

CHAPTER 8

Consumer Attitude Formation and Change

As consumers, each of us has a vast number of attitudes toward products, services, advertisements, direct mail, the Internet, and retail stores. Whenever we are asked whether we like or dislike a product (e.g., Windows 2000), a service (such as Poland Springs Water—Home and Office Delivery Service), a particular retailer (e.g., the Sharper Image), a specific direct marketer (CDW®—Computer Discount Warehouse), or an advertising theme (Colgate Total toothpaste “The Brushing That Works Between Brushings™”), we are being asked to express our **attitudes**.

Within the context of consumer behavior, an appreciation of prevailing attitudes has considerable strategic merit. For instance, there has been very rapid growth in the sales of natural ingredient bath, body, and cosmetic products throughout the world. This trend seems linked to the currently popular attitude that things “natural” are good and things “synthetic” are bad. Yet, in reality, the positive attitude favoring things natural is not based on any systematic evidence that natural cosmetic products are any safer or better for consumers.

To get at the heart of what is driving consumers’ behavior, *attitude research* has been used to study a wide range of strategic marketing questions. For example, attitude research is frequently undertaken to determine whether consumers will accept a proposed new-product idea, to gauge why a firm’s target audience has not reacted more favorably to its new promotional theme, or to learn how target customers are likely to react to a proposed change in the firm’s packaging design. To illustrate, Fruit of the Loom frequently conducts research among male and female target consumers to determine their attitudes about size, fit, comfort, and fashion elements of its active wear clothing (T-shirts, sweatshirts, sweatpants, and sweatshorts), as well as testing reactions to potential active wear designs. The goal of this research is often to *identify current attitudes* as a basis to better satisfying customer needs. In a similar fashion, Fruit of the Loom’s consumer advertising seeks to *modify attitudes* in ways that stimulate sales of its products.¹

In this chapter we will discuss the reasons why attitude research has had such a pervasive impact on consumer behavior. We also will discuss the properties that have made attitudes so attractive to consumer researchers, as well as some of the common frustrations encountered in attitude research. Particular attention will be paid to the central topics of attitude formation, attitude change, and related strategic marketing issues.

WHAT ARE ATTITUDES?

Consumer researchers assess attitudes by asking questions or making inferences from behavior. For example, if a researcher determines from questioning a consumer that she consistently buys Cover Girl Lipcolor products and even recommends them to friends, the researcher is likely to infer that the consumer possesses a positive attitude toward Cover Girl Lipcolor products. This example illustrates that attitudes are not directly observable, but must be inferred from what people say or what they do.

Moreover, the illustration suggests that a whole universe of consumer behaviors—consistency of purchases, recommendations to others, top rankings, beliefs, evaluations, and intentions—are related to attitudes. What, then, are attitudes? In a consumer behavior context, an attitude is a learned predisposition to behave in a consistently favorable or unfavorable way with respect to a given object. Each part of this definition describes an important property of an attitude and is critical to understanding the role of attitudes in consumer behavior.

THE ATTITUDE “OBJECT”

The word *object* in our consumer-oriented definition of attitude should be interpreted broadly to include specific consumption- or marketing-related concepts, such as product, product category, brand, service, possessions, product use, causes or issues, people, advertisement, Internet site, price, medium, or retailer.

In conducting attitude research, we tend to be *object-specific*. For example, if we were interested in learning consumers' attitudes toward three major brands of cellular telephones, our “object” might include Motorola, Ericsson, and Nokia; if we were examining consumer attitudes toward major brands of laptop computers, our “object” might include IBM, Toshiba, Compaq, Sony, Dell, and Hitachi.

ATTITUDES ARE A LEARNED PREDISPOSITION

There is general agreement that attitudes are *learned*. This means that attitudes relevant to purchase behavior are formed as a result of direct experience with the product, word-of-mouth information acquired from others, or exposure to mass-media advertising, the Internet, and various forms of direct marketing (such as a retailer's catalog). It is important to remember that whereas attitudes may result from behavior, they are not synonymous with behavior. Instead, they reflect either a favorable or an unfavorable evaluation of the attitude object. As *learned predispositions*, attitudes have a motivational quality; that is, they might propel a consumer *toward* a particular behavior or repel the consumer *away* from a particular behavior.

ATTITUDES HAVE CONSISTENCY

Another characteristic of attitudes is that they are relatively consistent with the behavior they reflect. However, despite their *consistency*, attitudes are not necessarily permanent; they do change. (Attitude change is explored later in this chapter.)

It is important to illustrate what we mean by consistency. Normally, we expect consumers' behavior to correspond with their attitudes. For example, if a Dutch con-

sumer reported preferring German over Japanese automobiles, we would expect that the individual would be more likely to buy a German car when next in the market for a new car. In other words, when consumers are free to act as they wish, we anticipate that their actions will be consistent with their attitudes. However, circumstances often preclude consistency between attitudes and behavior. For example, in the case of our Dutch consumer, the matter of affordability may intervene, and the consumer would find a particular Japanese car to be a more realistic choice than a German car. Therefore, we must consider possible *situational* influences on consumer attitudes and behavior.

ATTITUDES OCCUR WITHIN A SITUATION

It is not immediately evident from our definition that attitudes occur within and are affected by the *situation*. By situation, we mean events or circumstances that, at a particular point in time, influence the relationship between an attitude and behavior. A specific situation can cause consumers to behave in ways that are seemingly inconsistent with their attitudes. For instance, let us assume that Noah purchases a different brand of shaving cream each time the brand he is using runs low. Although his brand-switching behavior may seem to reflect a negative attitude or dissatisfaction with the brands he tries, it actually may be influenced by a specific situation. For example, if his wish is to economize, he will buy whatever is the least expensive brand.

The opposite can also be true. If Paul rents a car from Value each time he goes out of town on business, we may erroneously infer that he has a particularly favorable attitude toward Value. On the contrary, Paul may find Value car rental to be “just okay” (because more often than not they are inconveniently located away from the airport). However, since he owns his own business and travels at his own expense, he may feel that Value is “good enough,” given that he may be paying a little less than he would be paying if he rented from one of the major business-oriented car rental companies located at the airport.

Indeed, individuals can have a variety of attitudes toward a particular behavior, each corresponding to a particular situation. Stan may feel it is all right to eat lunch at McDonald’s but does not consider it appropriate for dinner. In this case, McDonald’s has its “time and place,” which functions as a boundary delineating the situations when Stan considers McDonald’s acceptable. However, if Stan is coming home late from school one night, feels exhausted and hungry, and spots a McDonald’s, he may decide to just have “dinner” there. Why? Because it is late, he is tired and hungry, and McDonald’s is convenient. Has he changed his attitude? Probably not.

It is important to understand how consumer attitudes vary from situation to situation. For instance, it is useful to know whether consumer preferences for different burger chains (for instance, Burger King, McDonald’s, or Wendy’s) vary in terms of eating situations (that is, lunch or snack, evening meal when rushed for time, or evening meal with family when not rushed for time). Consumer preferences for the various burger restaurants might depend on the anticipated eating situation. Wendy’s, for example, might be favored by some consumers as a good place to have dinner with their families. This suggests that its management might position Wendy’s restaurants as a nice place to take the family for a leisurely (and inexpensive) dinner.

Clearly, when measuring attitudes, it is important to consider the situation in which the behavior takes place, or we can misinterpret the relationship between attitudes and behavior. Table 8-1 presents some additional examples of how specific situations might influence consumer attitudes toward specific brands of products or services.

TABLE 8-1 Examples of How Situations Might Influence Attitudes

PRODUCT/SERVICE	SITUATION	ATTITUDE
Coppertone Oil Free Sunscreen	Active sports in the sun	"It sounds like a good idea to use an oil free sunscreen when involved in summer sports activities."
Cannon Color Printers	Old PC printer ceases to work	"Now that they have gone down in price so much, it's time for me to buy a color printer."
Hilton Resorts and Casinos	Exhausted, time for a weekend get-a-way	"I worked hard; I earned a couple of days away to relax."
Altoids Mints	Bad taste in one's mouth	"I really need a strong mint after I drink a large cup of coffee."
<i>Sports Illustrated for Kids</i>	It's my nephew's birthday	"He loves sports; I should get a one-year subscription."
Omega Seamaster Professional	Old wristwatch is lost	"Now I have an opportunity to get the watch James Bond wears."
Claritin-D 24 Hour	Summer allergy	"I need something that really works. I've heard good things about Claritin."
Kraft Fat-Free Salad Dressings	Going on a diet	"I really should try using more fat-free products."

STRUCTURAL MODELS OF ATTITUDES

Motivated by a desire to understand the relationship between attitudes and behavior, psychologists have sought to construct models that capture the underlying dimensions of an attitude.² To this end, the focus has been on specifying the composition of an attitude to better explain or predict behavior. The following section examines several important attitude models: the *tricomponent attitude model*, the *multiattribute attitude models*, the *trying-to-consume model*, and the *attitude-toward-the-ad model*. Each of these models provides a somewhat different perspective on the number of component parts of an attitude and how those parts are arranged or interrelated.

