as the real thing. The International AntiCounterfeiting Coalition, an industry group that combats piracy, estimates that trademark counterfeiting robs legitimate brand owners of \$200 billion annually.²³ As you might imagine, companies like Louis Vuitton go to great lengths to educate their consumers about the unique attributes of an original product and how to differentiate a true LV from an impostor.

Instrumental Conditioning

CO 4 **Instrumental conditioning**, also known as *operant conditioning*, occurs as the individual learns to perform behaviours that produce positive outcomes and to avoid behaviours that yield negative outcomes. This learning process is most closely associated with the psychologist B.F. Skinner, who demonstrated the effects of instrumental conditioning by teaching animals to dance, play Ping Pong, and so on by systematically rewarding them for desired behaviours.²⁴

Under classical conditioning, people respond involuntarily and fairly simply, often on the basis of very automatic responses. Under instrumental conditioning, people perform more complex behaviours and associate these behaviours with either rewards or punishments. The desired behaviour may be learned over a period of time, as intermediate actions are rewarded in a process called **shaping**. Shaping occurs when consumers are rewarded for successive steps taken toward the desired response. For example, the owner of a new store might award samples to shoppers just for coming into the store in a way that encourages trial, then provide consumers with coupons that stimulate low-involvement purchases, then reward consumers for signing up for a rewards program, and then finally reward them again when they come into the store and buy something more substantial.

Also, classical conditioning involves the close pairing of two stimuli. Instrumental learning occurs as a result of a reward received *following* the desired behaviour and takes place over a period in which a variety of other behaviours are attempted and abandoned because they are not reinforced. A good way to remember the difference is to keep in mind that in instrumental learning the response is performed because it is *instrumental* to gaining a reward or avoiding a punishment. Over time, consumers come to choose products that make them feel good or satisfy some social need and to associate with people who reward them.

Instrumental learning occurs in one of three ways. When the environment provides **positive reinforcement** in the form of a reward, the response is strengthened and appropriate behaviour is learned. For example, a woman who gets compliments after wearing a certain brand of perfume will learn that using this product has the desired effect, and she will be more likely to keep buying the product. Similarly, a user who gets a large number of “likes” on his Facebook status for posting humorous content, will be increasingly likely to do so again. **Negative reinforcement** also strengthens responses so that appropriate behaviour is learned. Negative reinforcement removes something negative in a way that increases a desired response. For example, when the retailer offers to pay the tax for the consumer, it is removing a negative stimulus (the tax) in a way that encourages the desired behaviour—making a purchase today!

In contrast, to reinforcement strategies that are used when marketers want to increase a particular behaviour, punishment is used to decrease an undesired behaviour. **Punishment** occurs when a response is followed by an unpleasant event. For

→ Tim Hortons rewards customers through their Roll Up the Rim campaign. This is a form of positive reinforcement, which serves to increase the chances consumers will perform the behaviour (buying products) again.

Steve White/CP Images



Marketing Insight

Marketing researchers frequently face the problem of consumers' reluctance to disclose personal information in surveys. Can online techniques help to overcome this barrier? Perhaps, if automated questioning can be made to resemble human interactions. One study found that when a computer appears to possess characteristics normally associated with human behaviour, such as using everyday language and taking turns in conversations, consumers respond favourably and form a relationship with the machine. In other words, they transfer rules they have learned in human interaction to a human-machine context. The research found that consumers are more likely to divulge personal information when the computer divulges information first, and that the degree of intimate disclosure gradually escalates. For example, the computer may disclose the fact that there are times when it crashes for no apparent reason and then ask the consumer to reciprocate by disclosing something about him- or herself. And those consumers who had engaged in self-disclosure and reciprocity with a computer were likely to evaluate products described online more favourably than those that had not engaged in this interaction.²⁵

example, being ridiculed by friends for wearing an offensive cologne or having the heel of your shoe rip off after buying a cheap pair would both be examples of punishment in the consumer context. We learn not to repeat these behaviours.

In terms of positive and negative reinforcement, when a positive outcome is no longer received, *extinction* of the behaviour is likely to occur and the learned stimulus-response connection will not be maintained (as when a woman no longer receives compliments on her perfume). Thus, either positive or negative reinforcement *strengthens* the future link between a response and an outcome because of the pleasant experience. This tie is *weakened* under conditions of both punishment and extinction because of the unpleasant experience. The relationships among these four conditions are easier to understand by referring to Figure 3-2.

Four Types of Learning Schedules

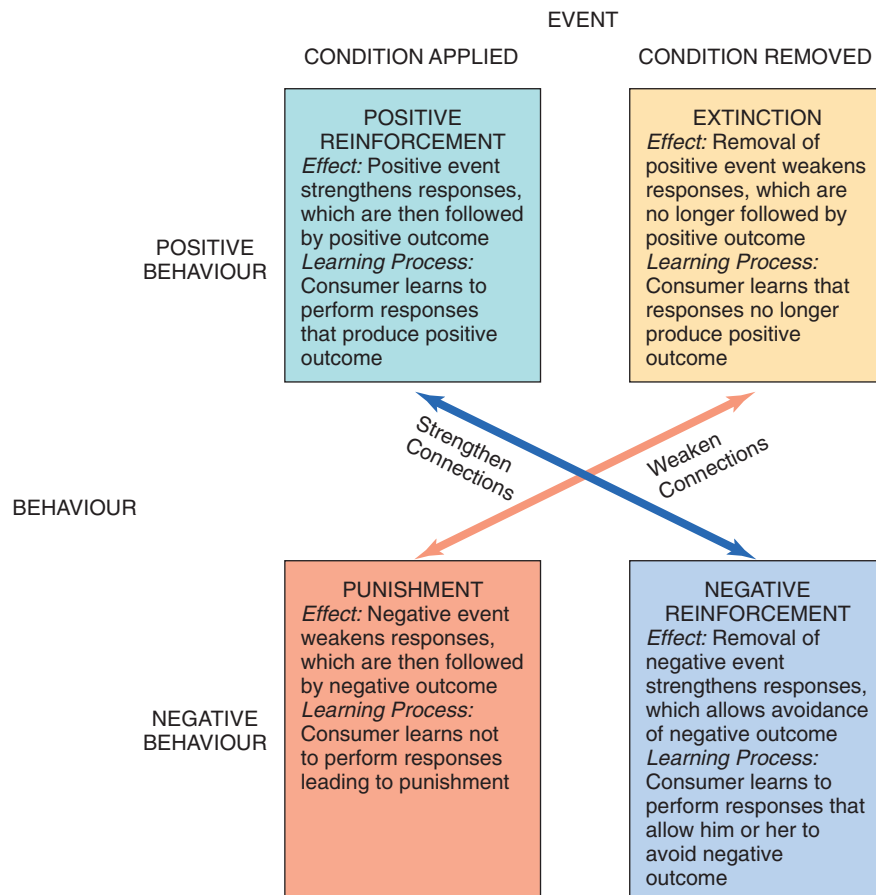
An important factor in operant conditioning is the set of rules by which appropriate reinforcements are given for a behaviour. The issue of what is the most effective *reinforcement schedule* to use is important to marketers, because it relates to the amount of effort and resources they must devote to rewarding consumers to condition desired behaviours. Two general ways in which consumers are reinforced for desired behaviours include ratio schedules and interval schedules. Ratio schedules reinforce the learner based on the number of responses that have been completed. For example, rewarding the consumer with a free gift after ten purchases is an example of a ratio reinforcement schedule. Interval schedules, on the other hand, reinforce the learner after a certain amount of time passes since the appropriate response. For example, you might be rewarded once a year by your bank for being a valued customer.

Drawing on this, several schedules are possible:

1. **Fixed-ratio reinforcement:** Reinforcement occurs only after a fixed number of responses. For example, a consumer might keep buying at the same store to earn a prize, knowing that after they make 14 purchases, they get their 15th purchase for free.

FIGURE 3-2

Four Types of Learning Outcomes



2. *Variable-ratio reinforcement:* The behaviour of a person is reinforced after a certain number of responses, but he or she does not know how many responses are required. People in such situations tend to respond at very high and steady rates, and this type of behaviour is very difficult to extinguish. An example of this is Tim Horton's "Roll Up the Rim to Win" Campaign. Consumers' chances of winning are based on a behaviour (buying a cup of coffee), but the consumer is not certain how many times they have to engage in the behaviour before they get the reward—anything from a free donut to a Toyota Camry Hybrid.
3. *Fixed-interval reinforcement:* After a specified time period has passed, the first response that is made brings the reward. Under such conditions, people tend to respond slowly right after being reinforced, but their responses speed up as the time for the next reinforcement looms. For example, consumers may crowd into a store for the last day of its seasonal sale and not reappear until the next sale.
4. *Variable-interval reinforcement:* The time that must pass before reinforcement is delivered varies around some average. Since the person does not know exactly when to expect the reinforcement, responses must be performed at a consistent rate. Take for example, a loyalty club member at a spa who gets mailed a coupon for a free facial once every eight to ten months.

