

## 2 Coming to live in a consumer society

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The origins of the consumer society as we know it today can be traced back a few hundred years. According to McKendrick, Brewer and Plumb (1982) the birthplace can be found in eighteenth century England. However, as McCracken (1988) has pointed out, the consumer revolution as a whole needs to be seen as part of a larger transformation in Western societies, which began in the sixteenth century. The social changes brought about by that transformation resulted in the modification of Western concepts of time, space, society, the individual, the family and the state. This provided the base on which the consumer revolution could thrive and develop into a mass phenomenon.

McCracken (1988) was one of the first scholars offering a comprehensive review of the history of consumption. He approached the subject by dividing the course of events into three *moments*. The first moment falls within the last quarter of the sixteenth century in Elizabethan England where profound changes in consumption pattern occurred in a small section of the population. This was the moment where some of the established concepts, notably the concepts of space, the individual and the family began to falter. The circumstances bringing about these changes served as a primer for the consumer movement that would come a century later. McCracken describes this as the second moment. It was characterized by a heightened propensity to spend, by a greatly extended choice of goods, and an increased frequency of purchases. Fashion started to play an important role too, and, for the first time, the individual as a consumer became the target of manipulative attempts. The origins of modern marketing instruments can be traced back to this time. With the rise of the third moment, the consumer movement was already a structural feature of life (McCracken, 1988). However, the development was not yet completed. The 19th century added new qualities to the movement and turned it into a "dream world of consumption" (Williams, 1982). The new developments included the invention of the department store, the world exhibitions and the medium of film.

Considering the further developments that have happened since then, one needs to add a fourth and a fifth moment to McCracken's three. The fourth moment was induced by the event of Fordism at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the United States. By the 1950s Fordism had spread through the whole of Western Europe shifting the consumer revolution towards mass production and mass consumption and turning it from an elite to a mass phenomenon (Bocock, 1993; Gabriel and Lang, 1995). This allowed for a new type of consumer to emerge. This consumer is no longer classified nor constrained by social class. Instead, he emphasizes individuality, self-expression and stylistic self-consciousness and is recognized by the kind of lifestyle chosen (Featherstone, 1991). In the 1990s, we have seen a diminished enthusiasm for consumption. New trends propagate 'downsizing' and a more modest lifestyle. Whether this is related to a change in attitude (e.g. due to environmental concerns) or to economic pressures is still a disputable question. A less controversial issue is that modern societies currently face profound structural changes due to the advances in information and computer technology. These new challenges are more than likely to have effects on consumption patterns. What kind of changes this will entail is difficult to predict. Since it goes beyond the scope and purpose of this examination, the various speculations will not be discussed here in detail. For all that can be predicted, the consumer as we know him today may vanish altogether (Gabriel and Lang, 1995). This development suggests that we might have reached the end of the fourth moment in the history of consumption and are at the dawn of the fifth.

In the following, the historical events that circumscribe these various moments are described in more detail. In particular it will be shown how the purpose of consumption changed from being a marker of status and social class to expressing distinguished lifestyles in contemporary consumer culture. The starting point of this excursion is the 16<sup>th</sup> century; back when Queen Elizabeth I ruled over England.

## **2.1 FROM CLASS TO LIFESTYLE**

### **2.1.1 Changing consumption patterns in Elizabethan England (16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century)**

Towards the end of the 16th century, Elizabeth I found herself struggling for power and authority. In order to regain her strength, she started to employ new instruments of government exploiting the hegemonic power of goods. This was a strategy she had observed at the Renaissance courts of Italy where the expressive properties of goods were utilized to communicate legitimacy, power and majesty. This aim was achieved by demanding the noblemen actively participate in a highly ceremonial court in order to receive favours from the Queen (McCracken, 1988). Consequently, the noblemen had to leave their countryseats to travel to London to bid for the Queen's attention. There they met others of equal standing who pursued the same goal. This demanded that they compete with the other noblemen in order to receive the desired favours. For the first time, the nobleman had to fear for his honour and social standing in comparison with others. Previously they had been the unquestioned masters and rulers in their own locality. Now the need arose to take some positive actions in order to stand out from the crowd of petitioners to be successful in their bid. One obvious way of displaying one's supremacy was in spending conspicuously. Thus, not only did Elizabeth I employ the symbolism of goods to demonstrate intangible concepts like her legitimacy; she also incited the noblemen to use goods in a similar fashion. This triggered a never-ending spiral because noblemen became busy thinking about ever-new ways of how they could outdo their competitors. According to McCracken (1988), before long, they became the slaves of competitive consumption. This in the long run resulted in fundamental changes for the Elizabethan family and locality.

Traditionally, the Elizabethan family of the sixteenth century was devoted to establishing and to maintaining 'the cult of family status'. They only purchased objects that had the ability to represent the honour of previous generations and that, at the same time, had the potential to

carry status claims for generations to come. New items had the mark of commonness and were not suitable for this purpose. Antique furnishings, for example, were more appropriate because the patina of use guaranteed social standing. This attitude was challenged by the new demand put on the noblemen. Driven by unprecedented status anxieties and the immediate needs of status competition, the noblemen began to buy more things for themselves rather than to spend on their family corporations. Thereby, emphasis was put on the novelty of a product rather than on longevity. Thus, the change in consumption patterns was accompanied by a shift in the symbolic properties of consumer goods. Patina was 'out' and fashion was 'in'.

A second major change occurred in the 'locality' of consumption. Traditionally, the nobleman had the duty (and usually also fulfilled it) to share certain of the resources that had descended to him and his households with his subordinates. When Elizabeth 1 started to demand participation in the ceremonial court, the noblemen started to relax this duty because of the perceived necessity to 'eat, drink, built and dress away family fortunes in London' in order to win favours (McCracken, 1988). As a consequence of this behaviour, the community started to suffer. The subordinates received fewer goods from superordinate households and the time super- and subordinates spent together in ceremonies and events of the locality decreased. The formerly quite close social relations between the two groups widened, and eventually resulted in large social gaps. The subordinates could only watch with an amazing gaze at the new consumption habits of their superordinates, but did not have the means to participate. The noblemen now consumed on a new scale and for new social purposes, which in addition to the formation of social gaps, resulted in differences in tastes, styles, aesthetic preferences, and attitudes. Previously there had only been differences in degree between the tastes of sub- and superordinate, now there were differences of kind. Noblemen now demanded different things. The previously quite uniform style of life vanished and new modes of living appeared, at least within the ranks of the upper social classes.