TRICOMPONENT ATTITUDE MODEL

According to the **tricomponent attitude model**, attitudes consist of three major components: a *cognitive* component, an *affective* component, and a *conative* component (see Figure 8-1).

The Cognitive Component

The first component of the tricomponent attitude model consists of a person's *cognitions*, that is, the knowledge and perceptions that are acquired by a combination of direct experience with the *attitude object* and related information from various sources. This knowledge and resulting perceptions commonly take the form of *beliefs*, that is, the consumer believes that the attitude object possesses various attributes and that specific behavior will lead to specific outcomes.

Although it captures only a part of Dana's belief system about two brands of pocket digital organizers (for example, the PalmPilot and Casio Casiopeia), Figure 8-2 illustrates the composition of a consumer's belief system about two alternatives. Dana's belief system for both brands consists of the same basic four attributes: ease of use, handwriting feature, PC backup, and "other" features. However, Dana has somewhat different beliefs about the two brands for these attributes. For instance, she knows from colleagues at work that the PalmPilot is famous for being easy to use and

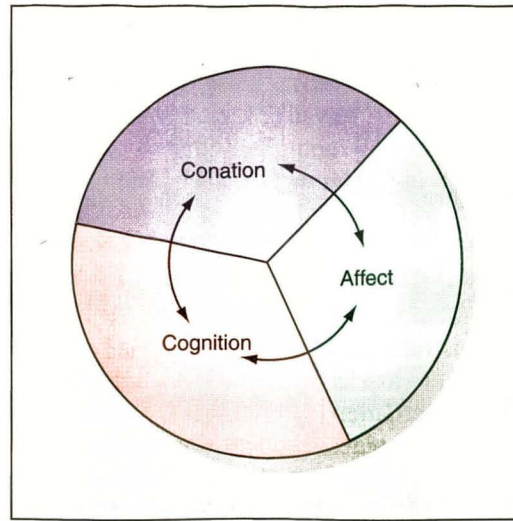


FIGURE 8-1
A Simple Representation of the Tricomponent Attitude Model

easy to back up; she feels from what she has read in an on-line review of the two machines that Casio is also good, but not as good on these two features. However, the Casio has a built-in drawing and doodling feature, as well as a built-in voice recording capability. These are two features that the PalmPilot did not have. Before she really makes her selection, she is thinking of asking a few friends and going on-line to the two companies' Web sites to check things out (www.palmpilot.com and www.casio.com).

The Affective Component

A consumer's *emotions* or *feelings* about a particular product or brand constitute the *affective component* of an attitude. These emotions and feelings are frequently treated by consumer researchers as primarily *evaluative* in nature; that is, they capture an individual's direct or global assessment of the attitude-object (or the extent to which the

FIGURE 8-2
A Consumer's Belief System for Two Brands of Pocket Digital Organizers

PRODUCT BRAND	POCKET DIGITAL ORGANIZERS							
	3Com PalmPilot				Casio Cassiopeia			
ATTRIBUTES	Ease of use	Handwriting feature	PC backup	Other features	Ease of use	Handwriting feature	PC backup	Other features
BELIEFS	Known to be a snap to use	A little effort to learn a few rules	Simple one button	Doesn't have built-in drawing feature	A longer learning curve	Easy, but a little learning	Some learning	Has drawing and voice-record features
EVALUATIONS	(++++)	(+++)	(++)	(-)	(+)	(++)	(++)	(+++)

TABLE 8-2 Selected Evaluative Scale Used to Gauge Consumers' Attitudes toward Old Spice After Shave

Compared to other after shave products, Old Spice is:

Good	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]	[6]	[7]	Bad
Positive	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]	[6]	[7]	Negative
Pleasant	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]	[6]	[7]	Unpleasant
Appealing	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]	[6]	[7]	Unappealing

individual rates the attitude-object as “favorable” or “unfavorable,” “good” or “bad”). To illustrate, Table 8-2 shows a series of evaluative (affective) scale items that might be used to assess consumers' attitudes toward Old Spice After Shave.

Affect-laden experiences also manifest themselves as *emotionally charged states* (such as happiness, sadness, shame, disgust, anger, distress, guilt, or surprise). Research indicates that such emotional states may enhance or amplify positive or negative experiences and that later recollections of such experiences may impact what comes to mind and how the individual acts.³ For instance, a person visiting an outlet mall is likely to be influenced by his or her emotional state at the time. If the outlet mall shopper is feeling particularly joyous at the moment, a positive response to the outlet mall may be amplified. The emotionally enhanced response to the outlet mall may lead the shopper to recall with great pleasure the time spent at the outlet mall. It also may influence the individual shopper to persuade friends and acquaintances to visit the same outlet mall and to make the personal decision to revisit the mall.

In addition to using direct or global evaluative measures of an attitude-object (for example, from “good to bad,” or “pleasant to unpleasant,” as depicted in Table 8-2), consumer researchers can also use a battery of affective response scales that measure feelings and emotions to construct a picture of consumers' overall feelings about a product, service, or ad. Table 8-3 gives an example of a five-point scale that measures affective responses.

TABLE 8-3 Measuring Consumers' Feelings and Emotions with Regard to Using Old Spice After Shave

For the past 10 days you have had a chance to try Old Spice After Shave. We would appreciate it if you would identify how your face felt after using the product during this 10-day trial period. For each of the words below, we would appreciate it if you would mark an “X” in the box corresponding to how your face felt after using Old Spice during the past 10 days.

	VERY			NOT AT ALL	
My face felt relaxed	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
My face felt handsome	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
My face felt tight	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
My face felt smooth	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
My face felt supple	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
My face felt clean	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
My face felt refreshed	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
My face felt revived	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
My face felt pampered	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
My face felt renewed	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]

The Conative Component

Conation, the final component of the tricomponent attitude model, is concerned with the *likelihood* or *tendency* that an individual will undertake a specific action or behave in a particular way with regard to the attitude object. According to some interpretations, the conative component may include the actual behavior itself.

In marketing and consumer research, the conative component is frequently treated as an expression of the consumer's *intention to buy*. Buyer intention scales are used to assess the likelihood of a consumer purchasing a product or behaving in a certain way. Table 8-4 provides several examples of common **intention-to-buy scales**. Interestingly, consumers who are asked to respond to an intention-to-buy question appear to be more likely to actually make a brand purchase for positively evaluated brands (such as "I will buy it"), as contrasted to consumers who are not asked to respond to an intention question.⁴ This suggests that a positive brand commitment in the form of a positive answer to an attitude intention question impacts in a positive way on the actual brand purchase.

MULTIATTRIBUTE ATTITUDE MODELS

Multiattribute attitude models portray consumers' attitudes with regard to an attitude "object" (such as a product, a service, a direct-mail catalog, or a cause or issue)⁵ as a function of consumers' perception and assessment of the key attributes or beliefs held with regard to the particular attitude "object." Although there are many variations of this type of attitude model, we have selected the following three models to briefly consider here: the *attitude-toward-object model*, the *attitude-toward-behavior model*, and the *theory-of-reasoned-action model*.

The Attitude-Toward-Object Model

The attitude-toward-object model is especially suitable for measuring attitudes toward a *product* (or *service*) category or specific *brands*.⁵ According to this model, the consumer's attitude toward a product or specific brands of a product is a function of the presence (or absence) and evaluation of certain product-specific beliefs or attributes. In other words, consumers generally have favorable attitudes toward those brands that they believe have an adequate level of attributes that they

TABLE 8-4 Two Examples of Intention-to-Buy Scales

Which of the following statements best describes the chance that you will buy Old Spice the next time you purchase an after shave product?

- I definitely will buy it.
- I probably will buy it.
- I am uncertain whether I will buy it.
- I probably will not buy it.
- I definitely will not buy it.

How likely are you to buy Old Spice After Shave during the next three months?

- Very likely
- Likely
- Unlikely
- Very unlikely

evaluate as positive, and they have unfavorable attitudes toward those brands they feel do not have an adequate level of desired attributes or have too many negative or undesired attributes. As an illustration, we return to the pocket digital organizer (see Figure 8-2). Currently, there are about a half dozen or so brands of pocket digital organizers available on the market. The available brands each have a different “mix” of features (a “feature set”). The defining features might include: simplicity of general use, backup with one’s PC, accuracy of the handwriting recognition program, e-mailing capacity, brightness of the backlit screen, drawing/doodling, and recording voice message. Some brands are likely to excel on the core features; some are really good on a few features; others are only adequate, but have more features; and some other brands are really no more than second-rate. However, what consumers will purchase is a function of how much they know, what they feel are the important features for them, and their awareness as to whether particular brands possess (or lack) these valued attributes.