Applications of Instrumental Conditioning Principles

Principles of instrumental conditioning are at work when a consumer is rewarded or punished for a purchase decision. For example, consumers who are rewarded in online marketplaces with discounts, bonus products, or even involving content are more likely to return again. Marketers often use shaping by gradually reinforcing consumers for taking appropriate actions. For example, a car dealer might encourage a reluctant buyer just to sit in a floor model, then suggest a test drive, and then try to close the deal. In a particularly ingenious example of shaping, Toyota Canada encourages consumers to take their vehicles for a weekend—a fairly big step in the shaping process.

One interesting example of positive reinforcement is foursquare (<http://foursquare.com>), a social platform, allowing consumers to “check in” to locations such as venues, events, and businesses. These “check-ins” get streamed through other social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook; allowing friends to keep track of the consumer’s whereabouts. The foursquare site provides positive reinforcement to consumers by rewarding them for visiting certain businesses with badges and points. And if you are the consumer to visit a particular venue the most, you will be dubbed the “mayor,” which may come with rewards such as free swag from the company!

REINFORCEMENT OF CONSUMPTION

Marketers use many ways to reinforce the behaviour of consumers, ranging from a simple “thank you” after a purchase to substantial rebates and follow-up phone calls. For example, a life insurance company obtained a much higher rate of policy renewal among a group of new customers who received a thank-you letter after each payment compared with a control group that did not receive any reinforcement.²⁶

FREQUENCY MARKETING

A popular technique known as **frequency marketing** reinforces the behaviour of regular purchasers by giving them prizes with values that increase along with the amount purchased. This operant learning strategy was pioneered by the airline industry, which introduced “frequent flyer” programs in the early 1980s to reward loyal customers.

Frequent-buyer programs are not just about consumers earning free trips and merchandise. Retailers can use related databases to refine everything from their merchandise mix to their marketing strategy on the basis of their detailed knowledge of consumers and their purchases. Costs are lowered by the ability to design focused and personalized marketing communications to the prime customer, customer retention programs are more effective, product launches and redesigns are more likely to be successful, and blunders are prevented.

COGNITIVE LEARNING THEORY

In contrast to behavioural theories of learning, **cognitive learning theory** stresses the importance of internal mental processes. This perspective views people as problem solvers who actively use information from the world around them to master their environment. Supporters of this viewpoint also stress the role of creativity and insight during the learning process.

An Ocean Spray commercial for diet cranberry juice illustrates how marketers can harness their knowledge of cognitive learning theories to tweak marketing messages. The spot features two men, in the role of cranberry growers, standing knee-deep in a bog. A group of women who are exercising joins them. Originally the ad depicted the women having a party, but a cognitive scientist who worked on the campaign nixed that idea; she argued that the exercise class would send the diet message more quickly whereas



**Join the Shoppers Optimum Program® today
and start earning points towards free stuff!**

The Shoppers Optimum loyalty program from Shoppers Drug Mart is an example of frequency marketing.

Courtesy of Shoppers Drug Mart

the party scene would confuse viewers who would spend too much time trying to figure out why the group was celebrating. This extra cognitive activity would distract from the ad's message. And, contrary to the standard advertising practice of mentioning the product as early as possible, she decided that the main characters should wait a few seconds before mentioning the new diet product. She reasoned that viewers would need a few more seconds to process the images, because of the additional action in the ad (the exercising). In a test of which ads get remembered best, this new version scored in the top 10 percent.²⁷

Is Learning Conscious or Not?

A lot of controversy surrounds the issue of whether or when people are aware of their learning processes. While behavioural learning theorists emphasize the routine, automatic nature of conditioning, proponents of cognitive learning argue that even these simple effects are based on cognitive factors; that is, expectations are created that a stimulus will be followed by a response (the formation of expectations requires mental activity). According to this school of thought, conditioning occurs because individuals develop conscious hypotheses and then act on them.

On the one hand, there is some evidence for the existence of unconscious procedural knowledge. People apparently do process at least some information in an automatic, passive way, which is a condition that has been termed *mindlessness*.²⁸ When we meet someone new or encounter a new product, for example, we have a tendency to respond to the stimulus in terms of existing categories rather than taking the trouble to formulate different ones. Our reactions are activated by a *trigger feature*—some stimulus that cues us toward a particular pattern. For example, men in one study rated a car in an ad as superior on a variety of characteristics if a seductive woman (the trigger feature) was present, despite the fact that the men did not believe the woman's presence actually had an influence on their evaluations.²⁹

Another recent study also illustrates this process. Undergraduates who were on their way to participate in a psychology experiment “accidentally” encountered a laboratory assistant who was laden with textbooks, a clipboard, papers, and a cup of hot or iced coffee and who asked for help with the cup. Guess what? The students who held a cup of iced coffee rated a hypothetical person they later read about as much colder, less social, and more selfish than did those who had helped out by holding a cup of hot coffee. Other

researchers report similar findings: People tidy up more thoroughly when there's a faint aroma of cleaning liquid in the air, and they act more competitively if there's a briefcase in the room. In each case, they change their behaviour without being aware of doing so.³⁰ Indeed, the bestselling book titled *Blink: The Power of Thinking without Thinking* argues that we often make snap judgments that result in decisions superior to those we think about a lot, because we rely on our “adaptive unconscious” to guide us.³¹

Nonetheless, many modern theorists are beginning to regard some instances of conditioning as cognitive processes, especially where expectations are formed about the links between stimuli and responses. Indeed, studies using *masking effects*, wherein it is difficult for subjects to consciously learn CS/UCS associations, show substantial reductions in conditioning.³² An adolescent girl may observe that women on TV and in real life seem to be rewarded with compliments and attention when they smell nice and wear alluring clothing. She figures out that the probability of these rewards occurring is greater when she wears perfume, and so she deliberately wears a popular scent to obtain the reward of social acceptance.

Observational Learning

CO 5 **Observational learning** occurs when people watch the actions of others and note the reinforcements they receive for their behaviours; learning occurs as a result of *vicarious* rather than direct experience. Importantly, while behavioural learning theories propose that individuals must directly experience the stimuli that influence their behaviours, cognitive learning theories can account for vicarious learning effects. This type of learning is a complex cognitive process; people store these observations in memory as they accumulate knowledge, perhaps using this information at a later point to guide their own behaviours. This process of imitating the behaviour of others is called *modelling*. For example, a woman shopping for a new kind of perfume may remember the reactions a friend received upon wearing a certain brand several months earlier, and she may base her purchase on her friend's experiences.

The modelling process is a powerful form of learning, and people's tendencies to imitate others' behaviours can have negative effects. Of particular concern is the potential of TV shows and movies to teach violence to children. Children may be exposed to new methods of aggression by models (e.g., cartoon heroes) in the shows they watch. At some later point the child may imitate these behaviours when he or she becomes angry.

A classic study demonstrates the effect of modelling on children's actions. Kids who watched an adult stomp on, knock down, and otherwise torture a large inflated “Bobo doll” repeated these behaviours when later left alone in a room with the doll; children who did not witness these acts did not.³³

For observational learning in the form of modelling to occur, four conditions must be met (which are summarized in Figure 3-3):³⁴

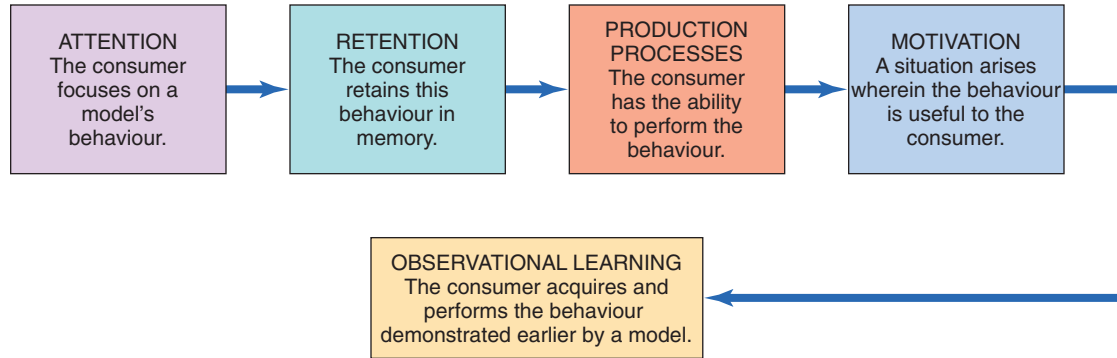
1. The consumer's attention must be directed toward the appropriate model whom, for reasons of attractiveness, competence, status, or similarity, it is desirable to emulate.
2. The consumer must remember what the model says or does.
3. The consumer must convert this information into actions.
4. The consumer must be motivated to perform these actions.

Applications of Cognitive Learning Principles

Consumers' ability to learn vicariously by observing how the behaviour of others is reinforced makes the lives of marketers much easier. Because people do not have to be reinforced directly for their actions, marketers do not necessarily have to reward or punish them for purchase behaviours. Instead, they can show what happens to models who use or do not use their products, in the knowledge that consumers will often be motivated to imitate these actions at a later time. For example, a perfume commercial may depict a woman surrounded by a throng of admirers who are providing her with positive reinforcement for using the product.