In summary, the major changes that occurred in the 16th and 17th century that prepared the way for the consumer movement to have far-reaching effects a century later were firstly, the arising need for noblemen to spend competitively and on themselves instead of on the corporation, and secondly, the shift of the symbolic property of goods from patina to novelty and fashion.

### **2.1.2 Changing ideas about status and consumer goods in the 18<sup>th</sup> century**

In the 18th century, the number of people who could join the noblemen in their pursuits to spend largely increased because of rising prosperity. The purchase for self instead of for the family now became established praxis, and the transition of consumer goods from being an object of 'patina' to an object that was cherished for its novelty continued. This was reflected in new ideas about how to express status. Increasingly aesthetic and stylistic considerations took precedence over utilitarian motives. Goods were no longer preserved until their usefulness was exhausted; instead the most important decision criterion for keeping or discarding them was whether they still satisfied the demands of fashion. Style triumphed over utility, aesthetics over function.

Fashion had the effect of replacing consumer goods over and over again. It turned consumption into a new, more frequent and demanding activity. Clever businessmen like the pottery manufacturer Josiah Wedgwood learned through observing patterns and regularities in society to exploit this pattern. For example, he noticed that fashion in clothing 'trickled down' from the court through the nobility, the gentry, the middle class and the lower classes. He also perceived that it was a relatively discretionary matter of the court when fashion trends changed and in which direction. This he set out to change. He started to employ marketing techniques as a way to insinuate his products into the lifestyle of the aristocrats in order to manipulate their tastes and preferences. This proved to be a successful strategy because once his goods were accepted and purchased by the aristocrats; it was only a matter of time until other

groups in the population wanted to acquire them as well. Other producers followed Wedgewood's example and soon a wide variety of products, not only clothes, obeyed the demands of fashion (McKendrick, Brewer and Plumb, 1982). Hence, in the 18th century consumption activities penetrated more and more areas of lives and it became possible for an increasing number of social groups to engage in them more frequently, in more locations, under new influences, in search of new goods and for new social and cultural needs.

### **2.1.3 'Shopping' in the 19th century**

In the nineteenth century, the introduction of the department store and the world exhibitions caused major excitement among the people of that time. For most of today's consumers who regard visits to big stores a routine chore, it may almost seem incomprehensible that the introduction of the department store was such a big event. In order to better understand this excitement, in the following section it is briefly described what shopping was like before this event. Until the first department store opened its doors, people only went shopping when they needed or wanted something in particular. Upon entering a shop, the shopkeeper attended the customer without much delay and asked what she desired. All goods were in locked cupboards and the customer could not just wander around to have a look at the various choices available, if there were many at all. The customer had to wait until the shopkeeper displayed the demanded goods on the counter. Often these goods were only prototypes and not ready-made products to take along immediately. Thus, the customer had to explain in detail what she had in mind, and then the goods were custom made according to these wishes. Before however the customer could leave the shop, sometimes long negotiations took place where one bartered over the price and the delivery date. Fixed prices were not the rule, in fact not realistic since goods were mostly produced as unique specimens to the specific requirements of the customer. Returning the goods after receipt or exchanging them for something else, a size larger or a different colour, was not a conceivable option either (Stihler, 1998).

With the event of the department store this all changed. The nature of the shopping activity was completely transposed. Now customers could visit a shop without a purchase intention in mind; they could go shopping just to have a look around and to experience the atmosphere. The department stores presented themselves as places of entertainment in which to spend some leisure time and to enjoy oneself. Among other things, this was also reflected in the architecture of the buildings. The exterior and the interior design often took on monumental forms. Previously accustomed to visiting a number of single room shops in simple one-story buildings in order to do their necessary shopping, consumers now could plan a single trip to one of the big department stores. The department stores were housed in multi-story buildings with large glass showcases along the sides displaying exotic goods, often closer resembling a palace or a theatre than a shop. The entrance of the *BonMarché* in Paris for instance was richly decorated with ornaments and the visitor was invited to enter through two temple-like pillars, which supported the front roof. The interior was not any less impressive. A giant glass dome provided a spacey atmosphere full of light. One gallery followed the next filled with a previously unmatched variety of goods. Three large staircases comparable to those found in opera houses guided the visitors to the higher levels. Balconies around the top level allowed for observing the activities down below (Miller, 1981).

Shopping in the 19th century thus took on entirely new dimensions. The whole atmosphere around and within the store was designed to add a dream like quality to consumption and to increase demand. The arrangement of goods was such as to stimulate and to arouse free-floating desires. This was aided by the introduction of credit. By being able to pay in instalments, previously unobtainable objects moved into the reach of even the ordinary person. Imaginative desires could merge with material ones and dreams could become reality. It was during this time that 'going shopping' turned into a leisure time activity, something to do on a free afternoon, something to take the children along for a fun day out.

The second important development in the 19th century was that people discovered the expressive powers of goods for the purpose of

expressing different styles of life. The courtly model of consumption had lost its influence and, according to Williams (1982), three new distinctive groups of lifestyles appeared instead, the lifestyle of mass consumption, the elite lifestyle, and the democratic lifestyle. Accessibility, modesty and dignity characterized the latter. In comparison, the lifestyle of mass consumption thrived on developing new ideas about luxury, understanding itself as the successor of the old aristocratic way of life. In contrast, the aim of the elite lifestyle was to create a new aristocracy based on superior aesthetics and tastes, independent from the status of the family of origin. This lifestyle was inspired by the ideas of Beau Brummell and the dandies who employed the emergent language of goods to carve out a new space in society for themselves, after the old order had broken down in the wake of the French revolution (McCracken, 1988).