The Attitude-Toward-Behavior Model

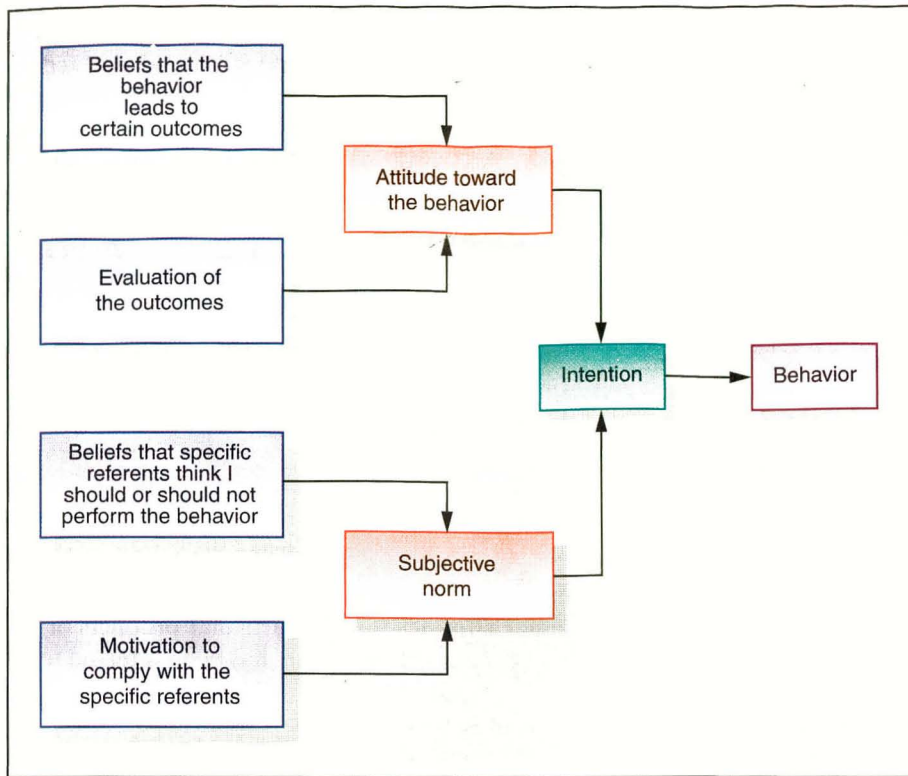
The **attitude-toward-behavior model** is the individual’s *attitude toward behaving* or *acting* with respect to an object, rather than the attitude toward the object itself.⁶ The appeal of the attitude-toward-behavior model is that it seems to correspond somewhat more closely to actual behavior than does the attitude-toward-object model. For instance, knowing Howard’s attitude about the act of purchasing a top-of-the-line BMW (that is, his attitude toward the *behavior*) reveals more about the potential act of purchasing than does simply knowing his attitude toward expensive German cars, or specifically BMWs (or the attitude toward the *object*). This seems logical, for a consumer might have a positive attitude toward an expensive BMW, but a negative attitude as to his prospects for purchasing such an expensive vehicle.

Theory-of-Reasoned-Action Model

The **theory of reasoned action** represents a comprehensive integration of attitude components into a structure that is designed to lead to both better explanations and better predictions of behavior. Like the basic tricomponent attitude model, the theory-of-reasoned-action model incorporates a *cognitive* component, an *affective* component, and a *conative* component; however, these are arranged in a pattern different from that of the tricomponent model (see Figure 8-3).

In accordance with this expanded model, to understand *intention* we also need to measure the *subjective norms* that influence an individual’s intention to act. A subjective norm can be measured directly by assessing a consumer’s feelings as to what relevant others (family, friends, roommates, co-workers) would think of the action being contemplated; that is, would they look favorably or unfavorably on the anticipated action? For example, if a graduate student was considering purchasing a new VW Beetle and stopped to ask himself what his parents or girlfriend would think of such behavior (that is, approve or disapprove), such a reflection would constitute his subjective norm.

Consumer researchers can get behind the *subjective norm* to the underlying factors that are likely to produce it. They accomplish this by assessing the *normative beliefs* that the individual attributes to relevant others, as well as the individual’s *motivation to comply* with each of the relevant others. For instance, consider the graduate student contemplating the purchase of a new VW Beetle. To understand his subjective norm about the desired purchase, we would have to identify his relevant others (parents and girlfriend); his beliefs about how each would respond to his pur-

**FIGURE 8-3**

A Simplified Version of the Theory of Reasoned Action

Source: Adapted from Icek Ajzen and Martin Fishbein, *Understanding Attitudes and Predicting Social Behavior* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1980), 84. © 1980. Adapted by permission of Prentice-Hall, Inc.

chase of the Beetle (such as “Dad would consider the car an unnecessary luxury, but my girlfriend would love it”); and finally, his motivation to comply with his parents or his girlfriend.⁷

THEORY OF TRYING TO CONSUME

There has been an effort underway to extend attitude models so that they might better accommodate consumers’ goals as expressed by their “trying” to consume.⁸ The **theory of trying to consume** is designed to account for the many cases where the action or outcome is not certain, but instead reflects the consumer’s attempts to consume (or purchase). In such cases, there are often *personal impediments* (a consumer is trying to find just the right eyeglass frames for under \$200 or trying to lose weight but loves desserts) and/or *environmental impediments* (only the first 500 in line will be able to purchase tickets for the rock concert) that might prevent the desired action or outcome from occurring. Again, the key point is that in these cases of trying, the outcome (purchase, possession, use, or action) is not, and cannot be assumed to be, certain. Table 8-5 lists a few examples of possible personal and environmental impediments that might negatively impact the outcome for a consumer trying to consume. Researchers have recently extended this inquiry by examining those situations where consumers do *not* try to consume—that is *failing to try to consume*. In this case, consumers appear to: (1) fail to see or are too ignorant of their options; and (2) make a conscious effort not to consume; that is, they might seek to self-sacrifice or defer gratification to some future time.⁹

TABLE 8-5 Selected Examples of Potential Impediments That Might Impact on Trying**POTENTIAL PERSONAL IMPEDIMENTS**

- “I wonder whether my fingernails will be longer by the time of my wedding.”
- “I want to try to lose fifteen pounds by next summer.”
- “I’m going to try to get tickets for a Broadway show for your birthday.”
- “I’m going to attempt to give up smoking by my birthday.”
- “I am going to increase how often I go to the gym from two to four times a week.”
- “Tonight, I’m not going to have dessert at the restaurant.”

POTENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPEDIMENTS

- “The first ten people to call in will receive a free T-shirt.”
- “Sorry, the shoes didn’t come in this shipment from Italy.”
- “There are only three bottles of champagne in our stockroom. You better come in sometime today.”
- “I am sorry. We cannot serve you. We are closing the restaurant because of a problem with the oven.”

ATTITUDE-TOWARD-THE-AD MODELS

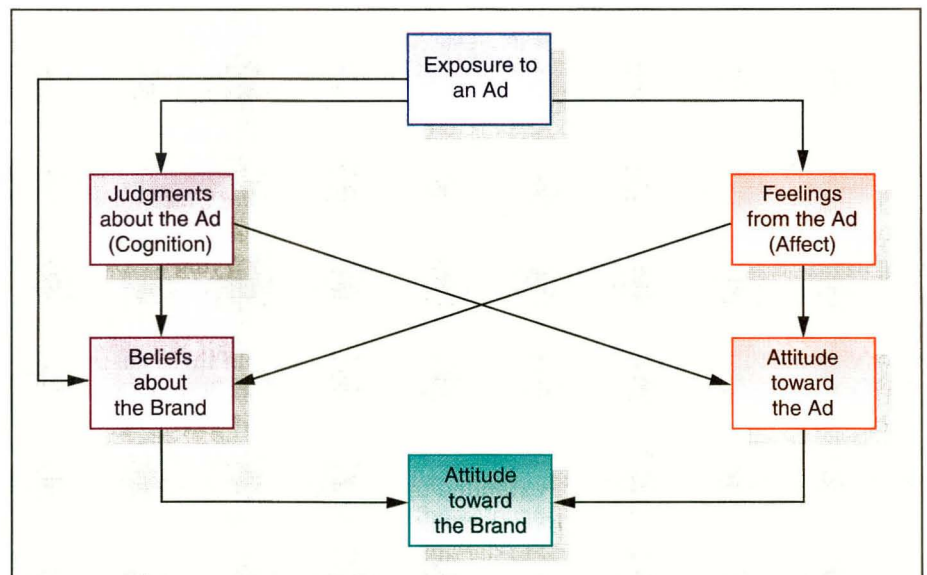
In an effort to understand the impact of advertising or some other promotional vehicle (such as a catalog) on consumer attitudes toward particular products or brands, considerable attention has been paid to developing what has been referred to as **attitude-toward-the-ad models**.

Figure 8-4 presents a schematic of some of the basic relationships described by an attitude-toward-the-ad model. As the model depicts, the consumer forms various feelings (affects) and judgments (cognitions) as the result of exposure to an ad. These feelings and judgments in turn affect the consumer’s attitude toward the ad and beliefs about the brand acquired from exposure to the ad. Finally, the consumer’s attitude toward the ad and beliefs about the brand influence his or her attitude toward the brand.¹⁰

FIGURE 8-4

A Conception of the Relationship among Elements in an Attitude-Toward-the-Ad Model

Source: Inspired by and based on Julie A. Edell and Marian Chapman Burke, “The Power of Feelings in Understanding Advertising Effects,” *Journal of Consumer Research* 14 (Dec 1987), 431. Reprinted by permission of University of Chicago Press as publisher.