FIGURE 3-3

Components of Observational Learning



Consumers’ evaluations of the people they model go beyond simple stimulus-response connections. For example, a celebrity’s image often provokes more than a simple reflexive response of good or bad,³⁵ it is a complex combination of many attributes. In general, the degree to which a model will be emulated depends on his or her social attractiveness. Attractiveness can be based upon several components, including physical appearance, expertise, or similarity to the evaluator.

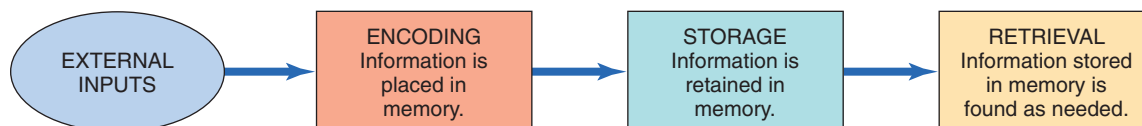
THE ROLE OF MEMORY IN LEARNING

CO 6 **Memory** involves a process of acquiring information and storing it over time so that it will be available when needed. Contemporary approaches to the study of memory employ an information-processing approach. They assume that the mind is in some ways like a computer: Data are input, processed, and output for later use in revised form. In the **encoding** stage, information is entered in a way the system will recognize. In the **storage** stage, this knowledge is integrated with what is already in memory and “warehoused” until needed. During **retrieval**, the mind accesses the desired information.³⁶ The memory process is summarized in Figure 3-4.

Many of our experiences are locked inside our heads and may surface years later if prompted by the right cues. Marketers rely on consumers to retain information they have learned about products and services, trusting that they will later apply it when they decide to buy. During the consumer decision-making process, this *internal memory* is combined with *external memory*—which includes all of the product details on packages, in shopping lists, and through other marketing stimuli—to permit brand alternatives to be identified and evaluated.³⁷ The grocery shopping list is a good example of a

FIGURE 3-4

The Memory Process



Marketing Insight



Brand names that use metaphors help trigger stories in our minds, and research suggests this strategy results in higher consumer evaluations compared to brand names composed of meaningless letters or numbers. One study reported that consumers rated cell phones from Samsung and LG more positively after they were the first in the industry to break the practice of naming the phones with combinations of letters and numbers—LG's phones sport names such as Chocolate, Shine, Vu, Voyager, Dare, and Decoy, while Samsung started things off with the BlackJack, UpStage, FlipShot, and Juke and later added the Access, Instinct, and Glyde. During the same period these companies increased market share in this category. Compared to other phone brands, consumers rated these models as modern, creative, engaging, original, cool, and easy to remember.³⁹

powerful external memory aid. When consumers use shopping lists, they buy approximately 80 percent of the items on the list, and the likelihood of a particular list item being purchased is higher if the person who wrote the list also participates in the shopping trip. Marketers also found that the likelihood of purchasing a list item increased with household size and is marginally greater during holiday periods. This means that if marketers can induce a consumer to plan to buy an item in advance of shopping, the probability of the item being purchased is high. One suggested way to encourage purchasing would be to provide peel-off stickers on packages so that when the consumer notices the supply is low, the consumer can peel off the label and place it directly onto a shopping list.³⁸

Research supports the idea that marketers can distort a consumer's recall of a product experience. What we think we "know" about products can be influenced by advertising messages to which we are exposed after using the products. This *postexperience advertising* is more likely to alter actual memories when it is very similar to or activates memories about the actual experience. For example, advertising can make a remembered product experience more favourable than it actually was.

Encoding of Information for Later Retrieval

The way information is *encoded* helps to determine how it will be represented in memory. Encoding involves linking new information to existing knowledge in order to make the new information more meaningful. In general, incoming data that are associated with other information already in memory stand a better chance of being retained. For example, brand names that are linked to physical characteristics⁴⁰ of a product category (Coffee-mate creamer or Sani-Flush toilet bowl cleaner) or that are easy to visualize (Tide detergent or Jaguar cars) tend to be more easily retained in memory than more abstract brand names.⁴¹

However, memory for brand names may interact with one's involvement in the product class. Low-involvement products, such as household cleaners, seem to benefit from descriptive names by being easier to remember. There is no evidence that descriptive names for high-involvement products, such as automobiles, are remembered any better than non-descriptive names.⁴²

TYPES OF MEANING

A consumer may process a stimulus simply in terms of its *sensory meaning*, such as its colour or shape. When this occurs the meaning may be activated when the person sees a picture of the stimulus. We may experience a sense of familiarity upon seeing an ad for a new snack food we tasted recently, for example. In many cases, though, meanings are encoded at a more abstract level. *Semantic meaning* refers to symbolic associations, such as the idea that rich people drink champagne.

PERSONAL RELEVANCE

Episodic memories are memories for events that are personally relevant.⁴³ As a result, a person's motivation to retain these memories will likely be strong. Couples often have a song that reminds them of their first date or their wedding. Often an important and compelling episodic event, such as one's wedding, will lead to memories that are quite vivid and unique, and are sometimes called *flashbulb memories*.

One method of conveying product information is through a *narrative* or a story. Much of the social information that an individual acquires is represented in memory this way. Therefore, using this method in product advertising can be an effective marketing technique. Narratives persuade people to construct a mental representation of the information they are viewing. Pictures aid in this construction and allow for a more developed and detailed mental representation.⁴⁴ Recent research supports the idea that brands are more likely to be positively evaluated and purchased when they connect to a consumer through a narrative.⁴⁵

CB As I See It



Dr. Scott Hawkins *Rotman School of Management University of Toronto*

Consumers confront a daily barrage of marketing information from an increasing number of sources in a growing variety of contexts. The number, pacing, placement, and complexity of the messages can quickly overwhelm consumers' abilities to process them. In addition, consumers tend to view many marketing claims as irrelevant to their current goals or of trivial value. This suggests that

consumers process many promotional messages with minimal levels of involvement.

Herbert Krugman was one of the first to argue that the high-involvement persuasion model, which portrays advertising as a means to overcome resistant attitudes, might not always offer the most appropriate criteria for gauging advertising effectiveness.¹ He argued that information processed under high involvement can raise consumer defences, whereas information processed under low involvement can have powerful effects on consumers' beliefs because their passive acceptance of messages can (perhaps without their awareness) alter the way they think about products and brands (i.e., incidentally learned information can influence consumers as much as, or even more than, intentionally learned information).

In a series of studies, my colleague and I examined how participants' level of involvement during initial exposure to marketing claims influenced what they learned and what they subsequently came to believe.² Participants rated consumer trivia statements (e.g., "Antihistamines have no effect on the common cold") as more true when they had been exposed to those statements earlier than when they had not (repetition-induced belief). It appeared that the repetition-induced belief resulted from the increased familiarity with the previously exposed claims. That is, repetition increased the familiarity of claims, and familiar claims were judged to be more valid than unfamiliar ones. Moreover, when participants processed the information during initial exposure in a *less* involved way (making a comprehension rating), the effect of repetition on belief became *more* pronounced relative to the high-involvement

condition (making a truth rating). Again, familiarity with the claims helped explain these results.

However, the familiarity of a claim had much less (although still significant) influence on participants' beliefs under high involvement. High-involvement processing leads to greater elaboration, which in turn leads to greater familiarity of the claim. High-involvement processing also produces more evaluative processing, which may limit the effects of familiarity. Thus, repetition of marketing messages can have a particularly strong impact on consumer beliefs under low involvement because consumers are likely to rely on the familiarity associated with the claims to assess their validity.

In another study, my colleague and I tested this interpretation by attempting to increase memory for the claims without also encouraging evaluative processing, which increases the accessibility of relevant prior knowledge. Repetition-induced belief was strongest when subjects engaged in a processing task (rote rehearsal) that increased familiarity without increasing evaluative processing of the information. It is interesting to note that marketers routinely use mnemonic devices such as rote repetition ("How do you spell relief? R-O-L-A-I-D-S") and jingles ("I wish I were an Oscar Mayer wiener") to increase rehearsal without inducing evaluative processing.

The power of simple repetition to build brand knowledge, especially when consumers are relatively uninvolved in processing those messages, seems especially important in a media environment that continues to become more cluttered. In a later study, my colleagues and I examined how greater levels of claim repetition and the relationships among claims can influence belief.³ We found that increasing the number of repetitions of a claim continues to increase belief in that claim, but the greatest impact occurs with the first exposure (i.e., there is some wearout of repetition). In addition, we found that by varying the claims slightly (so that there were multiple claims about related product features that all implied a common benefit), we could increase belief that a product had a general benefit simply by exposing participants to more of the related feature claims. Marketers often use "variations-on-a-theme advertising" that exposes consumers to multiple executions of the same brand benefit, which will not only help keep consumers interested but may also contribute to greater belief in the brand's benefit compared to simple repetition of the same advertising execution.