Each of these lifestyles can be understood as a different response of people to the particular problems and difficulties in a changing society. What is noticeable here is the successful implementation of a new system of discourse, which emerged in the form of commodities. The 19th century consumer recognized the expressive potential that lies within commodities and that they could exploit it for the accomplishment of new cultural objectives. Consumer goods were now widely used to express cultural values and to support the emergence of new lifestyles. Thus, the third moment in the history of consumption with the events of the department store entailed that consumption turned into a dream world where reality, entertainment and shopping often merged together to become one entity. The experiential aspect of shopping moved to the fore and some authors even came to conclude that shopping took on attributes of a new religion of consumption (Bowling, 1987).

#### **2.1.4 Mass production and consumption in the 20<sup>th</sup> century**

Mass consumption in the modern sense was first established in the United States at the beginning of the 20th century. Britain followed, and by the 1950s, the rest of Western Europe joined in. Henry Ford, the

American car manufacturer, played a decisive role in it. He recognized the close relationship that existed between production and consumption holding the view that if you cut wages, you just cut the number of your customers (Gabriel and Lang, 1995). Consequently, he paid his work force high enough wages for them to be able to afford the products that were being produced. Within a short period, a large percentage of the working class population could call themselves proud owners of a Model T Ford. A few years earlier, when only rich people of the upper classes were able to participate in the consumption process, this would have been an unthinkable possibility. Due to Henry Ford's insight, the market shifted from an elite phenomenon towards mass production and mass consumption. This was such a fundamental change that in the 1970s this phenomenon got its own name. Gramsci called it *Fordism*, which soon was to become an established term within the social sciences (Bocock, 1993; Gramsci, 1971).

From the beginning of the 20th century onwards, more and more groups of consumers emerged being able to exercise choice in what they bought because the amount of money that they had left over after the necessary spending on subsistence (i.e., food, clothes and shelter) steadily increased. At the start of the 20th century, working class consumers in Britain spent 50 to 75% of their income on food. Surplus cash was spent on luxuries like drink and tobacco. Today consumers only need to spend 10 and 30% of their incomes on food. Therefore, much more money is left over to spend on services and entertainment, the various forms of savings and items of conspicuous consumption like dress, personal possession and decoration for the home (Gabriel and Lang, 1995).

One result of this was that in contemporary consumer culture the hierarchical structure of society has more or less dissolved due to an increase in social mobility and the possibility for almost all individuals to participate in the world of consumption. Hence, vertical differentiations have become of much more importance. Instead of social class, the factor that distinguishes people nowadays is taste and style and this is expressed in their consumption choices. Consequently the modern day consumer is no longer preoccupied with social class but

with consumption standards and appropriate commodity choices. This is accompanied by a willingness to read meaning into material goods that goes beyond viewing them simply as markers of social categories (Featherstone, 1991; Bourdieu, 1984). This is also reflected in modern marketing strategies. For decades marketers have segmented the population based on types of occupation like high managerial, administrative, professional, skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers, pensioners, widows and the unemployed. Nowadays goods are promoted based on life style characteristics, life stages, shared interests and/or aspirations combined with stages in the marriage and reproduction cycle (Wills, 1990, cited in Bocock, 1993).

## **2.2 THEORETICAL EXPLANATIONS OF MODERN CONSUMPTION: OR WHY DO PEOPLE CONSUME?**

Up to now only an overview of the historical events that have contributed to the emergence of the consumer society, as we know it today, has been presented. This perspective however leaves a number of important questions unanswered: Why for example did people in the 18th century suddenly show a heightened propensity to spend? Why do consumers nowadays continue to consume although they seem to have everything they need? Is this simply due to a rise in prosperity, or do other factors provide a more powerful explanation for this development? In order to find an answer to these questions, in the following a number of theoretical views from scholars of various fields are discussed, who all have contributed a piece to the puzzle of modern consumption. At first, the classical theories of Thorstein Veblen (1857-1929) and Georg Simmel (1858-1918) are presented followed by views of contemporary scholars like Baudrillard, Bourdieu, Campbell and McCracken.

### **2.2.1 From emulation to manipulation**

Veblen suggested that the ultimate problem in understanding industrial society is not how goods come to be made but how they take

on meaning. In *Theory of the Leisure Class* he stresses that the consumption of goods serves, in addition to the conventionally accepted function to satisfying needs, to indicate a person's level of wealth and his social status. He observed that the *nouveaux rich* imitated the life style of the upper classes in Europe, trying to lead an aristocratic way of life and demonstrating through a mere absence from work and the pursuit of leisure activities their distance from the working class. This was further underlined through an exaggerated display of their possessions. Veblen called this type of behaviour conspicuous consumption and conspicuous leisure, a phrase now widely known and used. The assumption underlying his theory is that the root cause of human action and the motives behind it are emulation, pride and envy. Lower classes observe the life and habits of the higher classes with the aspiration to move upwards. In order to achieve this, they strive to imitate the ways of the higher classes. Higher social status groups of course want to keep their social distance and therefore continually change their habits and patterns of consumption, for example by inventing and following new trends and fashions. Knowing what is fashionable and appropriate becomes elevated to a sign of social standing, falling behind means social decline. To summarize Veblen's contribution: He showed how everyday objects could lose their functional qualities and become objects of display, establishing the social standing of their owners and users. Therefore, the act of consumption cannot only be viewed in simply economic terms; moreover it is a manifest sign of social status with profound socio-cultural significance.