It appears that for a novel product, such as a “contact lens for pets,” the consumer’s attitude toward the ad has a *stronger* impact on brand attitude and purchase intention than for a familiar product, such as pet food.¹¹ This same research found that beliefs about a brand (brand cognition) that result from ad exposure play a much stronger role in determining attitudes toward the brand for a familiar product. This research points up the importance of considering the nature of the attitude object in assessing the potential impact of advertising exposure.

ATTITUDE FORMATION

How do people, especially young people, form their initial *general* attitudes toward “things”? Consider their attitudes toward clothing they wear, for example, such as underwear, casual wear, and business attire. On a more specific level, how do they form attitudes toward Fruit of the Loom or Calvin Klein underwear, or Levi’s or Gap casual wear, or Anne Klein or Emporium Armani business clothing? Also, what about where such clothing is purchased? Would they buy their underwear, casual wear, and business clothing at K-Mart, Sears, JC Penney, or Macy’s? How do family members and friends, admired celebrities, mass-media advertisements, even cultural memberships, influence the formation of their attitudes concerning consuming or not consuming each of these types of apparel items? Why do some attitudes seem to persist indefinitely, while others change fairly often? The answers to such questions are of vital importance to marketers, for without knowing how attitudes are formed, they are unable to understand or to influence consumer attitudes or behavior.

Our examination of attitude formation is divided into three areas: how attitudes are learned, the sources of influence on attitude formation, and the impact of personality on attitude formation.

HOW ATTITUDES ARE LEARNED

When we speak of the formation of an attitude, we refer to the shift from having no attitude toward a given object (for instance, a notebook computer) to having *some* attitude toward it (such as a notebook computer is useful when traveling). The shift from no attitude to an attitude (or the *attitude formation*) is a result of learning (see chapter 7 for a detailed exploration of learning theories).

Consumers often purchase new products that are associated with a favorably viewed brand name. Their favorable attitude toward the brand name is frequently the result of repeated satisfaction with other products produced by the same company. In terms of *classical conditioning*, an established brand name is an *unconditioned* stimulus that through past positive reinforcement has resulted in a favorable brand attitude. A new product, yet to be linked to the established brand, would be the *conditioned* stimulus. To illustrate, by giving a new skin-smoothing lotion the benefit of its well-known and respected family name, Jergens[®] is counting on an extension of the favorable attitude already associated with the brand name to the new product. They are counting on *stimulus generalization* from the brand name to the new product. Research suggests that the “fit” between a parent brand (for instance, Jergens) and a brand extension (for instance, Jergens’ skin-smoothing lotion) is a function of two factors: (1) the similarity between the pre-existing product categories already associated with the parent brand and the new extension, and (2) the “fit” or match between the images of the parent brand and the new extension.¹²

Sometimes, attitudes follow the purchase and consumption of a product. For example, a consumer may purchase a brand-name product without having a prior attitude toward it, because it is the only product of its kind available (such as the last tube of toothpaste in a hotel drugstore). Consumers also make trial purchases of new brands from product categories in which they have little personal involvement (see chapter 7). If they find the purchased brand to be satisfactory, then they are likely to develop a favorable attitude toward it.

In situations in which consumers seek to solve a problem or satisfy a need, they are likely to form attitudes (either positive or negative) about products on the basis of information exposure and their own cognition (knowledge and beliefs). In general, the more information consumers have about a product or service, the more likely they are to form attitudes about it, either positive or negative. However, regardless of the available information, consumers are not always ready or willing to process product-related information. Furthermore, consumers often use only a limited amount of the information available to them. Research suggests that only two or three important beliefs about a product dominate in the formation of attitudes and that less important beliefs provide little additional input.¹³ This finding suggests that marketers should fight off the impulse to include *all* the features of their products and services in their ads; rather, they should focus on the few key points that are at the heart of what distinguishes their product from the competition.

SOURCES OF INFLUENCE ON ATTITUDE FORMATION

The formation of consumer attitudes is strongly influenced by personal experience, the influence of family and friends, direct marketing, and mass media.

The primary means by which attitudes toward goods and services are formed is through the consumer's direct experience in trying and evaluating them.¹⁴ Recognizing the importance of direct experience, marketers frequently attempt to stimulate trial of new products by offering cents-off coupons or even free samples. Figure 8-5 illustrates this strategy; the ad for Diet Snapple includes a coupon for 55¢ off when the consumer buys two 16-ounce bottles to encourage trial. In such cases, the marketer's objective is to get consumers to try the product and then to evaluate it. If a product proves to their liking, then it is probable that consumers will form a positive attitude and be likely to purchase the product. In addition, from the information on the coupon (such as name and address) the marketer is able to create a database of interested consumers.

As we come in contact with others, especially family, close friends, and admired individuals (such as a respected teacher), we form attitudes that influence our lives. The family is an extremely important source of influence on the formation of attitudes, for it is the family that provides us with many of our basic values and a wide range of less-central beliefs. For instance, young children who are "rewarded" for good behavior with sweet foods and candy often retain a taste for (and positive attitude toward) sweets as adults.

Marketers are increasingly using highly focused direct-marketing programs to target small consumer niches with products and services that fit their interests and lifestyles. (Niche marketing is sometimes called *micromarketing*.) Marketers very carefully target customers on the basis of their demographic, psychographic, or geodemographic profiles with highly personalized product offerings (such as golf clubs for left-handed people) and messages that show they understand their special needs and desires. Direct marketing efforts have an excellent chance of favorably influencing target consumers' attitudes, because the products and services offered and the



FIGURE 8-5
Snapple Uses a Cents-Off Coupon to Encourage Trial

Carry the whole family of Diet Snapple anywhere.
Order your 2-in-1 Backpack/Cooler now! (a \$30 value)

Please send me _____ Backpack/Coolers @ \$18.95 EACH @ _____ Total Amount

MAIL TO: Diet Snapple Backpack/Cooler
P.O. BOX 8713
St. Cloud, MN 56309-8713

Name _____

Address _____ (Apt. No.) _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code (Required) _____

SEND: Snapple Backpack/Cooler (M) 1 L. or (F) 1 L. or when supplies are exhausted

- This completed mail-in certificate (cut) - No ad. or other labels will be included!
- Any four (4) Diet Snapple labels for each Backpack/Cooler
- \$18.95 for each Backpack/Cooler ordered (shipping or handling fee)
- Make check or money order (do not send cash) payable to Diet Snapple Backpack/Cooler

This certificate must accompany your request. No duplicate or reproduction of certificate. Snapple labels or receipts are required. Offer only good in USA and AFFRITO addresses. Void where prohibited, taxed or restricted. Allow 4-8 weeks for delivery. **IMPORTANT: WE MUST HAVE YOUR COMPLETE ADDRESS AND ZIP CODE FOR DELIVERY.** © Snapple Beverage Corp. Snapple and Diet Snapple are registered trademarks of Snapple Beverage Corp.

MANUFACTURER'S COUPON - EXPIRES APRIL 26, 1999
DO NOT DOUBLE

SAVE **55¢**

When you buy any two (2) 16-ounce bottles of Diet Snapple

COUPON: Limit one coupon per item purchased. This coupon good on Diet Snapple products only. *EXCLUDES: No unit restrictions. The face value of the coupon plus the handling fee and the amount of the purchase price of the item. Consumer must pay sales tax. 10¢ of 1¢. Good only in the USA. Void where taxes, prohibitions, restrictions, limitations, conditions, terms and/or other conditions apply. Other unit restrictions apply. © Snapple Beverage Corp. ONE SNAPPLE 16 FL OZ (473 mL) BOTTLE. 750000 Snapple is a registered trademark of Snapple Beverage Corp.

5 76183 35228 2 (8100) 0 9804

promotional messages conveyed are very carefully designed to address the individual segment's needs and concerns. Thus, they are able to achieve a higher "hit rate" than mass marketing.

In countries where people have easy access to newspapers and a variety of general and special-interest magazines and television channels, consumers are constantly exposed to new ideas, products, opinions, and advertisements. These mass-media communications provide an important source of information that influences the formation of consumer attitudes.

PERSONALITY FACTORS

Personality also plays a critical role in attitude formation. For example, individuals with a *high need for cognition* (that is, those who crave information and enjoy thinking) are likely to form positive attitudes in response to ads or direct mail that are rich in product-related information. On the other hand, consumers who are relatively *low in need for cognition* are more likely to form positive attitudes in response to ads that feature an attractive model or well-known celebrity. In a similar fashion, attitudes toward new products and new consumption situations are strongly influenced by specific personality characteristics of consumers.

ATTITUDE CHANGE

It is important to recognize that much that has been said about *attitude formation* is also basically true of attitude change. That is, attitude changes are learned; they are influenced by personal experience and other sources of information, and personality affects both the receptivity and the speed with which attitudes are likely to be altered.