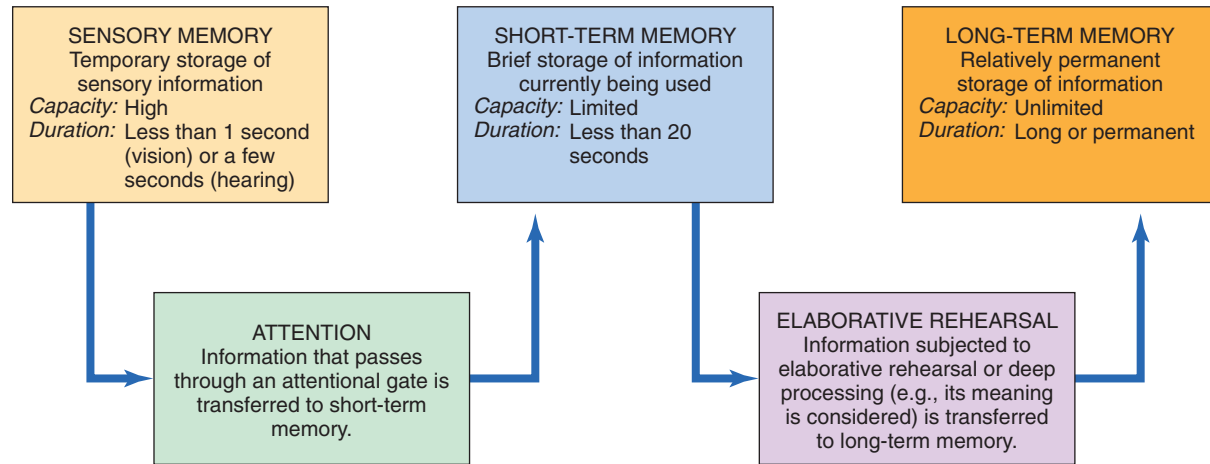
¹Herbert E. Krugman, "The Impact of Television Advertising: Learning without Involvement," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 29 (Fall 1965): 349–356.

²Scott A. Hawkins and Stephen J. Hoch, "Low-Involvement Learning: Memory without Evaluation," *Journal of Consumer Research* 19 (September 1992): 212–225.

³Scott A. Hawkins, Stephen J. Hoch, and Joan Meyers-Levy, "Low-Involvement Learning: Repetition and Coherence in Familiarity and Belief," *Journal of Consumer Psychology* 11 (2001): 1–11.

FIGURE 3-5

Relationships among Memory Systems



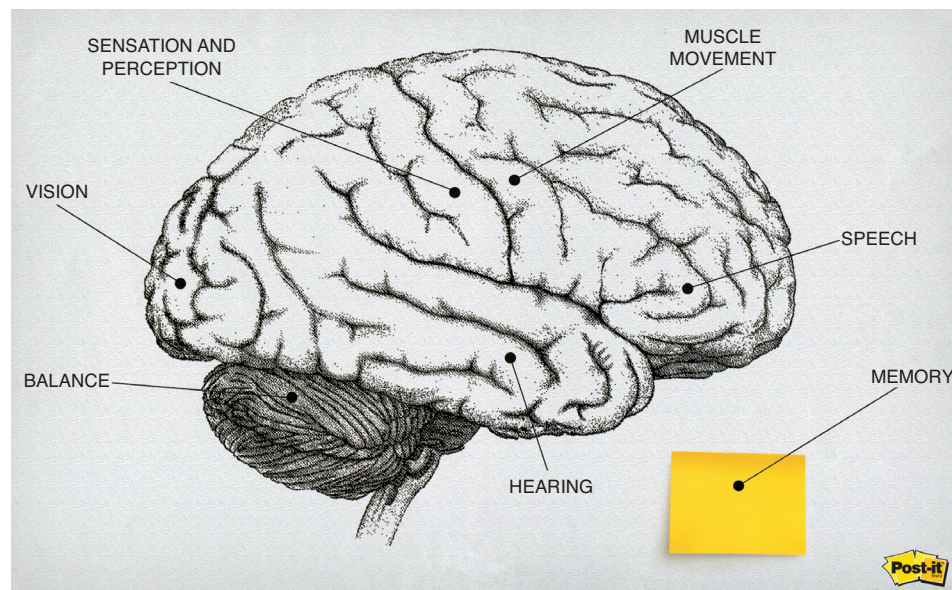
Memory Systems

According to the information-processing perspective, there are three distinct memory systems: sensory memory, short-term memory (STM), and long-term memory (LTM). Each plays a role in processing information. The interrelationships of these memory systems are summarized in Figure 3-5.

Sensory memory permits storage of the information we receive from our senses. This storage is very temporary; it lasts a couple of seconds at most. For example, a person might be walking past a doughnut shop and get a quick, enticing whiff of something baking inside. While this sensation would last for only a few seconds, it would be sufficient to allow the person to determine whether he or she should investigate further. If the information is retained for further processing, it passes through an *attentional gate* and is transferred to short-term memory.

→ This Brazilian ad illustrates that external memory aids such as Post-its can help us remember many of the details of modern life.

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Short-term memory also stores information for a limited period of time, and its capacity is limited. As with the RAM in a computer, this system can be regarded as *working memory*; it holds the information we are currently processing. Verbal input may be stored *acoustically* (in terms of how it sounds) or *semantically* (in terms of its meaning).⁴⁶

The information is stored by combining small pieces into larger ones in a process known as **chunking**. A chunk is a configuration that is familiar to the person and can be manipulated as a unit. For example, a brand name can be a chunk that summarizes a great deal of detailed information about the brand.

Initially it was believed that STM was capable of processing between five and nine chunks of information at a time, and for this reason phone numbers were designed to have seven digits.⁴⁷ It now appears that three to four chunks is the optimum size for efficient retrieval (10-digit phone numbers can be remembered because the individual digits are chunked, so we may remember a three-digit exchange as one piece of information).⁴⁸

Long-term memory is the system that allows us to retain information for a long period of time. For information to enter into long-term memory from short-term memory, **elaborative rehearsal** is required. This process involves thinking about the meaning of a stimulus and relating it to other information already in memory. Marketers sometimes assist in the process by devising catchy slogans or jingles that consumers repeat on their own.

Storing Information in Memory

Relationships among the types of memory are a source of some controversy. The traditional perspective, known as *multiple-store*, assumes that STM and LTM are separate systems. More recent research has moved away from the distinction between the two types of memory, instead emphasizing the interdependence of the systems. This work argues that, depending on the nature of the processing task, different levels of processing occur that activate some aspects of memory rather than others. These approaches are called **activation models of memory**.⁴⁹ The more effort it takes to process information (so-called deep processing), the more likely it is that information will be placed in long-term memory.

ASSOCIATIVE NETWORK MODELS

Associative network models propose that an incoming piece of information is stored in an *associative network* containing many bits of related information organized according to some set of relationships. The consumer has organized systems of concepts relating to brands, stores, manufacturers, etc. Associative network models assume that it is the associations that form in consumers' minds that lead to learning about brands and products. For example, the more times a brand name (i.e., Volvo) becomes associated with a trait or benefit (i.e., safety) in memory, the stronger the link between the brand and the benefit become,⁵¹ particularly if the brand and the benefit are uniquely associated.⁵²

These storage units, known as **knowledge structures**, can be thought of as complex spiderwebs filled with pieces of data. Information is placed into *nodes*, which are connected by *associative links* within these structures. Pieces of information seen as similar or associated in some way are chunked together under some more abstract category. New, incoming information is interpreted to be consistent with the structure already in place.⁵³ According to the *hierarchical processing model*, a message—an ad, for instance—is processed in a bottom-up fashion: Processing begins at a very basic level and is subject to increasingly complex processing operations that require greater cognitive capacity. If processing at one level fails to evoke the next level, processing of the ad is terminated and capacity is allocated to other tasks.⁵⁴

Links form between nodes as an associative network is developed. For example, a consumer might have a network for “perfumes.” Each node represents a concept related to the category. This node can be an attribute, a specific brand, a celebrity identified with