Simmel (1904) in analysing the role of fashion in the process of emulation showed that the competition for social status and prestige resulted in seemingly irrational changes in fashion trends that made perfectly functional commodities obsolete a long time before their utility was used up. Consequently, the demand for consumer goods inflated, namely for those goods currently in fashion, leading to an increased propensity to spend. This is known as the *trickle-down-effect*. Further, Simmel pointed at the two way street of status competition showing that status competition not only inspired imitation but also differentiation. Differentiation became of more and more importance due to a growing urbanization since the 18th century. Living in the metropolis or the

suburban areas brought new challenges to people, anonymity being one of them. Resulting from it, city dwellers were anxious to preserve a sense of individuality and autonomy and consumption presented one way to articulate this. Individual styles and preferences to dress, eat, drink, etc. were used for the purpose of differentiation and as a way to preserve an autonomous identity. At the same time, they also served to express membership of a particular social status group in differentiation to other groups (Simmel, 1903).

*Comment on Veblen and Simmel's theories.* Campbell (1987), while acknowledging the contributions of both Veblen and Simmel to the theoretical understanding of the consumer movement, argues that an explanation for the increased propensity to spend can only be found if one looked at more profound changes that occurred in society and at the underlying values and attitudes that govern consumption. Campbell as well as other authors claims that the so-called Veblen effect was not new to the 18th century. New were the skilful promotion activities exploiting the emulative tendencies that existed within the population. The new marketing techniques aimed at creating new fashions and at making fashionable goods desirable. Following this argument, one could conclude that the growing disposition to spend was due to advertising. This is however not a satisfying explanation either because it only leads to a further question: Why did advertising and sale campaigns suddenly appear? One possibility would be to attribute this to the phenomenon of fashion, as Simmel has done. Evidence suggests that the quickening tempo of fashion changes indeed originates in the 18th century. From this point of view, it appears that the emergence of fashion is the key to answer the question of why either emulation on the part of the consumer or manipulation on the part of the producer should have taken off in such a rapid way. Campbell again provides an argument that speaks against this thesis. He states that when examining the concept of fashion with a bit more scrutiny, one comes to realize that fashion itself is just a form of emulation. Hence, if one attributed the increased propensity to spend to fashion all arguments would necessarily result in a tautology.

Gabriel and Lang (1995) give further limiting factors of Veblen's theory. They question Veblen's assumption that any attempt to compare

one's own standard of life with that of others will necessarily result in feelings of envy and dissatisfaction, which are followed up by efforts to improve upon one's status by purchasing appropriate products. Veblen does not take into account that the outcome of such a comparative process could also be satisfaction and contentment with one's position in life and then people would not feel driven to consume. Gabriel and Lang suggest that in addition to emulation other motives for consumption might be more or equally as important. These could be the desire to live up to an ideal or to enjoy an improved standard of living in its own right.

Despite the various points of critique that can be held against the theories of Veblen and Simmel, they have nonetheless contributed a great deal to our understanding of consumers in the 18th and 19th centuries. They were the first to detach consumption from the notion of greed and the idea that goods simply serve the satisfaction of physical needs and linked it to social status. They made consumption a central topic of social theorizing for other scholars to build upon. The theories that have resulted from this are discussed in the next section.

### **2.2.2 Motivating factors of consumption: Is it the need for distinction, pleasure or displaced meanings?**

As the early theorists have pointed out, goods can be used to communicate differences in social relations, thus are regulators of social mobility. Today however, goods are not only used to display status origin but also to conceal it. Hence, it becomes more and more difficult to read status ranks and to classify people accordingly (Featherstone, 1991). Therefore, in contemporary consumer culture, knowledge about goods and their appropriateness is no longer sufficient. One also needs to know how to properly employ them. This entails learning about the appropriate body shape, size, weight, stance, walk, tone of voice, style of speaking and a natural ease in dealing with them. Bourdieu (1984) called this type of knowledge cultural capital as compared to economic capital, adding that consumers need to use both for the purpose of distinction. Today, he argues, it is a particular constellation of taste, consumption preferences and lifestyle practices, not merely the

possession of goods, that allows for making out one's position within society. For this purpose, it is necessary to strive for new goods and to follow new trends as a way to keep up and ahead of others and to maintain one's respective class position. Overall, this means that consumer culture has brought democratisation in that power differences between classes were levelled out to a certain degree. As Bourdieu (1984) however points out, this did not extinguish the need for differentiation. In contemporary culture we still observe that status groups aim at preserving and enhancing their present style of life by maintaining a social distance and by closing off economic opportunities to outsiders. Fashion, in the way Simmel has described it, continues to play a role. It eases the adherence and absorption into a particular social group, but at the same time allows for differentiation and distinction from other groups (c.f. Fowler, 1997). Similarly, Baudrillard (1970/1988) argued that consumption is not driven by the need for a particular object, but by the desire for *différence*, which in Baudrillard's view is the longing for social meaning.

The sociologist Campbell (1987) does not share the position that the need for differentiation is the driving force of modern consumption. He argues that one has to look at the larger changes that occurred within English society in order to understand people's motivation to consume. The rise in prosperity undoubtedly contributed to it, but according to Campbell, the growth of self-consciousness, the shaping of subjectivity in a socially constructed childhood, the occurrence of romantic love and the Puritan ethic had no lesser effects. It was first under these conditions that beliefs, actions, aesthetic preferences and emotional responses were no longer regarded as dictated by outer circumstances but as partly willed and influenced by the individual. This development opened up the possibility for individuals to attribute new meanings to consumer goods and to employ them in different ways. According to Campbell, this is the key to explain the heightened propensity to spend. As it may not be obvious at first glance why this should be the case, Campbell's theory of modern consumption will be depicted in more detail below.

Central to Campbell's theory is the difference in meaning between the two concepts need/satisfaction and desire/pleasure. The need/satisfaction

concept relates to a state of being and its disturbance. For example, if feeling hungry one experiences a feeling of deprivation. This feeling could also be described as a push from *within*. Upon realizing this state, one feels motivated to do something, i.e. to get some food. More generally speaking, upon realizing a need deprivation a person is likely to look for an appropriate remedy to address the felt disturbance and to satisfy the need. According to Campbell, the most suitable remedies for satisfying such a need are objects since they possess the right intrinsic attributes.