STRATEGIES OF ATTITUDE CHANGE

Altering consumer attitudes is a key strategy consideration for most marketers. For marketers who are fortunate enough to be market leaders and to enjoy a significant amount of customer goodwill and loyalty, the overriding goal is to fortify the existing positive attitudes of customers so that they will not succumb to competitors' special offers and other inducements designed to win them over. For instance, in many product categories (greeting cards, in which Hallmark has been the leader, or wet shaving systems, in which Gillette has dominated), most competitors take aim at the market leaders when developing their marketing strategies. Their objective is to change the attitudes of the market leaders' customers and win them over. Among the *attitude-change strategies* that are available to them are: (1) changing the consumer's basic motivational function, (2) associating the product with an admired group or event, (3) resolving two conflicting attitudes, (4) altering components of the multiattribute model, and (5) changing consumer beliefs about competitors' brands.

CHANGING THE BASIC MOTIVATIONAL FUNCTION

An effective strategy for changing consumer attitudes toward a product or brand is to make particular needs prominent. One method for changing motivation is known as the **functional approach**.¹⁵ According to this approach, attitudes can be classified in terms of four functions: the **utilitarian function**, the **ego-defensive function**, the **value-expressive function**, and the **knowledge function**.

The Utilitarian Function

We hold certain brand attitudes partly because of a brand's utility. When a product has been useful or helped us in the past, our attitude toward it tends to be favorable. One way of changing attitudes in favor of a product is by showing people that it can serve a utilitarian purpose that they may not have considered. For example, as its market positioning,

Comet cleaner with bleach stresses its utilitarian benefit in terms of superior cleaning ability. Similarly, Scripto Aim'n Flame lighter also stresses its superiority (to the match) as a means of safely lighting fireplaces, barbecues, or pilot lights (a utilitarian benefit).

The Ego-Defensive Function

Most people want to protect their self-images from inner feelings of doubt—they want to replace their uncertainty with a sense of security and personal confidence. Ads for cosmetics and personal care products, by acknowledging this need, increase both their relevance to the consumer and the likelihood of a favorable attitude change by offering reassurance to the consumer's self-concept. For example, Figure 8-6 for Ortho's Retin-A counter argues a number of common parental stalemates about teenage acne (e.g., "There's nothing you can do about it") with the statement "No matter what anybody says, it's your face and you can take action." Ortho's response shows understanding and it's reassuring to potential consumers.

The Value-Expressive Function

Attitudes are an expression or reflection of the consumer's general values, lifestyle, and outlook. If a consumer segment generally holds a positive attitude toward owning the latest personal communications devices (owning the smallest cellular telephone currently on the market), then their attitudes toward new electronic devices are likely to reflect that orientation. Similarly, if a segment of consumers has a positive attitude toward being "in fashion," then their attitudes toward high-fashion clothing are likely to reflect this viewpoint. Thus, by knowing target consumers' attitudes, marketers can better anticipate their values, lifestyle, or outlook and can reflect these characteristics in their ads and direct-marketing efforts. Advertisements for Tommy Hilfiger's Tommy fragrance are targeted to young individuals who pursue a clean-cut, sociable, and outdoors lifestyle.

The Knowledge Function

Individuals generally have a strong need to know and understand the people and things with whom they come in contact. The consumer's "need to know," a cognitive need, is important to marketers concerned with product positioning. Indeed, many product and brand positionings are attempts to satisfy the *need to know* and to improve the consumer's attitudes toward the brand by emphasizing its advantages over competitive brands. For instance, a message for an advanced design toothbrush might point out *how* it is superior to other toothbrushes in controlling gum disease by removing more plaque and why this is so important to good overall health. The message might even use a bar graph to contrast its plaque removal abilities to other leading toothbrushes. Figure 8-7 is an ad for Activin™, the natural extract of red grape seeds that helps fight free radicals by providing antioxidant power that helps promote good health. The presentation of scientific evidence and graphic comparative information about Activin™ all are an appeal to consumers's *need to know*.

Combining Several Functions

Because different consumers may like or dislike the same product or service for different reasons, a functional framework for examining attitudes can be very useful. For instance, three consumers may all have positive attitudes toward Suave hair care products. However, one may be responding solely to the fact that the products work well (the utilitarian function); the second may have the inner confidence to agree with the point "When you know beautiful hair doesn't have to cost a fortune" (an ego-defensive function). The third consumer's favorable attitudes might reflect the realization that Suave has for many years stressed "value" (equal or better products for less)—the knowledge function.

FIGURE 8-6
Appeal to the Ego-
Defensive Function



**No matter what anybody says,
it's your face and you can take action.**

You can make it clearer. You can make it more healthy-looking. You can even make it blemish-free. Whether you have five pimples or fifteen.

Retin-A is a proven prescription treatment you can only get from your healthcare provider. Unlike other products that simply cover up or dry out pimples, Retin-A works at the source where blemishes begin.

It contains tretinoin, a vitamin A derivative much like the naturally occurring one in your body. Retin-A is thought to help lift excess oil and pore-clogging skin cells to the surface. It also helps prevent this cell build-up from recurring, so you can maintain the improvement in your skin.

Retin-A doesn't work overnight. However, with continued use you may start to notice an overall improvement. So be patient.

During the first few weeks, some irritation, including redness and peeling, will be experienced by most patients. Generally, these effects are manageable

and diminish over time. However, some people with sensitive skin may experience excessive irritation. Since Retin-A may make your skin more sensitive to the sun's rays, be sure to protect your skin from natural or artificial sunlight. For more information, ask your healthcare provider about

Retin-A or call: 1-800-99RETIN-A.



a Johnson & Johnson company



Retin-A for the skin you want to have.

See additional important information on the following page.


ASSOCIATING THE PRODUCT WITH A SPECIAL GROUP, EVENT, OR CAUSE

Attitudes are related, at least in part, to certain groups, social events, or causes. It is possible to alter attitudes toward products, services, and brands by pointing out their relationships to particular social groups, events, or causes. For instance, A.T. Cross provides a fixed amount of financial support to Literacy Volunteers of America when consumers purchase their fine writing instruments. This link with a literacy enhancing program is a logical step

The French eat rich foods. They smoke more, exercise less, and live longer.

(Is there no justice?)

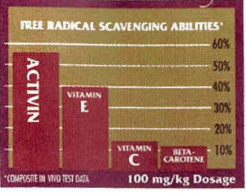
In France, the pursuit of pleasure does not include trips to the gym or avoiding fatty foods. (Life is good.) So why do the French have the lowest rate of heart disease of any Westernized society? This is the French Paradox.



Some scientists believe they have traced the mystery of the French Paradox to the red wine they drink, which contains powerful antioxidants called biologically active flavonoids. Antioxidants help protect the body against free radicals, which can destroy cell membrane molecules and damage DNA. Many scientists believe that free radicals may be a root cause of certain types of cancer, heart disease and the aging process.

In fact, university studies show that the antioxidant activity of ActiVin is significantly greater than that of vitamins E, C or beta-carotene, which means that ActiVin may be more effective in fighting free radicals and maintaining a healthier, active life.

ActiVin promotes good health in other ways as well.




Product	Relative Ability (%)
ACTIVIN	~60%
VITAMIN E	~35%
VITAMIN C	~25%
BETA-CAROTENE	~10%

*COMPARE IN VIVO TEST BATH. 100 mg/kg Dosage

It is made by a unique process called *Acti-Pure™*, which eliminates the need for toxic chemicals used in extracting flavonoids. So it's safe to consume and environmentally friendly to produce.

ActiVin is a nutritional ingredient found in quality health and dietary products. Make sure you see the ActiVin™ logo on the label, or call 1-800-783-4636 for more information. It's not just about better health; it's about living better.



ACTIVIN™
THE POWER TO STAY HEALTHY™

©1997 InterHealth Nutritionals Incorporated, Concord, CA 94520 (510) 827-4400 fax/(510) 827-4088 www.interhealthUSA.com

FIGURE 8-7
Appeal to the Knowledge Function

on the part of a writing instrument company like A.T. Cross. It also has the potential of augmenting consumers' positive attitudes toward A.T. Cross, among consumers who perceive the Literacy Volunteers of America as a worthwhile not-for-profit service organization.

RESOLVING TWO CONFLICTING ATTITUDES

Attitude-change strategies can sometimes resolve actual or potential conflict between two attitudes. Specifically, if consumers can be made to see that their negative attitude toward a product, a specific brand, or its attributes, is really not in conflict with another attitude, they may be induced to change their evaluation of the brand (or move from negative to positive).