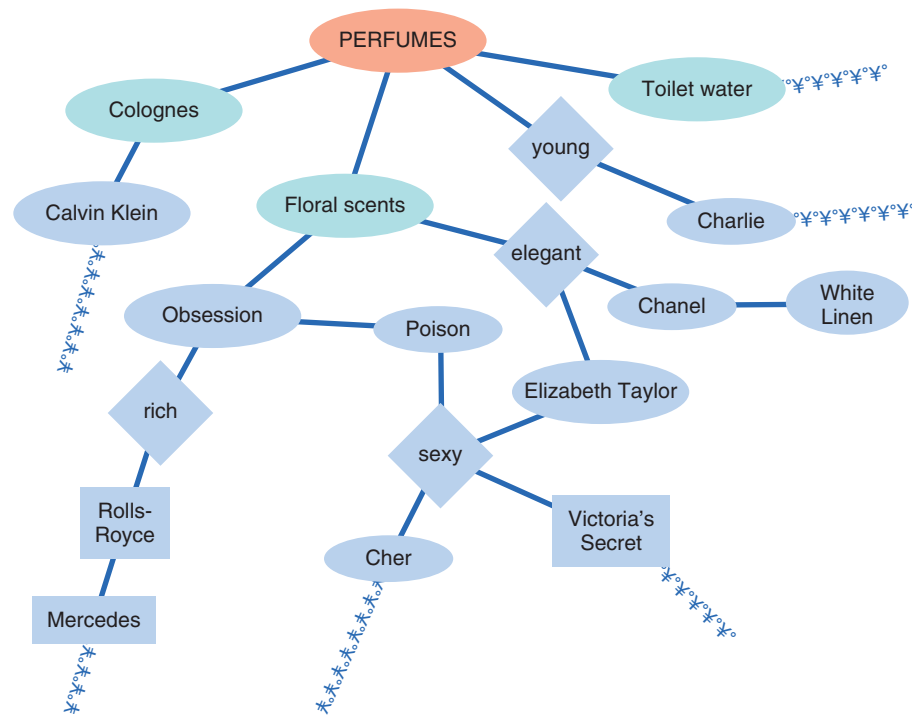


Consumers in Focus

In the age of Google, Facebook, and Wikipedia, sometimes consumers experience the problem, not of remembering too little, but of remembering *too much*. The Internet records everything and forgets nothing, even when we wish it would. A survey Microsoft conducted found that 75 percent of U.S. recruiters do online research about job candidates and many use social media sites like Facebook and photo-sharing sites to get the real 411 on prospective employees. Seventy percent of employers have rejected candidates because of information they found online. It's hard to get away with anything when your behaviour seems to get as much attention as the misdeeds of celebrities like Charlie Sheen! One 26-year-old woman told a reporter she dreaded being tagged in online photos, because people would see the outfits she wears when she's out on the town. As she observed, “You have movie-star issues and you're just a person.” This constant scrutiny means it's getting harder and harder to people get a “mulligan” (a golf term for a replay). In a wired world, your former transgressions are never forgotten.⁵⁰

FIGURE 3-6

An Associative Network for Perfumes



a perfume, or even a related product. A network for perfumes might include concepts such as the names Chanel, Obsession, and Calvin Klein, as well as attributes such as sexy and elegant.

When asked to list perfumes, the consumer would recall only those brands contained in the appropriate category. This group constitutes that person's **evoked set** (something we discuss in greater detail in Chapter 9). The task of a new entrant that wants to position itself as a category member (e.g., a new luxury perfume) is to provide cues that facilitate its placement in the appropriate category. A sample network for perfumes is shown in Figure 3-6.

SPREADING ACTIVATION

A meaning can be activated indirectly; energy spreads across nodes of varying levels of abstraction. As one node is activated, other nodes associated with it also begin to be triggered. Meaning thus spreads across the network, bringing up concepts including competing brands and relevant attributes that are used to form attitudes toward the brand.

This process of **spreading activation** allows consumers to shift back and forth between levels of meaning. The way a piece of information is stored in memory depends on the type of meaning assigned to it. This meaning type will, in turn, determine how and when the meaning is activated. For example, the *memory trace* for an ad could be stored in one or more of the following ways:

1. *Brand-specific*: in terms of claims made for the brand
2. *Ad-specific*: in terms of the medium or content of the ad itself
3. *Brand identification*: in terms of the brand name
4. *Product category*: in terms of how the product works, where it should be used, or experiences with the product
5. *Evaluative reactions*: in terms of whether "that looks like fun"⁵⁵

LEVELS OF KNOWLEDGE Knowledge is coded at different levels of abstraction and complexity. *Meaning concepts* are individual nodes (e.g., elegant). These may be combined into a larger unit, called a *proposition* (also known as a *belief*). A proposition links two nodes together to form a more complex meaning, which can serve as a single chunk of information. For example, a proposition might be that “Chanel is a perfume for elegant women.”

Propositions are, in turn, integrated to produce a complex unit known as a *schema*. As was noted in Chapter 2, a **schema** is a cognitive framework that is developed through experience. Information consistent with an existing schema is encoded more readily.⁵⁶ The ability to move up and down among levels of abstraction greatly increases processing flexibility and efficiency. For this reason, young children, who do not yet have well-developed schemas, are not able to make as efficient use of purchase information as older children.⁵⁷

One type of schema that is relevant to consumer behaviour is a **script**—a sequence of procedures that is expected by an individual. For example, consumers learn service scripts that guide expectations and purchasing behaviour in business settings. Consumers learn to expect a certain sequence of events and may become uncomfortable if the service departs from the script. A service script for your visit to the dentist might include events such as the following: (1) driving to the dentist, (2) reading old magazines in the waiting room, (3) hearing your name called and sitting in the dentist’s chair, (4) having the dentist put a funny substance on your teeth, (5) having the dentist clean your teeth, and so on. This desire to follow a script helps to explain why such service innovations as automatic bank machines and self-service gas stations initially met with resistance by some consumers who had trouble adapting to a new sequence of events.⁵⁸

Analogical Learning

One implication of the notion of these cognitive structures that exist in memory is that it helps to explain ways marketers can help consumers learn new information; something that marketers often care about when introducing new and innovative products.⁵⁹ One way consumers can learn about new products and features is through **analogical learning**. If the marketer wants to inform or educate the consumer about a new product, the marketer might do so by drawing an analogy (i.e., highlighting similarities) between the new product and an existing product.

In analogical learning, the existing product is called the **base** (as it is the original source of knowledge) and the new product is called the **target** (as this is what the existing knowledge will be transferred to). Analogical learning occurs because the consumer can easily integrate existing knowledge from the base into the formation of the new knowledge structure (e.g., the schema for the target) regarding the new product.⁶⁰ For example, when Listerine first introduced their new Fresh Burst Breath Strips, which dissolve on the tongue and freshen breath, they compared the new product to a well-established and familiar existing product—Listerine Mouthwash—to highlight the ability of the new product to freshen breath.

Analogical learning can take one of two forms. First, it may occur at the level of **attributes**, which are identifiable features or properties of the product. In the example of the Listerine breath strips, realizing that a previous product and the new product both come in distinctive green packaging would be an example of attribute-based learning. Second, analogical learning can occur at the level of relations. **Relations** refer to how the product relates to a desired outcome. In the example above, realizing that both mouthwash and the fresh strips can serve to freshen breath highlights a relational analogy.⁶¹ Importantly, what types of analogies are most effective may depend on the target market; while experts represent product information in terms of relational features, novices tend to think about products more in terms of attributes. For example, a professional golfer will learn about a new innovative golfing product by relating its performance (e.g., swing speed) to previous clubs that he or she has used. In contrast, a novice golfer would be more likely to understand a new innovative golf product by comparing its physical attributes (e.g., size of club head) to golf clubs that he or she had previously seen.

→ This ad from BC Hydro helps consumers understand how little sense it makes to waste household energy by using an analogy.

Ad Agency: DDB Canada/Vancouver B.C., Photography: Frank Hoedl



Retrieving Information for Purchase Decisions

Retrieval is the process of accessing information from long-term memory. As evidenced by the popularity of the TV show *Are You Smarter Than a 5th Grader?* people have a vast quantity of information stored in their heads that is not necessarily available on demand. Although most of the information entered into long-term memory does not go away, it may be difficult or impossible to retrieve unless the appropriate cues are present.

FACTORS INFLUENCING RETRIEVAL

Some differences in retrieval ability are physiological. Older adults consistently display inferior recall ability for current items, such as prescription information, though events that happened to them when they were younger may be recalled with great clarity.⁶²

Other factors are situational, relating to the environment in which the message is delivered by comparing energy production to a natural process. Not surprisingly, recall is enhanced when the consumer pays more attention to the message in the first place. Some evidence indicates that information about a *pioneering brand* (the first brand to enter a market) is more easily retrieved from memory than follower brands because the product's introduction is likely to be distinctive and, for the time being, no competitors divert the consumer's attention.⁶³ In addition, in the case of low-involvement products, descriptive brand names are more likely to be recalled than those that do not provide adequate cues about what the product is.⁶⁴

The viewing environment of a marketing message can also affect recall. For example, commercials shown during baseball games yield the lowest recall scores among sports programs because the activity is stop-and-go rather than continuous. Unlike hockey or basketball, the pacing of baseball gives many opportunities for attention to wander, even during play. Similarly, General Electric found that its commercials fare better in TV shows with continuous activity, such as stories or dramas, compared with variety shows or talk shows punctuated by a series of acts.⁶⁵ Finally, a large-scale analysis of TV commercials found that commercials shown first in a series of ads are recalled better than those shown last.⁶⁶

Recent research on *postexperience advertising effects* underscores how powerful marketing communications can be in shaping our daily experiences. Language and

imagery from ads we have seen recently can become confused with our own experiential memories so that we may come to believe that what we saw in advertising actually was our own experience with products. One study showed that when consumers were exposed to advertising after they had directly experienced a product, the ad altered their recollections of the experience.⁶⁷

FAMILIARITY AND RECALL As a general rule, prior familiarity with an item enhances its recall. Indeed, this is one of the basic goals of marketers who are trying to create and maintain awareness of their products. The more experience a consumer has with a product, the better use that person is able to make of product information.⁶⁸

However, there is a possible fly in the ointment. As noted earlier in this chapter, some evidence indicates that extreme familiarity can result in inferior learning and recall. When consumers are highly familiar with a brand or an advertisement, they may attend to fewer attributes because they do not believe that any additional effort will yield a gain in knowledge.⁶⁹ For example, when consumers are exposed to the technique of *radio replay*, in which the audio track from a TV ad is replayed on the radio, they do very little critical, evaluative processing and instead mentally replay the video portion of the ad.⁷⁰