The desire/pleasure concept in contrast is related to the quality of an experience. Campbell defines pleasure as being the favourable reaction to a certain pattern of sensation. The motivation to experience such a pattern is driven by feelings of desire and this is triggered by the presence of an appropriate stimulus in the environment. Thus, one experiences a pull from *without* by something external to oneself. An object cannot fulfil this longing for pleasure since pleasure is not an intrinsic property of any object but a type of reaction by humans when encountering certain stimuli. Consequently, in order to achieve pleasure a person needs to strive for an exposure to a certain stimulus in the hope of triggering the longed for response.

Traditionally pleasure has been derived as a by-product in the process of satisfying needs. With rising affluence however, this became harder to achieve since it is within the nature of sensual pleasures that they diminish the more frequent and extended one engages in an activity that provides it. In other words, the more regular a need could be satisfied, the greater was the loss in the total sum of pleasures in life. Pleasure thus became a scarce good and for maximizing the yield, the modern individual sought for new ways of experiencing it. The realms of emotions and imagination promised to be a more powerful and sustainable source since fantasies and dreams can be constructed limitlessly and consumed for the intrinsic pleasures they provide *ad libidum*.

Thus, modern pleasure seeking according to Campbell is no longer related to the senses but to activities like daydreaming or fantasizing. The purpose of goods in this context is to act as props. They are the

building blocs around which consumers create their pleasurable visions. This alone of course cannot yet explain the increased propensity to consume. An additional factor is that people feel a strong desire to purchase the products employed in the construction of their dreams since it is within the nature of this form of mentalist hedonism to experience a great deal of pleasure from imagining the visions coming true. The motivating force behind consumption thus is the incorrigible hope that reality could possibly match the dream. As however fantasies have the inherent quality of being perfect, the consequence of each purchase necessarily must be disillusionment. The only way to re-experience this illusory pleasure again is to take the dream forward and to attach it to a new product. This is possible because the actual intent is not to consume the product *per se* but its sign value. As signs are free to float between objects, they can be used for creating an indefinite number of associative links and hence it is possible to use a variety of different objects as tangible cues in the same hedonistic fantasy (Baudrillard, 1968/1988).

Taking Campbell's position, the answer he offers to the question of why there is an ongoing pursuit for novelty in modern consumer societies seems plausible. His theory explains how wanting is extinguished so quickly and why people discard goods as rapidly as they acquire them. The basic motivation underlying consumption thus is the desire to experience in reality the pleasures already enjoyed in one's imagination, each new product presenting a possibility for realizing this ambition. Product attributes are of little importance in this world of consuming fantasies because it is possible to attach whatever properties one desires to the provided commodities. The only limit is one's ability to imagine it. Hence, according to Campbell, "the inexhaustibility of wants lies in the inevitable gap between the perfected pleasures of the dream and the imperfect joys of reality" (1987, p. 186).

Empirical support for Campbell's theory has been provided by a number of authors. Fournier and Guiry (1993) and Phillips (1996) for example reported that consumers entertain dreams of not yet acquired products and experiences. Such dreams serve the purpose of anticipatory consumption and purchase prioritising but they also offer escape from the mundane aspects of life, are a means of mood management and

provide intrinsic enjoyment. In addition, the authors observed an overall high level of anticipation to fulfil the dreams.<sup>1</sup> This fits the finding of Anderson (1983), Bandura (1977) and Mahoney (1974) who all showed that imagining oneself performing a target behaviour results in corresponding changes in intentions. A reason for this is that judgements and beliefs about oneself depend on the relative availability of causal scenarios and scripts. Hence, the more frequently one imagines a scenario, the more likely the intention to produce changes. The likelihood of acting on a consumption vision is especially likely if the main actor of the vision is oneself, and if possible and ideal images of oneself are part of the vision. This is related to the fact that envisioned scenarios allow a person to anticipate certain roles and their effects in advance as they make situations more real, tangible and concrete. If the imagined or a similar situation arises one day, then it is more likely that the behaviour that already has been anticipated in the vision is enacted, since one can draw on the already existing role and action scripts. With regard to a purchasing situation this means that a purchase that has previously been anticipated in a consumption vision is likely to result in an actual purchase at some point in the future. This of course depends on the plausibility of the imagined scenario (Phillips, 1996).

In support of Campbell's theory, it generally is reported that consumption dreams are experienced as pleasurable and that the greatest pleasures lies in letting the dream come true. Yet, after having allowed a dream to become true often negative feelings prevail. In a cross-cultural study, Belk, Ger and Askegard (1997) showed that young consumers in the US, in Turkey and in Denmark experience the moments of acquisition as joyful, exciting, positive, content and relaxed, often accompanied by feelings of accomplishment and pride. After the acquisition however negative feelings like a let down, regret, frustration, sadness and disinterest often arise. These findings reinforce Campbell's proposition that possession provides a brief happy state, but after acquiring goods people have to turn to new sources of desire. Hence, the thrill lies more in the desire than in its realization.

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<sup>1</sup> Compare also Gregory, Cialdini and Carpenter (1982)

Other authors entertain positions similar to those of Campbell. For example, Scitovsky (1976) supports the view that it is the craving and the yearning for new things and ideas, which is the source of all striving and progress. Bauman (1988), from a Marxist perspective, argues that the pleasure principle is purposefully deployed by the capitalist system to perpetuate its own existence. It enables consumers to endure the rigors of life under the capitalistic reality principle like for example the alienation of work and the threat of unemployment. Lebergott (1993) adds that in modern societies consumption choices all have the same purpose, they are made in the pursuit of happiness. If this is indeed the case, Gabriel and Lang (1995) contemplate, the pursuit of pleasure in consumer societies free of guilt and shame then becomes the foundation of a new moral philosophy, the new image of the good life and the driving engine behind the propensity to consume.