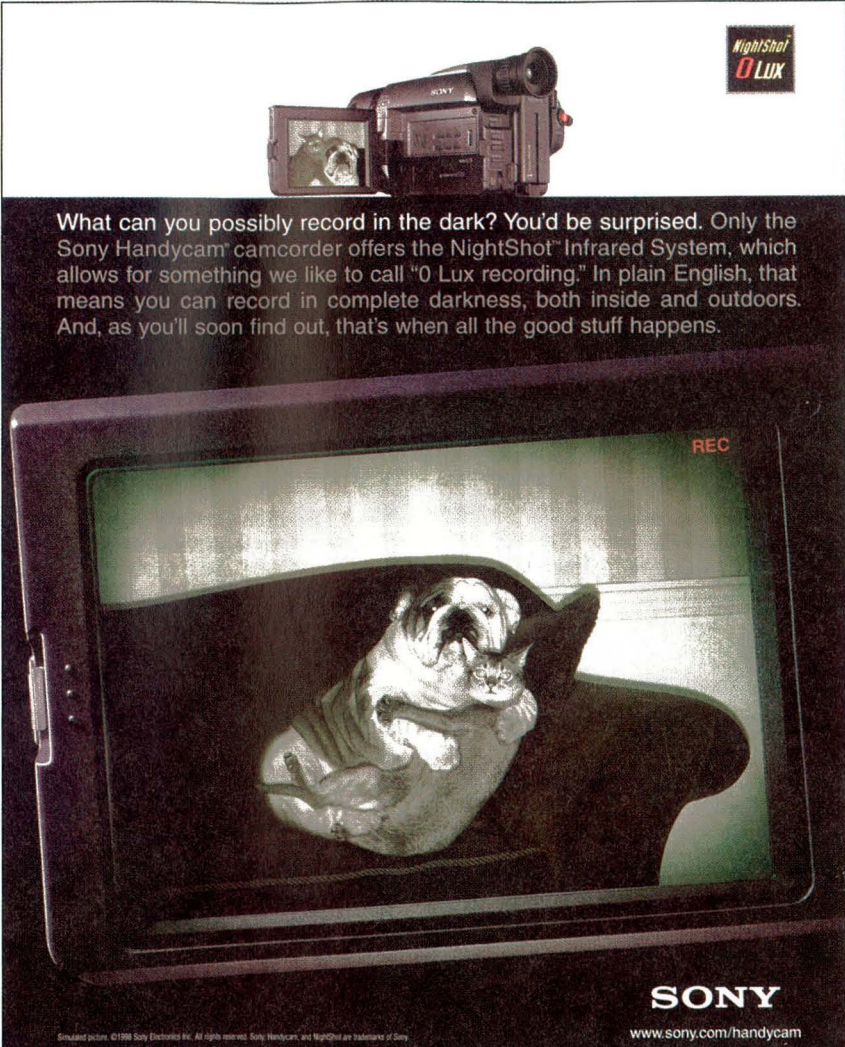
For example, Charles loves the idea of making video documentaries of his frequent vacations to exotic faraway places (attitude #1), but he may feel that purchasing a camcorder is an unwise investment because these cameras are inadequate when it comes to low-light environments that he repeatedly finds himself in (attitude #2). However, if Charles learns that Sony makes camcorders with a “NightShot™” feature that makes it possible to record in even complete darkness, he might change his mind, thus resolving his conflicting attitudes (see Figure 8-8).

ALTERING COMPONENTS OF THE MULTIATTRIBUTE MODEL

Earlier in this chapter we discussed a number of multiattribute attitude models. These models have implications for attitude-change strategies; specifically, they provide us with additional insights as to how to bring about attitude change: (1) changing the relative evaluation of attributes, (2) changing brand beliefs, (3) adding an attribute, and (4) changing the overall brand rating.

FIGURE 8-8

Resolving Two Conflicting Attitudes



The advertisement features a Sony Handycam camcorder at the top. Below it, a large screen displays a dog's face in a dark environment, illuminated by the camera's NightShot feature. The screen has a "REC" indicator in the top right corner. The Sony logo and website URL are at the bottom right.

**NightShot™
0 LUX**

What can you possibly record in the dark? You'd be surprised. Only the Sony Handycam™ camcorder offers the NightShot™ Infrared System, which allows for something we like to call “0 Lux recording.” In plain English, that means you can record in complete darkness, both inside and outdoors. And, as you'll soon find out, that's when all the good stuff happens.

SONY
www.sony.com/handycam

Simulated picture. ©1998 Sony Electronics Inc. All rights reserved. Sony, Handycam, and NightShot are trademarks of Sony.

Changing the Relative Evaluation of Attributes

The overall market for many product categories is often set out so that different consumer segments are offered different brands, with different features or benefits. For instance, within a product category such as headache remedies, there are brands like Extra-Strength Anacin that stress potency and brands like Tylenol that stress gentleness (or contain no aspirin). These two brands of headache remedy historically have appealed to different segments of the overall headache remedy market. Similarly, when it comes to chewing gum, the market can be divided into regular gum and sugar-free gum or into regular gum and bubble gum.

In general, when a product category is naturally divided according to distinct product features or benefits that appeal to a particular segment of consumers, marketers usually have an opportunity to persuade consumers to “cross over,” that is, to persuade consumers who prefer one version of the product (such as a 35-mm single-lens reflex camera) to shift their favorable attitudes toward another version of the product (for instance, a highly automatic point-and-shoot camera), and possibly vice versa.

Changing Brand Beliefs

A second cognitive-oriented strategy for changing attitudes concentrates on changing beliefs or perceptions about the brand itself. This is by far the most common form of advertising appeal. Advertisers are constantly reminding us that their product has “more” or is “better” or “best” in terms of some important product attribute. As a variation on this theme of “more,” ads for Palmolive dishwashing liquid are designed to *extend* consumers’ brand attitudes with regard to the product’s gentleness by suggesting that it be used for hand washing of fine clothing items. Dr Pepper’s ads challenge consumers to taste any difference between regular Dr Pepper (with sugar) and Diet Dr Pepper (sugar free). One version visually portrays the idea of the same taste by using identical twins each with a can of one of the two types of soft drinks in their hand. Moreover, it offers a \$1.00-off coupon to give consumers an incentive to try Diet Dr Pepper. The purpose is to change consumers’ attitudes about Diet Dr Pepper (that is, that it tastes as good as regular Dr Pepper).

Adding an Attribute

Another cognitive strategy consists of *adding an attribute*. This can be accomplished either by adding an attribute that previously has been ignored or one that represents an improvement or technological innovation.

The first route, adding a previously ignored attribute, is illustrated by the point that yogurt has more potassium than a banana (a fruit associated with a high quantity of potassium). For consumers interested in increasing their intake of potassium, the comparison of yogurt and bananas has the power of enhancing their attitudes toward yogurt.

The second route of adding an attribute that reflects an actual product change or technological innovation is easier to accomplish than stressing a previously ignored attribute. An example is Pantene Pro-V hair spray, which makes the point that because of the new ingredient Elastesse® its product is able to hold hair in place without a stiff or sticky feel. Thus, by adding an ingredient, Pantene may favorably alter consumers’ attitudes. In a similar fashion, Dove’s decision to introduce an unscented version of its popular moisturizing bar may help women with a strong preference for unscented cosmetic products to now shift their attitude toward Dove and consider purchasing the unscented Dove soap (*deleting an ingredient*).

Changing the Overall Brand Rating

Still another cognitive-oriented strategy consists of attempting to alter consumers' *overall assessment of the brand* directly, without attempting to improve or change their evaluation of any single brand attribute. Such a strategy frequently relies on some form of global statement that “this is the largest-selling brand” or “the one all others try to imitate,” or a similar claim that sets the brand apart from all its competitors. This strategy has regularly been part of Honda’s advertising approach of affirming that its cars are used by other auto manufacturers as the “standard” to live up to.

CHANGING BELIEFS ABOUT COMPETITORS’ BRANDS

Another approach to attitude change strategy involves changing consumer beliefs about the *attributes of competitive* brands or product categories. For instance, an ad for Advil makes a dramatic assertion of product superiority over aspirin and Tylenol: The ad claims that Advil lasts longer and is gentler than aspirin and that two Advil work better than Extra Strength Tylenol. Similarly, Vicks 44 claimed that it works longer at fighting coughs than Robitussin-DM (see Figure 8-9). Clearly, the purpose of this ad is to create the attitude that Vicks 44 is a longer-lasting product than a principal competitor. In general, this strategy must be used with caution. Comparative advertising can boomerang by giving visibility to competing brands and claims. (Chapter 9 discusses comparative advertising in greater depth.)

THE ELABORATION LIKELIHOOD MODEL (ELM)

Compared to the various specific strategies of attitude change that we have reviewed, the **elaboration likelihood model (ELM)** proposes the more global view that consumer attitudes are changed by two distinctly different “routes to persuasion”—a central route or a peripheral route (see also chapter 7).¹⁶ The *central route* is particularly relevant to attitude change when a consumer’s motivation or ability to assess the attitude object is high; that is, attitude change occurs because the consumer actively seeks out information relevant to the attitude object itself. When consumers are willing to exert the effort to comprehend, learn, or evaluate the available information about the attitude object, learning and attitude change occur via the central route.