SALIENCE AND RECALL The **salience** of a brand refers to its prominence or level of activation in memory. As noted in Chapter 2, stimuli that stand out in contrast to their environment are more likely to command attention, which in turn increases the likelihood that they will be recalled. Almost any technique that increases the novelty of a stimulus also improves recall (a result known as the **von Restorff effect**).⁷¹ This effect explains why unusual advertising or distinctive packaging tends to facilitate brand recall.⁷²

Introducing a surprise element into an ad (such as the Energizer Bunny, who unexpectedly marches through a commercial) can be particularly effective in aiding recall even if the stimulus is not relevant to the factual information being presented.⁷³ In addition, so-called *mystery ads*, in which the brand is not identified until the end of the ad, are more effective at building associations in memory between the product category and that brand—especially in the case of relatively unknown brands.⁷⁴ And the intensity and type of emotions we experience at the time also affect the way we recall the event later. We recall mixed emotions (those with positive and negative components) differently than **unipolar emotions** (those that are either wholly positive or wholly negative). The latter become even more polarized over time, so that we recall good things as even better than they were and bad things as even worse.⁷⁵

PICTORIAL VERSUS VERBAL CUES Is a picture worth a thousand words? There is some evidence for the superiority of visual memory over verbal memory, but this advantage is unclear because it is more difficult to measure recall of pictures.⁷⁶ However, the available data indicate that information presented in picture form is more likely to be recognized later.⁷⁷ Certainly visual aspects of an ad are more likely to grab a consumer's attention. In fact, eye-movement studies indicate that about 90 percent of viewers look at the dominant picture in an ad before they bother to view the copy.⁷⁸

Although pictorial ads may enhance recall, they do not necessarily improve comprehension. One study found that TV news items presented with illustrations (still pictures) as a backdrop result in improved recall for details of the news story, even though understanding of the story's content does not improve.⁷⁹

FACTORS INFLUENCING FORGETTING

Marketers obviously hope that consumers will not forget about their products. However, in a poll of more than 13 000 adults, more than half were unable to remember any specific ad they had seen, heard, or read in the last 30 days.⁸⁰ Forgetting is obviously a problem for marketers.

Early memory theorists assumed that memories fade because of the simple passage of time. In a process of decay, the structural changes in the brain produced by learning simply go away. Forgetting also occurs because of **interference**; as additional information is learned, it displaces earlier information.

Stimulus–response associations will be forgotten if consumers subsequently learn new responses to the same or similar stimuli in a process known as *retroactive interference*. On the other hand, prior learning can interfere with new learning, a process called *proactive interference*. Since pieces of information are stored in memory as nodes that are connected to one another by links; a meaning concept that is connected by a larger number of links is more likely to be retrieved. But, as new responses are learned, a stimulus loses its effectiveness in retrieving the old response.⁸¹

These interference effects help to explain problems in remembering brand information. Consumers tend to organize attribute information by brand.⁸² Additional attribute information regarding a brand or similar brands may limit a person’s ability to recall old brand information. Recall may also be inhibited if the brand name comprises frequently used words. These words cue competing associations and result in less retention of brand information.⁸³

In one study, brand evaluations deteriorated more rapidly when ads for the brand appeared with messages for other brands in the same category than when the ad was shown with ads for 12 dissimilar products.⁸⁴ By increasing the salience of a brand, marketers can impair the recall of other brands.⁸⁵ However, calling a competitor by name can result in poorer recall for one’s own brand.⁸⁶

Products as Memory Markers

Products and ads can themselves serve as powerful retrieval cues. Indeed, the three types of possessions most valued by consumers are furniture, visual art, and photos. The most common explanation for this attachment is the ability of these things to call forth memories of the past.⁸⁷ Studies find that valued possessions can evoke thoughts about people and prior events on several dimensions, including friends and loved ones, sensory experiences, and memories of breaking away from parents or former partners.⁸⁸ In fact, researchers are just beginning to probe the effects of *autobiographical memories* on buying behaviour. These memories appear to be one way that advertisements create emotional responses. Ads that succeed in getting us to think about our own past also appear to get us to like these ads more—especially if the link between the nostalgia experience and the brand is strong.⁸⁹ Products are particularly important as life-markers when our sense of past is threatened, as when a consumer’s current identity is challenged because of some change in role caused by divorce, moving, graduation, and so on.⁹⁰ Our possessions often have *mnemonic* qualities that serve as a form of external memory by prompting consumers to retrieve episodic memories. For example, family photography allows consumers to create their own retrieval cues, with the 11 billion amateur photos taken annually forming a kind of external memory bank for our culture.

THE MARKETING POWER OF NOSTALGIA

Nostalgia has been described as a bittersweet emotion, in which the past is viewed with both sadness and longing. References to “the good old days” are increasingly common as advertisers call up memories of distant youth—feelings they hope will translate to what they’re selling today. A stimulus can sometimes evoke a weakened response much later, an effect known as *spontaneous recovery*. This reestablished connection may explain consumers’ powerful nostalgic reactions to songs, pictures, or brands they have not been exposed to in many years.

Why are nostalgia appeals so welcomed by consumers? According to one consumer analyst, “We are creating a new culture, and we don’t know what’s going to happen. So we need some warm fuzzies from our past.”⁹¹ Or this strategy may work because more than half of adults think things were better in the past than they are today, according to research by Roper Starch Worldwide.⁹²

A **retro brand** is an updated version of a brand from a prior historical period. These products trigger nostalgia, and researchers find that they often inspire consumers to think back to an era where (at least in our memories) life was more stable, simple, or even utopian; they let us “look back through rose-coloured glasses.”⁹³ Recent research suggests that consumer preferences for nostalgic brands are related to a need to belong and that consumption of nostalgic products can resolve belongingness needs.⁹⁴

Food can do the same thing. One study looked at how favourite recipes stimulate memories of the past. When the researchers asked informants to list three of their favourite recipes and to talk about these choices, they found that people tended to link them with memories of past events such as childhood memories, family holidays, milestone events (such as dishes they make only on special holidays such as corned beef and cabbage on St. Patrick’s Day), heirlooms (recipes handed down through generations), and the passing of time (e.g., eating blueberry cobbler only in the summer).⁹⁵

MEMORY AND AESTHETIC PREFERENCES

We like ads and products that remind us of our past; prior experiences also determine what we like now. The *nostalgia index* indicates that people’s tastes in such products as movies and clothing are influenced by what was popular during certain critical periods of their youth. For example, liking a specific song appears to be related to how old a person was when that song was popular. On average, songs that were popular when an individual was 23.5 years old are the most likely to be favoured; favourite movie stars and fashion models are usually those who were popular when that individual was 26 and 33 years old, respectively; and men, but not women, also show evidence of nostalgic attachment to cars from their youth.⁹⁶

Measuring Memory for Marketing Stimuli

CO 7 Because advertisers pay so much money to place their messages in front of consumers, they are naturally concerned about whether people will actually remember these messages at a later point in time. It seems that they have good reason to be concerned. In one study, fewer than 40 percent of TV viewers made positive links between commercial messages and the corresponding products, only 65 percent noticed the brand name in a commercial, and only 38 percent recognized a connection to an important point.⁹⁸ Even more sadly, only 7 percent of TV viewers can recall the product or company featured in the most recent TV commercial they watched.

Ironically, we may be more likely to remember companies that we don’t like—perhaps because of the strong negative emotions they evoke. In a 2007 survey, for example, that assessed both recall of companies and their reputations, four of the ten best-remembered companies also ranked in the bottom ten of reputation rankings: Halliburton, Ford, General Motors, and ExxonMobil. In fact, Halliburton, with the lowest reputation score, scored the highest media recall of all 60 companies in the survey.⁹⁹

RECOGNITION VERSUS RECALL

One indicator of good advertising is, of course, the impression it makes on consumers. But how can this impact be defined and measured? Two basic measures of impact are *recognition* and *recall*. In the typical recognition test, subjects are shown ads one at a time and asked whether they have seen them before. In contrast, free-recall tests ask consumers to think independently of what they have seen, without being prompted for this information first; obviously, this task requires greater effort on the part of respondents. For example, InterMedia Advertising Group is a research firm that measures advertising effectiveness by monitoring the ability of the TV-viewing population to remember an ad within 24 hours. The firm assigns a recall index to each ad to indicate



Marketing Insight

The head office for Fluevog Shoes, a world-famous, fashion-forward shoe store, is located in Vancouver. Fluevog stores are also found in Boston, San Francisco, Seattle, Toronto, and New York. Fluevog’s success illustrates the power of applying learning theories effectively. The store name, for example, is just difficult (and interesting) enough to pronounce to be easy to remember. (John Fluevog’s family name was adopted from the Norwegian village from which they emigrated to Canada.) They sell memorable (i.e., fun and imaginative) styles, with names such as Lounge Lizards, Swingers, Wok ‘n Roll, Angels, Demerol (yes, it’s a nurse’s Fluevog), and Granny Glamour, to a primarily youthful market (aged 18 to 50 years, 60 percent female).