This view however is not all encompassing either. Gabriel and Lang (1995) criticized that the pleasure principle as Campbell conceives it, is supposed to operate across classes, races, gender, ages and all other social and cultural distinction, disregarding the social, political and communicative dimension of consumption. In theory it might be possible that consumers attach whatever property they desire to any consumer good provided. In reality however they are unlikely to do so because their dreams will in part be determined by their social environment, their upbringing, their economic situation, fashion trends and the like. This exerts an influence on the kind of properties that are deemed appropriate for attachment. Another point of criticism is that Campbell did not take into account that people fantasize for other reasons than for deriving pleasure and that pleasure seeking therefore cannot provide the sole encompassing answer to the question of why people consume. The anthropologist McCracken (1988) for example, while also locating the increased propensity to spend within the realms of imagination, attributes it to a quest for ideals rather than to a quest for pleasure.

A core assumption of McCracken's theory is that the gap between the 'real' and the 'ideal' is a permanent feature of social life and that the bridging of it is the most pressing problem a culture (and individuals)

must deal with. He proposes that people in order not to put their perfected dreams into danger of being unmasked relocate them to a distant location. At this location they are no longer at risk to be subjected to empirical proof, yet they appear as a 'practical' reality since their substantiality is 'proven' by their existence in this other location. This other location could be the golden age (when I was a child, things were much better ...), the glorious future (when I have finished my degree, then ..., when I buy my dream house, then ...), or somewhere across the continuum of space within a perfect other (e.g., a distant reference group). The purpose of consumer goods in this scenario is to serve as bridges to the displaced meanings and to become the objectification of one's hopes and ideals. This however is not always experienced as sufficient. Occasionally people feel the desire to obtain a tangible sign, which reinforces them in their belief that their ideals are achievable and can potentially become true. In which case they cross the bridge and purchase the product - a quite dangerous activity since it undermines the purpose of the displaced meaning by collapsing the distance between the individual and his or her ideals. After having acquired the product, the displaced meaning is inevitably put to empirical test. This can destroy the hopes that have been connected to the idealized image, resulting in disillusionment. McCracken describes a number of strategies that consumers have developed to either not touch the immunity of the displaced meaning or, if one has unmasked it, to reinstate it again. In the latter case, one possibility is to devalue the purchased item and to attach the meaning one has attributed to it to another good, a good which one doesn't own yet.

As the reader may have already noted, McCracken's theory has a lot in common with Campbell's theory, although both make use of a different metaphor. For both Campbell and McCracken, the location that holds and contains the meanings of goods is within the realm of the consumers' imagination. In addition they both predict that the consequence of purchasing a good which has been part of a fantasy results in disillusionment and that consumers in order to preserve their dream, take the dream forward and attach it to new goods. Whether consumer goods are more likely to serve as bridges to displaced meanings or whether they are more likely to function as props in

idealized fantasies has not yet been validated empirically. A fair assumption seems to be that probably both metaphors are true. At times consumers might engage in fantasies simply for the purpose of deriving pleasure, at other times they may want to obtain empirical proof for their ideals being achievable and worth striving for.

Consumer goods in both cases are the perfect medium to be employed a) because of their logical similarity with displaced meanings and hedonistic pleasures and b) due to their role as non-linguistic communicators. Unlike spoken words, goods are signs, concrete and enduring.<sup>2</sup> They demonstrate certain substances through their own substance in that their concreteness passes from the signifying object to the signified meaning. This in turn encourages the fiction that the intangible they stand for is indeed substantial and can be possessed concretely. Emotionally they stand as a kind of 'proof' for the displaced meaning or in Campbell's terminology, for the reality of the fantasies. The logical similarity that exists between displaced meanings, hedonistic pleasures and consumer goods is based on their shared properties scarcity and desirability. The economic value of goods fulfils the criteria of scarcity; their plentitude the criteria of desirability since for most consumers there is always another, higher level of consumption to which they aspire. This logical similarity creates a special bond between consumer goods and the attached meanings linking the signifier and the signified.

Although there are many similarities between McCracken and Campbell's theory, the answer McCracken gives to the question considered here is not the same. According to McCracken's perspective, it is the pursuit of displaced meanings through goods, which makes consumers attentive to luxury goods and to product innovations. It is this striving that evokes appetite for non-necessity goods and induces the willingness to make the exceptional purchase. Hence, in addition to the other factors already mentioned: greed, the need for distinction and self-

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<sup>2</sup> McCracken argues that objects are constrained in the range of meanings that they can assume because they bear a non-arbitrary relationship to the things they signify. Baudrillard (1968/1988) in contrast understands objects as being capable of telling virtually any story. This is rooted in Simmel's idea that anything can become fashionable provided it stands out from the rest.

indulgence, the increased propensity to spend can also be explained by the role consumer goods play in re-establishing access to ideals that have been displaced to distant locations in time and space.

### 2.2.3 Summary

Beginning with Veblen and Simmel and then considering the more contemporary theorists, it looks like, at least at first glance, that there is little overlap regarding the answers they give to the question of why people consume. If one however takes a meta-perspective, one notes that there is one common element uniting all theories. This element is the ability of consumer goods to function as communicators. That goods have not always been communicators was shown at the beginning of this chapter when describing the various moments in the history of consumption. At first, goods were only of a certain use-value and did not imply any meaning via the process of consumption. This first changed when rationality and economic thinking entered the realms of consumption. Today, consumer goods can take up a range of imagistic and symbolic associations, which dominate their initial use-value. Goods have become commodity signs. They are free to take on whatever *ersatz* value there is, and in the Saussurian sense, their meanings are arbitrarily determined by their position in a self-referential set of signifiers. Thus, they have become communicators and this seems to be the most fundamental function in explaining why consumers consume beyond necessary levels of subsistence.