In contrast, when a consumer’s motivation or assessment skills are low (low-involvement), learning and attitude change tend to occur via the peripheral route without the consumer focusing on information relevant to the attitude object itself. In such cases, attitude change is often an outcome of secondary inducements (such as cents-off coupons, free samples, beautiful background scenery, great package, or the encouragement of a celebrity endorsement). Current research indicates that even in low-involvement conditions (like exposure to most advertising), where both central and secondary inducements are initially equal in their ability to evoke similar attitudes, it is the central inducement that has the greatest “staying power”—that is over time it is more persistent.¹⁷



BEHAVIOR CAN PRECEDE OR FOLLOW ATTITUDE FORMATION

Our discussion of attitude formation and attitude change has stressed the traditional “rational” view that consumers develop their attitudes before taking action (or “Know what you are doing before you do it”). There are alternatives to this “attitude precedes



When you've got a cough, you want a cough medicine that keeps on going so you can too. That's what Vicks 44® does. It works longer between doses, up to 8 hours. While Robitussin DM® should be taken every 4

Vicks 44 Robitussin-DM

Brand	Duration	Dosing Frequency
Vicks 44	Up to 8 hours	Up to 8 hours of cough relief
Robitussin-DM	Should be taken every 4 hours	Should be taken every 4 hours

And Maximum Strength Vicks 44 also feels more soothing. It's one cough medicine that does its job, so you can do yours.

Worked nonstop all day, surrounded by 32 first graders. Now, that's a cough medicine.

8 HOUR VICKS 44

Get the most from just one dose.

FIGURE 8-9
Changing Attitudes by
Changing Beliefs About a
Competitor's Brand

behavior” perspective, alternatives that, on careful analysis, are likely to be just as logical and rational. For example, *cognitive dissonance theory* and *attribution theory* each provide a different explanation as to why behavior might precede attitude formation.

COGNITIVE DISSONANCE THEORY

According to **cognitive dissonance theory**, discomfort or dissonance occurs when a consumer holds conflicting thoughts about a belief or an attitude object. For instance, when consumers have made a commitment—made a down payment or placed an order for a product, particularly an expensive one such as an automobile or a personal

computer—they often begin to feel cognitive dissonance when they think of the unique, positive qualities of the brands not selected (“left behind”). When cognitive dissonance occurs after a purchase, it is called **postpurchase dissonance**. Because purchase decisions often require some amount of compromise, postpurchase dissonance is quite normal. Nevertheless, it is likely to leave consumers with an uneasy feeling about their prior beliefs or actions—a feeling that they tend to resolve by changing their attitudes to conform with their behavior.

Thus, in the case of postpurchase dissonance, attitude change is frequently an *outcome* of an action or behavior. The conflicting thoughts or dissonant information that follow a purchase are prime factors that induce consumers to change their attitudes so that they will be consonant with their actual purchase behavior.

What makes postpurchase dissonance relevant to marketing strategists is the premise that *dissonance* propels consumers to reduce the unpleasant feelings created by the rival thoughts. A variety of tactics are open to consumers to reduce postpurchase dissonance. The consumer can rationalize the decision as being wise, seek out advertisements that support the choice (while avoiding dissonance-creating competitive ads), try to “sell” friends on the positive features of the brand, or look to known satisfied owners for reassurance.

In addition to such consumer-initiated tactics to reduce postpurchase uncertainty, a marketer can relieve consumer dissonance by including messages in its advertising specifically aimed at reinforcing consumers’ decisions by “complimenting their wisdom,” offering stronger guarantees or warranties, increasing the number and effectiveness of its services, or providing detailed brochures on how to use its products correctly. Beyond these dissonance-reducing tactics, marketers increasingly are developing *affinity* or *relationship programs* (see chapter 16) designed to reward good customers and to build customer loyalty and satisfaction. As noted earlier, the airlines, hotel chains, and major car rental companies have all developed such programs for their best customers.

ATTRIBUTION THEORY

As a group of loosely interrelated social psychological principles, **attribution theory** attempts to explain how people assign causality (that is, blame or credit) to events on the basis of either their own behavior or the behavior of others.¹⁸ In other words, a person might say, “I contributed to Care, Inc., because it really helps people in need,” or “She tried to persuade me to buy that unknown autofocus camera because she’d make a bigger commission.” In attribution theory, the underlying question is why: “Why did I do this?” “Why did she try to get me to switch brands?” This process of making inferences about one’s own or another’s behavior is a major component of attitude formation and change.

Attribution theory describes attitude formation and change as an outgrowth of people’s speculations as to their own behavior (self-perception) and experiences.

Self-Perception Theory

Of the various perspectives on attribution theory that have been proposed, **self-perception theory**—individuals’ inferences or judgments as to the causes of their own behavior—is a good beginning point for a discussion of attribution.

In terms of consumer behavior, self-perception theory suggests that attitudes develop as consumers look at and make judgments about their own behavior. Simply stated, if a woman observes that she routinely purchases the *Wall Street Journal* on her way to work, she is apt to conclude that she likes the *Wall Street Journal* (or has a pos-

itive attitude toward this newspaper).¹⁹ Drawing inferences from one's own behavior is not always as simple or as clear-cut as the newspaper example might suggest. To appreciate the complexity of self-perception theory, it is useful to distinguish between **internal** and **external attributions**. Let us assume that Joe has just finished using a popular computer presentation program, such as Microsoft's PowerPoint, for the first time and that his slide show is well received by his audience. If, after the presentation, he says to himself, "I'm really a natural at making great presentations," this statement would be an example of an *internal attribution*. It is an internal attribution because he is giving himself credit for the outcome (because of his ability, skill, or effort). That is, he is saying, "This slide presentation is good because of me." On the other hand, if Joe concluded that the successful presentation was due to factors beyond his control (a user-friendly program, the assistance of a friend, or just "luck"), this would be an example of an *external attribution*. In this case, he might be saying, "My great presentation is beginner's luck."

This distinction between internal and external attributions can be of strategic marketing importance. For instance, it would generally be in the best interests of the firm that produces the presentation program if the users, especially inexperienced users, *internalized* their successful use of the graphics package. If they internalized such a positive experience, it is more likely that they will repeat the behavior and become a "satisfied" regular user. Alternatively, however, if they were to *externalize* their success, it would be preferable that they attribute it to the particular program, rather than to an incidental environmental factor such as "beginner's luck" or a friend's "foolproof" instructions.

According to the principle of **defensive attribution**, consumers are likely to accept credit personally for success (internal attribution) and to credit failure to others or to outside events (external attribution). For this reason, it is crucial that marketers offer uniformly high-quality products that allow consumers to perceive themselves as the reason for the success, that is, "I'm competent." Moreover, a company's advertising should serve to reassure consumers, particularly inexperienced ones, that its products will not let them down but will make them "heroes" instead.

Foot-in-the-Door Technique Self-perception theorists have explored situations in which consumer compliance with a minor request affects subsequent compliance with a more substantial request. This strategy, which is commonly referred to as the **foot-in-the-door technique**, is based on the premise that individuals look at their prior behavior (or compliance with a minor request) and conclude that they are the kind of person who says "Yes" to such requests (that is, an internal attribution). Such self-attribution serves to increase the likelihood that they will agree to a similar, more substantial request. Someone who donates five dollars to cancer research might be persuaded to donate a much larger amount, when properly approached. The initial donation is, in effect, the foot-in-the-door.

Research into the foot-in-the-door technique has concentrated on understanding how specific incentives (for instance, cents-off coupons of varying amounts) ultimately influence consumer attitudes and subsequent purchase behavior. It appears that different-size incentives create different degrees of internal attribution, which, in turn, lead to different amounts of attitude change. For instance, individuals who try a brand without any inducements or individuals who buy a brand repeatedly are more likely to infer increasingly positive attitudes toward the brand from their respective behaviors ("I buy this brand because I like it"). In contrast, individuals who try a free sample are less committed to changing their attitudes toward the brand ("I tried this brand because it was free").

Thus, contrary to what might be expected, it is not the biggest incentive that is most likely to lead to positive attitude change. If an incentive is too big, marketers run the risk that consumers might externalize the cause of their behavior to the incentive and be *less* likely to change their attitudes and *less* likely to make future purchases of the brand. Instead, what seems most effective is a *moderate* incentive, one that is just big enough to stimulate initial purchase of the brand but still small enough to encourage consumers to internalize their positive usage experience and allow a positive attitude change to occur.²⁰

Attributions Toward Others

In addition to understanding self-perception theory, it is important to understand **attributions toward others** because of the variety of potential applications to consumer behavior and marketing. As already suggested, every time a person asks “Why?” about a statement or action of another or “others”—a family member, a friend, a salesperson, a direct marketer, a shipping company—attribution theory is relevant. To illustrate, in evaluating the words or deeds of others, let us say a salesperson, a consumer tries to determine if the salesperson’s motives are in the consumer’s best interests. If the salesperson’s motives are viewed as favorable to the consumer, the consumer is likely to respond favorably. Otherwise, the consumer is likely to reject the salesperson’s words and go elsewhere to make a purchase. In another case, a consumer orders a new modem card to upgrade a laptop computer from a major direct marketer like CDW or PC Zone. Since the consumer wants it immediately, she agrees to pay an extra \$5 to \$10 for next-day delivery by FedEx or UPS. If the next the day the package with the modem card fails to show up as expected, the consumer has two possible “others” that she might attribute the failure to—that is the direct marketer (“failing to get the product out on time”), or the delivery service (“failing to get the package to the consumer on time”). In addition, she might blame them both (a “dual” failure); or if the weather was really bad, she might conclude that it was the bad weather (an attribution that nether of them were at fault).²¹

Attributions Toward Things

Consumer researchers also are interested in consumers’ **attributions toward things**, because products (or services) can readily be thought of as “things.” It is in the area of judging product performance that consumers are most likely to form product attributions. Specifically, they want to find out why a product meets or does not meet their expectations. In this regard, they could attribute the product’s successful performance (or failure) to the product itself, to themselves, to other people or situations, or to some combination of these factors.²² To recap an earlier example, when Joe developed an excellent computer slide presentation, he could attribute his success to the PowerPoint software program (product attribution), to his own skill (self- or internal-attribution), or to his friend who helped him (external attribution).