Fluevog carries the strategy to be distinctive through to store decor and marketing communications. Each store is designed to fit with its neighbourhood and the previous life of that neighbourhood. The Toronto store retained some fixtures and furnishings from its diner days, while the San Francisco store is reminiscent of a smoking parlour with overstuffed couches. Fluevog stays away from runway placements and conventional promotions, opting for wacky ads, pocket-sized catalogues, in-store fashion shows and sample sales, angels moulded on shoe soles, and poetry enclosures in shoes. The company’s website (www.fluevog.com) attracts about two million visits every month.⁹⁷

the strength of its impact. Scores for 2002 attest to the power of a memorable character in aiding recall. Ads with well-known celebrities such as Britney Spears tend to have very high recall rates.¹⁰⁰

Under some conditions these two memory measures tend to yield the same results, especially when the researchers try to keep the viewers' interest in the ads constant.¹⁰¹ Generally, though, recognition scores tend to be more reliable and do not decay over time the way recall scores do.¹⁰² Recognition scores are almost always better than recall scores, because recognition is a simpler process and more retrieval cues are available to the consumer.

Both types of retrieval play important roles in purchase decisions. Recall tends to be more important in situations in which consumers do not have product data at their disposal, and so they must rely on memory to generate this information.¹⁰³ On the other hand, recognition is more likely to be an important factor in a store where consumers are confronted with thousands of product options and information (i.e., where external memory is abundantly available) and where the task may simply be to recognize a familiar package. Unfortunately, package recognition and familiarity can have a negative consequence in that warning labels may be ignored, since their existence is taken for granted and not really noticed.¹⁰⁴

PROBLEMS WITH MEMORY MEASURES

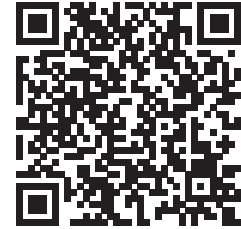
Although the measurement of an ad's memorability is important, the ability of existing measures to accurately assess these dimensions has been criticized for several reasons.

RESPONSE BIASES Results obtained from a measuring instrument are not necessarily caused by what is being measured, but rather to something else about the instrument or the respondent. This form of contamination is called a **response bias**. For example, people tend to give "yes" responses to questions, regardless of what is asked. In addition, consumers are often eager to be "good subjects" by pleasing the experimenter. They will try to give the responses they think the experimenter is looking for. In some studies, the claimed recognition of bogus ads (ads that have not been seen before) is almost as high as the recognition rate of real ads.¹⁰⁵

MEMORY LAPSES People are also prone to unintentionally forgetting information. Typical problems include *omitting* (the leaving out of facts), *averaging* (the tendency to "normalize" things and not report extreme cases), and *telescoping* (the inaccurate recall of time).¹⁰⁶ These distortions call into question the accuracy of various product usage databases that rely on consumers to recall their purchases and consumption of food and household items. In one study, for example, people were asked to describe what portion of various foods—small, medium, or large—they ate in a normal meal. However, different definitions of medium were used (e.g., 3/4 cup versus 1-1/2 cups). Regardless of the measurement specified, about the same number of people claimed they normally ate medium portions.¹⁰⁷

MEMORY FOR FACTS VERSUS FEELINGS Although techniques are being developed to increase the accuracy of memory scores, these improvements do not address the more fundamental issue of whether recall is necessary for advertising to have an effect. In particular, some critics argue that these measures do not adequately tap the impact of "feeling" ads, where the objective is to arouse strong emotions rather than to convey concrete product benefits. Many ad campaigns, including those for Hallmark, Tim Hortons, and Bell use this approach. An effective strategy relies on a long-term buildup of feeling rather than on a one-shot attempt to convince consumers to buy the product.¹⁰⁸

Also, it is not clear that recall translates into preference. We may recall the benefits touted in an ad but not believe them. Or the ad may be memorable because it is obnoxious, and the product becomes one we "love to hate." The bottom line is that while recall is important, especially for creating brand awareness, it is not necessarily sufficient to alter consumer preferences. To accomplish this, marketers need more sophisticated attitude-change strategies. These issues will be discussed in Chapters 7 and 8.



CHAPTER SUMMARY

IT'S IMPORTANT FOR MARKETERS TO UNDERSTAND HOW CONSUMERS LEARN ABOUT PRODUCTS AND SERVICES.

- Learning is a change in behaviour that is caused by experience. Learning can occur through simple associations between a stimulus and a response or via a complex series of cognitive activities.

CONDITIONING RESULTS IN LEARNING.

- Behavioural learning theories assume that learning occurs as a result of responses to external events. Classical conditioning occurs when a stimulus that naturally elicits a response (an unconditioned stimulus) is paired with another stimulus that does not initially elicit this response. Over multiple pairings, the second stimulus (the conditioned stimulus) comes to elicit the response as well.

LEARNED ASSOCIATIONS CAN GENERALIZE TO OTHER THINGS, WHICH IS IMPORTANT TO MARKETERS.

- This response can also extend to other, similar stimuli in a process known as stimulus generalization. This process is the basis for such marketing strategies as licensing and family branding, in which a consumer's positive associations with a product are transferred to other contexts.

THERE IS A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CLASSICAL AND INSTRUMENTAL CONDITIONING.

- Operant or instrumental conditioning occurs as the person learns to perform behaviours that produce positive outcomes and avoid those that result in negative outcomes. While classical conditioning involves the pairing of two stimuli, instrumental learning occurs when reinforcement is delivered following a response to a stimulus. Positive reinforcement occurs when a desired

response is followed by the presentation of a positive stimulus, while negative reinforcement occurs when a desired response is followed by the removal of a negative stimulus. Punishment, on the other hand, occurs when a response is followed by an unpleasant stimulus. Extinction of the behaviour will occur if reinforcement is no longer received.

OBSERVATION OF OTHERS' BEHAVIOUR CAN RESULT IN LEARNING.

- Cognitive learning occurs as the result of mental processes. For example, observational learning takes place when the consumer performs a behaviour as a result of seeing someone else performing it and being rewarded for it.

MEMORY SYSTEMS WORK.

- Memory refers to the storage of learned information. The way information is encoded when it is perceived determines how it will be stored in memory. The memory systems known as sensory memory, short-term memory, and long-term memory each play a role in retaining and processing information from the outside world.

OUR KNOWLEDGE OF INDIVIDUAL PRODUCTS IS INFLUENCED BY OTHER PRODUCTS WE ASSOCIATE WITH THEM.

- Information is not stored in isolation; it is incorporated into knowledge structures where it is associated with other related data. The location of product information in associative networks and the level of abstraction at which it is coded help to determine when and how this information will be activated at a later time. Some factors that influence the likelihood of retrieval include the level of familiarity with an item, its salience (or prominence) in memory, and whether the information was presented in pictorial or written form.

Visit the text's website for Chapter Quizzes, BizSkill and Decision-Making Mini Simulations, Glossary Flashcards, Audio Chapter Summaries, and Student PowerPoint Slides.

PRODUCTS HELP US TO RETRIEVE MEMORIES FROM OUR PAST.

- Products also play a role as memory markers; they are used by consumers to retrieve memories about past experiences (autobiographical memories) and are often valued for their ability to do so. This function also contributes to the use of nostalgia in marketing strategies.

MARKETERS MEASURE OUR MEMORIES ABOUT PRODUCTS AND ADS.

- Memory of product information can be measured through either recognition or recall techniques. Consumers are more likely to recognize an advertisement if it is presented to them than to recall one without having any cues. However, neither recognition nor recall automatically or reliably translates into product purchases.

KEY TERMS

Activation models of memory p. 79	Extinction p. 65	Retrieval p. 75
Advertising wearout p. 66	Frequency marketing p. 72	Retro brand p. 85
Analogical learning p. 81	Instrumental conditioning p. 69	Salience p. 83
Associative learning p. 64	Interference p. 84	Schema p. 81
Attributes p. 81	Knowledge structures p. 79	Script p. 81
Base p. 81	Learning p. 63	Sensory memory p. 78
Behavioural learning theories p. 63	Long-term memory p. 79	Shaping p. 69
Brand equity p. 66	Masked branding p. 66	Short-term memory p. 79
Chunking p. 79	Memory p. 75	Spreading activation p. 80
Classical conditioning p. 64	Negative reinforcement p. 69	Stimulus discrimination p. 66
Cognitive learning theory p. 72	Nostalgia p. 84	Stimulus generalization p. 65
Conditioned response (CR) p. 64	Observational learning p. 74	Storage p. 75
Conditioned stimulus (CS) p. 64	Positive reinforcement p. 69	Target p. 81
Decay p. 65	Punishment p. 69	Unconditioned stimulus (UCS) p. 64
Elaborative rehearsal p. 79	Relations p. 81	Unipolar emotions p. 83
Encoding p. 75	Response bias p. 86	von Restorff effect p. 83
Evoked set p. 80		

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is the difference between an unconditioned stimulus and a conditioned stimulus?
2. How can marketers use repetition to increase the likelihood that consumers will learn about their brand?
3. Why is it not necessarily a good idea to advertise a product in a commercial in which a really popular song is playing in the background?
4. What is the difference between classical conditioning and instrumental conditioning?
5. How do different types of reinforcement enhance learning? How does the strategy of frequency marketing relate to conditioning?
6. What is the major difference between behavioural and cognitive theories of learning?
7. Name the three stages of information processing.
8. What is external memory and why is it important to marketers?
9. Give an example of an episodic memory.
10. Why do phone numbers have seven digits?
11. List three types of memory and explain how they work together.
12. How is associative memory like a spiderweb?
13. How does the likelihood that a person will be willing to use an ABM machine relate to a schema?