Advertising and other media play upon the role of commodities as signs and step over the boundaries of previously sealed-apart meanings and create new mixtures and essentially new products. Accordingly, advertising can be defined as the art of making commodities communicate to us, the aim being to construct a bridge between a promised experience and a commodity. Hence, advertising converts the original meaning of goods - their use-value - and attaches new images and signs that approximate a whole range of associated feelings and desires via images. Efforts in this direction have intensified over the past 40 to 50 years as for instance is obvious in the kind of advertising

messages presented. Where in the 1950s advertising messages primarily focused on product information, by the 1980s they mainly incorporated lifestyle imagery (Leiss, 1983). The material act of consumption thus has been pushed more and more into the background on account of the promise that most satisfaction can be derived from consuming the signs and the symbolism of the goods.

## **2.3 SHOPPING IN CONTEMPORARY CONSUMER SOCIETIES**

In contemporary consumer societies, the 19<sup>th</sup> century style splendid and grandiose department stores have experienced a decline. They are no longer necessary. We have learned from them what they had to teach us. Their purpose consisted in closing the psychological distance between the inner world of wants and the externality of the commodity. This was achieved through the ‘chaotic-exotic’ interior and the mixing of the shopper with the commodity in vast areas of display. We are now socialized into our role as consumers. The extravagant display of goods nowadays is substituted by more powerful, intimate and private means in the form of television, advertising and shopping malls. The design of shopping malls is quite different from the design of big department stores reflecting the state of mind of the modern consumer, the new psychology of wishing. Shopping malls appeal to the privacy of our dreams. If we enter, we are not overwhelmed by a commodity scene but attracted by a pleasant interior design. The commodity has modestly receded and can be found in small and mostly specialized shops withdrawn into the walls of the building, replicating the architecture of the psyche where private dreams are not immediately evident but situated in the deeper levels (Ferguson, 1992). This is also reflected in the nature of shopping itself, as for example is evident in the shopping motives of the contemporary consumer.

### **2.3.1 Shopping motives**

Tauber (1972) was among the first who investigated the reasons that motivate people to shop. He found that consumers, besides regarding

shopping as part of their role, experience it as a diversion from the routine of life and as a form of recreation and family entertainment. In addition, they view it as an activity that provides sensory stimulation, as a way of learning about new trends in fashion, styling and product innovation, as a self-gratifying activity when bored, lonely or depressed, or as a means of self-enhancement. Some respondents in Tauber's study reported great pleasures in bargain hunting, elevating their perception of themselves as wise shoppers. Others pointed out the feelings of power and status when being waited on in the shops. Similar findings were reported in a number of other studies, all providing evidence that shopping, at least sometimes, is used for the purpose of emotional arousal and mood management (e.g. Hill and Gardner, 1986; Hirschman, 1998; Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982; Kacen, 1998; Scherhorn, Reisch and Raab, 1990).

A further aspect of shopping is that it is an experience outside the home, which allows direct encounter with friends and other social contacts. Respondents mentioned that they like to go out shopping when they want to be with peers, when they desire to meet people with similar interests, or when in need of attention. More recently Westbrook and Black (1985) have repeated Tauber's study and found general support for his findings. Based on these findings it can be concluded that shopping motives are generally not the same as buying motives. It is true that at times people go shopping because they have identified a need for a certain product, however at other times social or psychological considerations play a much more important role. In some instances more emphasis is even given to the utility of the buying process than to the purchased product per se. The activity of 'going shopping' as compared to the necessary chore of 'doing the shopping' thus has increasingly turned into a recreational pastime. Investigating the recreational shopper, Bellenger and Korgaonkar (1980) provided the following profile: Recreational shoppers are actively involved in information seeking, spend more time per shopping trip, are less likely to have an idea of what they are going to buy, are less likely to shop with others and continue to shop after having made a purchase. In addition, they are less likely to prefer discount stores, are female, prefer women's magazines, and are less traditional and more innovative. They give more importance

to store décor, desire excitement and a nice store atmosphere, prefer indoor shopping, and place less emphasis on travel distance. Almost 70% of the respondents in Bellenger and Korgaonkar's study could be classified as recreational shoppers. Taking into account all those people who did not respond to the questionnaire, the group of recreational shoppers still made up 37% of the total. The conclusion that can be drawn from this is that in contemporary consumer societies, a large proportion of the population regards shopping *as* a goal rather than an activity *with* a goal. Findings by Babin, Darden and Griffin (1994) add a further aspect to this view of the recreational consumer. They found that experiential shopping motivations and unplanned purchases are related to hedonic shopping values whereas utilitarian shopping values are related to fulfilled purchase intentions and planned purchase acquisitions. Interestingly, hedonic shopping values were also found to be related to addictive buying tendencies. Hence, shopping in its new form also bears some hidden dangers. What this entails specifically will become more obvious throughout the next chapters.

### **2.3.2 Recreational shopping and impulsive buying behaviour**

From the above description of the recreational shopper it can be derived that planned purchases are no longer the norm in contemporary consumer cultures. The 1945 DuPont Consumer Buying Habit Study for example showed that 38.2% of all purchases were bought on impulse. By 1977, the percentage had increased to over fifty percent. These numbers are somewhat exaggerated because impulse buying in the DuPont studies was equated with unplanned buying and operationalised as any purchase that is not on a consumer's shopping list. This masks the fact that a considerable amount of planning also takes place in the store (Rook, 1998). Nonetheless, impulse buying can be regarded as a distinguishing feature of the new consumer societies as is evident in the following findings.

Based on in-depth interviews, Rook (1987) characterized impulse buying as extraordinary, forceful, urgent, fast, and more emotional than rational. It was perceived by the respondents as exciting, as the right

product at the right time, and/or being driven by fantastic forces. It frequently was accompanied by intense feelings states like feeling good, happy, satisfied, light, wonderful and high, but at times consumers also felt distressed, out-of-control and helpless when impulse buying. Similarly, Weinberg and Gottwald (1982) found that impulse buyers assessed themselves as significantly more amused, more delighted and more enthusiastic after an actual purchase than non-buyers. As compared to the non-buyers, they experienced more interest, enthusiasm, joy, glee, but less astonishment and indifference. By observers, actual impulse buyers were perceived as more emotionalised.