How We Test Our Attributions

After making initial attributions about a product’s performance or a person’s words or actions, we often attempt to determine whether the inference we made is correct. According to a leading attribution theorist, individuals acquire conviction about particular observations by acting like “naive scientists,” that is, by collecting additional information in an attempt to confirm (or disconfirm) prior inferences. In collecting such information, consumers often use the following criteria:²³

1. *Distinctiveness*—The consumer attributes an action to a particular product or person if the action occurs when the product (or person) is present and does not occur in its absence.
2. *Consistency over time*—Whenever the person or product is present, the consumer's inference or reaction must be the same, or nearly so.
3. *Consistency over modality*—The inference or reaction must be the same, even when the situation in which it occurs varies.
4. *Consensus*—The action is perceived in the same way by other consumers.

The following example illustrates how each of these criteria might be used to make inferences about product performance and people's actions.

If Jim, a homeowner who takes pride in his lawn, observes that his grass seems to be cut more evenly with his new Lawn-Boy mower than with his former lawnmower, he is likely to credit the new Lawn-Boy with the improved appearance of his lawn (distinctiveness). Furthermore, if Jim finds that his new Lawn-Boy produces the same high-quality results each time he uses it, he will tend to be more confident about his initial observation (that is, the inference has consistency over time). Similarly, he will also be more confident if he finds that his satisfaction with the Lawn-Boy extends across a wide range of other related tasks, such as mulching grass and picking up leaves (consistency over modality). Finally, Jim will have still more confidence in his inferences to the extent that his friends who own Lawn-Boys also have similar experiences (consensus).

Much like Jim, we go about gathering additional information from our experiences with people and things, and we use this information to test our initial inferences.

SUMMARY

An attitude is a learned predisposition to behave in a consistently favorable or unfavorable way with respect to a given object (e.g., a product category, a brand, a service, an advertisement, a Web site, or a retail establishment). Each property of this definition is critical to understanding why and how attitudes are relevant in consumer behavior and marketing.

Of considerable importance in understanding the role of attitudes in consumer behavior is an appreciation of the structure and composition of an attitude. Four broad categories of attitude models have received attention: the tricomponent attitude model, multiattribute attitude models, trying-to-consume attitude models, and attitude-toward-the-ad models.

The tricomponent model of attitudes consists of three parts: a cognitive component, an affective component, and a conative component. The cognitive component captures a consumer's knowledge and perceptions (i.e., beliefs) about products and services. The affective component focuses on a consumer's emotions or feelings with respect to a particular prod-

uct or service. Evaluative in nature, the affective component determines an individual's overall assessment of the attitude object in terms of some kind of favorableness rating. The conative component is concerned with the likelihood that a consumer will act in a specific fashion with respect to the attitude object. In marketing and consumer behavior, the conative component is frequently treated as an expression of the consumer's intention to buy.

Multiattribute attitude models, including attitude-toward-object, attitude-toward-behavior, and the theory of reasoned action, have received much attention from consumer researchers. As a group, these models examine consumer beliefs about specific-product attributes (e.g., product or brand features or benefits). Recently, there has been an effort to better accommodate consumers' goals as expressed by their "trying to consume" (that is, a goal the consumer is trying or planning to accomplish). The theory of trying is designed to account for the many cases in which the action or outcome is not certain. The attitude-toward-

the-ad models examine the influence of advertisements on the consumer's attitudes toward the brand.

How consumer attitudes are formed and how they are changed are two closely related issues of considerable concern to marketing practitioners. When it comes to attitude formation, it is useful to remember that attitudes are learned and that different learning theories provide unique insights as to how attitudes initially may be formed. Attitude formation is facilitated by direct personal experience and is influenced by the ideas and experiences of friends and family members and exposure to mass media. In addition, it is likely that an individual's personality plays a major role in attitude formation.

These same factors also have an impact on attitude change; that is, attitude changes are learned. They are influenced by personal experiences and the information gained from various personal and impersonal sources. The consumer's own personality affects both the acceptance and the speed with which attitudes are likely to be altered.

Strategies of attitude change can be classified into six distinct categories: (1) changing the basic

motivational function, (2) associating the attitude object with a specific group or event, (3) relating the attitude object to conflicting attitudes, (4) altering components of the multiattribute model, (5) changing beliefs about competitors' brands, and (6) the elaboration likelihood model. Each of these strategies provides the marketer with alternative ways of changing consumers' existing attitudes.

Most discussions of attitude formation and attitude change stress the traditional view that consumers develop attitudes before they act. However, this may not always, or even usually, be true. Both cognitive dissonance theory and attribution theory provide alternative explanations of attitude formation and change that suggest that behavior might precede attitudes. Cognitive dissonance theory suggests that the conflicting thoughts, or dissonant information, that follow a purchase decision might propel consumers to change their attitudes to make them consonant with their actions. Attribution theory focuses on how people assign causality to events and how they form or alter attitudes as an outcome of assessing their own behavior, or the behavior of other people or things.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Explain how situational factors are likely to influence the degree of consistency between attitudes and behavior.
2. Because attitudes are learned predispositions to respond, why don't marketers and consumer researchers just measure purchase behavior and forget attitudes?
3. Explain a person's attitude toward visiting Disney World in terms of the tricomponent attitude model.
4. How can the marketer of a "nicotine patch" (a device that assists individuals to quit smoking) use the *theory of trying* to segment its market? Using this theory, identify two segments that the marketer should target and propose product positioning approaches to be directed at each of the two segments.
5. Explain how the product manager of a breakfast cereal might change consumer attitudes toward the company's brand by: (a) changing beliefs about the brand, (b) changing beliefs about competing brands, (c) changing the relative evaluation of attributes, and (d) adding an attribute.
6. The Department of Transportation of a large city is planning an advertising campaign that encourages people to switch from private cars to mass transit. Give examples of how the department can use the following strategies to change commuters' attitudes: (a) changing the basic motivational function, (b) changing beliefs about public transportation, (c) using self-perception theory, and (d) using cognitive dissonance.
7. The Saturn Corporation is faced with the problem that many consumers perceive compact and mid-size American cars to be of poorer quality than comparable Japanese cars. Assuming that Saturn produces cars that are of equal or better quality than Japanese cars, how can the company persuade consumers of this fact?
8. Should the marketer of a popular computer graphics program prefer consumers to make internal or external attributions? Explain your answer.
9. A college student has just purchased a new personal computer. What factors might cause the student to experience postpurchase dissonance? How might the student try to overcome it? How can the retailer who sold the computer help reduce the student's dissonance? How can the computer's manufacturer help?

EXERCISES

- Find two print ads, one illustrating the use of the affective component and the other illustrating the cognitive component. Discuss each ad in the context of the tri-component model. In your view, why has each marketer taken the approach in each of these ads?
- What sources influenced your attitude about this course before classes started? Has your initial attitude changed since the course started? If so, how?
- Describe a situation in which you acquired an attitude toward a new product through exposure to an advertisement for that product. Describe a situation where you formed an attitude toward a product or brand on the basis of personal influence.
- Find advertisements that illustrate each of the four motivational functions of attitudes. Distinguish between ads that are designed to reinforce an existing attitude and those aimed at changing an attitude.
- Think back to the time when you were selecting a college. Did you experience dissonance immediately after you made a decision? Why or why not? If you did experience dissonance, how did you resolve it?

KEY TERMS

- Attitude-toward-object model
- Attitude-toward-the-ad model
- Attitude-toward-behavior model
- Attitudes
- Attribution theory
- Attributions toward things
- Attributions toward others
- Cognitive dissonance theory
- Defensive attribution
- Ego-defensive function
- Elaboration Likelihood Model
- Foot-in-the-door technique
- Functional approach
- Intention-to-buy scales
- Internal and external attributions
- Knowledge function
- Multiattribute attitude models
- Postpurchase dissonance
- Self-perception theory
- Theory-of-reasoned-action model
- Theory of trying to consume
- Tricomponent attitude model
- Utilitarian function
- Value-expressive function

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