14. Why does a pioneering brand have a memory advantage over follower brands?
15. If a consumer is familiar with a product, seeing an ad for it can work both ways by either enhancing or diminishing recall. Why?
16. How does learning new information make it more likely that we'll forget things we've already learned?
17. Define nostalgia and explain why it's such a widely used advertising strategy.
18. Name the two basic measures of memory and describe how they differ from one another.
19. List three problems with measures of memory in the field of advertising.

CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR CHALLENGE

Discuss

1. In his 2005 book *Blink: The Power of Thinking without Thinking*, author Malcolm Gladwell argues that hallowed marketing research techniques such as focus groups are ineffective. According to Gladwell, we usually react to products quickly and without much conscious thought, so it's better to simply solicit consumers' first impressions rather than getting them to think at length about why they buy. What's your position on this issue?
2. Some diehard fans were not pleased when the Rolling Stones sold the tune "Start Me Up" for about \$4 million to Microsoft, which wanted the classic song to promote its Windows 95 launch. The Beach Boys sold "Good Vibrations" to Cadbury Schweppes for its Sunkist soft drink, and Bob Dylan sold "The Times They Are A-Changin'" to Coopers & Lybrand (now PricewaterhouseCoopers).¹⁰⁹ Other rock legends have refused to play the commercial game, including Bruce Springsteen, The Grateful Dead, Led Zeppelin, Fleetwood Mac, R.E.M., and U2. According to U2's manager, "Rock 'n roll is the last vestige of independence. It is undignified to put that creative effort and hard work to the disposal of a soft drink or beer or car."¹¹⁰ Singer Neil Young is especially adamant about not selling out; in his song "This Note's for You," he croons, "Ain't singing for Pepsi, ain't singing for Coke, I don't sing for nobody, makes me look like a joke." What's your take on this issue? How do you react when one of your favourite songs turns up in a commercial? Is this use of nostalgia an effective way to market a product? Why or why not?

Experiential Exercises

3. Devise a "product jingle memory test." Compile a list of brands that are or have been associated with memorable jingles, such as Oscar Meyer, Sleep Country, or Alka-Seltzer. Read this list to friends and see how many jingles are remembered. You may be surprised at the level of recall.
4. Identify some important characteristics of a product with a well-known brand name. On the basis of these attributes, generate a list of possible brand extension or licensing opportunities. Include some that would most likely not be accepted by consumers.
5. A physician borrowed a page from product marketers when she asked for their advice to help persuade people in the developing world to wash their hands habitually with soap. Diseases and disorders caused by dirty hands—such as diarrhea—kill a child somewhere in the world about every 15 seconds, and about half of those deaths could be prevented with the regular use of soap. The project adapted techniques that major marketers use to encourage habitual product usage of items such as skin moisturizers, disinfecting wipes, air fresheners, water purifiers, toothpaste, or vitamins. For example, beer commercials often depict a group of guys together because research shows that being with a group of friends tends to trigger habitual drinking! The researchers found that when people in Ghana experienced a feeling of disgust it was a cue to wash their hands. However, as in many developing countries, toilets are actually a symbol of cleanliness because they have replaced pit latrines. So an advertising campaign included messages that reminded people of the germs they could still pick up even in modern bathrooms—mothers and children walked out of restrooms with a glowing purple pigment on their hands that contaminated everything they touched. These images in turn triggered the habit of handwashing and the project resulted in a significant increase in the number of people who washed their hands with soap.¹¹¹ How can other organizations that work to improve public health, the environment, or other social issues harness our knowledge about consumer learning and habitual behaviour to create or reenergize positive habits?
6. Collect some pictures of "classic" products that have high nostalgic value. Show these pictures to consumers and allow them to free associate. Analyze the types of memories that they evoke and think about how a marketer might employ these associations in a product's promotional strategy.



CBC video cases are available at the text's website. View the video, and test your knowledge by answering the accompanying questions for this chapter.

MARKETING IN PRACTICE: CASE STUDY

A&W: NOSTALGIA FOR A HERITAGE BRAND

Paul Hollands, President and CEO of A&W restaurants, Canada, was encouraged by the report he had just received on the new store openings in four major urban centres in Canada. These new store openings represented a shift in the nostalgia-based strategy A&W had been pursuing for a decade, and Paul realized the new strategy carried some risks. A&W had built a strong relationship with their customers over the years and he was concerned that this new strategy, which focused on a more contemporary positioning, might not resonate with the loyal customer base that had been cultivated over two decades. The initial performance of the new stores looked good, however, and Paul wondered how he might leverage this initial success.

History

A&W was founded by Roy Allen and Frank Wright in California in 1922, and the first Canadian A&W restaurant opened in Winnipeg in 1956. The Canadian restaurants were part of the American chain until 1972 when they were sold to Unilever. As part of this transaction, the Canadian A&W brand agreed to limit its operations to the Canadian market. Unilever managed the brand until a buyout by the senior management group was executed in 1995. Currently, the organization is publicly held and trades on the Toronto stock exchange. There are over 730 restaurant locations across Canada with plans to open 20–30 new locations every year. A&W is the second-largest burger chain in Canada, trailing only McDonald's in the market.

The initial drive-in format of the restaurant was phased out in the early 1980s, the last such restaurant closing in 1999 in Langley, British Columbia. It was replaced with a more modern, pastel-coloured fast-food outlet that included healthier options. In the early eighties, A&W aggressively pursued shopping-mall locations, while still opening some standalone operations. Today A&Ws are still commonly found in Canadian malls of various sizes.

In its early years, A&W developed a number of strong brand identities that it effectively used in its marketing efforts. For example, in 1975 the

company launched a campaign starring an orange-clad mascot, The Great Root Bear. The success of this effort became a long-running campaign that featured a tuba jingle that accompanied the beloved bear.

The Importance of Nostalgia

It was this rich heritage of brand imagery that led the organization to take a more retro approach to its advertising and product mix in the 1990s. Former menu items, such as the Burger Family (e.g., Momma, Teen, and Baby Burgers), were reintroduced, and marketing became more targeted toward the baby-boomer generation (the cohort of consumers in Canada born between 1947 and 1966). In fact, it was this target segment that inspired A&W to focus on the nostalgia for the simpler pleasures of days gone by. Although innovation was still important to the organization, new products and approaches centred on classic burgers rather than food fads of the day. Paul himself had been quoted as saying: “We’re a classic heritage brand—a heritage brand is built around simple ideas that are powerful regardless of the age.”

At this point in time, the restaurant design was also revamped. The exterior features were cast in bright orange and yellow colours that were reminiscent of the 1950s look. The interior was decorated with memorabilia, including pictures and news clippings associated with this time period. Existing restaurants were renovated to match the new style. In-store promotion was focused on the product mix that replicated earlier days. Frosty glass mugs, teen burgers, and root beer floats were once again part of the consumption experience.

Advertising also focused on the baby boomer with television commercials that featured actors from the boomer-age cohort reliving experiences and memories associated with the brand. In one commercial, a husband and wife on a date return to the restaurant and when he honks the horn while parking she responds, “Oh, they don’t do that anymore.” To her surprise, the restaurant manager approaches the car with a burger order.



Courtesy of A&W Food Services of Canada Inc.

Promotions also focused on nostalgia. An initiative entitled “Cruisin’ the Dub” invited vintage car owners that owned vehicles from the 1950s and 1960s to meet at A&W locations and showcase items from their collection.

The New Initiative

A new restaurant initiative was launched in the fall of 2009. A format for new urban (e.g., downtown) locations was adopted in which some of the baby-boomer aspects noted above were scaled back in favour of a more modern look. The new urban locations were smaller than a normal fast-food restaurant and featured a more sophisticated, updated feel. Polished concrete floors, self-order kiosks, streamlined brand visuals, china plates, and real cutlery on aluminum trays all provided a more contemporary consumption experience.

The changes to the restaurant emerged out of a company rethink in early 2008, as A&W strategized on how to attract younger customers and still keep its baby-boomer base. This new initiative tried to achieve this balance. The old theme colour, orange, was still prominent, as was the

mainstay “home of the burger family” slogan, along with the A&W name. In essence the company had decided to imbue the future with the past in an effort to attract new consumers and retain those loyal baby boomers that had supported the company for decades.

Paul was mindful of the balance he needed to achieve in moving forward. He wondered what the positive reaction to the new restaurant initiative meant? How should the company proceed? To what extent should the organization embrace this new strategic path?

1. Why has nostalgia as a tactic been so successful for A&W? What benefit does nostalgia provide for the consumer?
2. What should A&W do now given the early evidence of success with respect to the new initiative?
3. Where does nostalgia fit in the new initiative? What emphasis would you suggest the company give to nostalgia in moving forward with their marketing?
4. What other elements of learning and memory might A&W incorporate into its future initiatives?

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