Rook and Hoch (1985) described impulse buyers as consumers who enjoy shopping, who do not show a cautious or 'Protestant' buying style, who are more likely to shop at night, when feeling positive and over the phone, and who are less likely to shop on specific days and with a shopping list. Corresponding results are also reported by other authors. Bellenger, Robertson and Hirschman (1978) for example found that impulse buyers were more likely to mention 'shopping' rather than work, a business trip or school as their main motive for being downtown. Rook and Fisher (1995) characterized an impulse buyer as a person who is more likely to experience spontaneous buying stimuli, who is more open and receptive to sudden and unexpected buying ideas, whose thinking is likely to be unreflective and prompted by physical proximity to a desired product, who is dominated by motivational attraction and absorbed by the promise of immediate gratification. Thus, the description of impulse buyers closely matches the description of the recreational shopper: They both shop when the mood strikes; they find gratification in shopping activities and they often buy more than planned. This view is supported by Lunt and Livingstone (1992) who reported that impulse buying is much more common among leisure shoppers.

### **2.3.2.1 Emotional states in impulse buying**

Gardner and Rook (1988) reported that after an impulse purchase 75% of the respondents in their study were in a better mood, 16% felt no difference and 8% felt worse. Reasons for being in a positive mood after

an impulse purchase were getting something one needs, having accomplished a task, getting enjoyment out of the purchased item, enjoying the novelty, getting a good deal, mood alteration and breaking out of an undesirable mood state. However, almost 40% of the respondents also felt somewhat to extremely guilty after the purchase. But the positive moods like pleasure, sense of release, content, relaxed, excitement and carefree prevailed. Hence, one reason to engage in impulse purchases seems to be to relieve negative mood states. Berneman and Heller (1986) for example reported that shopping for clothing is often used by consumers to reinforce a positive mood or to counteract a negative mood.

In a study conducted by Kacen (1998), eighty percent of the purchases that were bought to relieve negative moods were unplanned and impulsive. A reason for this might be that sad people generally are more likely to prefer small immediate rewards, whereas happy people are more likely to opt for larger delayed rewards (Gardner, 1985). Consumer goods appear to be a perfect means to be used as immediate rewards because a) they are readily available and b) they are effective tools to alter negative mood states. The latter point has been explained by Kacen (1998) as follows.

From cognitive research we know that stimuli (here the consumer goods) that lack similarity with the emotional experience they intervene tend to disrupt and impair the mood-maintaining looping. This diminishes the intensity of the mood and finally terminates it. Food items work as nurturing self-treats because snacking provides energy. This reduces tension. Low energy levels in contrast produce stress and negative feelings (Kendall and Hoolon, 1979; Zillermann and Bryant, 1985; Thayer, 1989).

In Kacen's study, the most frequent items purchased by bad mood shoppers were clothing, electronic products like CDs, video games, stereo equipment and food items. Clothing was used to enhance self-esteem and to diminish negative self-perceptions; music and video games provided distraction and escape. Women bought more clothing and furnishings for mood enhancing purpose, whereas men bought more CDs and electronics. According to Kacen, these purchase choices may

reflect the different shopping skills of men and women and the various ways of self-enhancement they engage in depending on their personal self-conceptions (compare section 2.3.3 and chapter three). An intriguing result noted by Kacen was that none of the items addressed the problem that had induced the purchase in the first place. The sole intention of all purchases was to assuage feelings. This supports the picture Tauber, Bellenger and Korgaonkar have drawn of the consumer in a contemporary consumer society. Buying today may simply be used for emotional reasons.

### **2.3.2.2 Defining impulse buying**

As can be seen from the above descriptions, impulse buying has many faces. This is also the reason why there is no single agreed upon definition. In the early days of impulse buying research Kollat and Willet (1967) proposed to define impulse buying as a purchase decision that is made in the store with no explicit recognition of a need for such a purchase prior to entry into the store. A more differentiated view on impulse buying was proposed by Stern (1962). He differentiated between four types of impulse purchases: (1) pure impulse buying - a novelty or escape purchase which breaks the normal buying pattern, (2) reminder impulse buying - when a shopper sees an item or recalls an advertisement or other information and remembers that the stock at home is low or empty, (3) suggestion impulse buying - when a shopper sees a product for the first time and visualizes a need for it, and (4) planned impulse buying - when shoppers make specific purchase decisions based on price specials, coupon offers and the like. Later definitions of impulse buying mainly focused on the first type described by Stern, the more emotional *pure* impulse purchase.

Weinberg and Gottwald (1982) for instance defined impulse buying on the basis of an affective, a cognitive and a reactive component. The consumer is highly activated when buying something on impulse, has however little control over the buying decision, as the behaviour is a largely automated response to a special stimulus situation.

Rook and Hoch (1985) described five elements that they view as characteristic of impulse buying: (1) feeling a sudden and spontaneous desire to act, (2) being in a state of psychological disequilibria, which refers to the feeling of being temporarily out of control, (3) experiencing a psychological conflict and struggle; one is pulled in two directions having to weigh the benefits of immediate gratification against the long term consequences (4) reduced cognitive evaluation; the behaviour is involving although not mindless but requires complete attention, and (5) an impulse purchase is often made without regard for the consequences. Based on these characteristics, Rook (1987) formulated the following definition:

Impulse buying occurs when a consumer experiences a sudden, often powerful and persistent urge to buy something immediately. The impulse to buy is hedonically complex and may stimulate emotional conflict. Also, impulse buying is prone to occur with diminished regard for its consequences (p. 191).

Piron (1991) regarded this definition as too narrow because it describes only the emotional side of impulse buying. Reviewing the literature on impulse buying, she extracted three elements that all have previously been used to define impulse buying. Based on these elements, she proposed the following comprehensive definition: Impulse buying is unplanned, it is a result of an exposure to a stimulus, and it is decided 'on-the-spot'. As some impulse purchases are more rational than emotional, she further makes a distinction between non-experiential and experiential types of impulse buying. Piron thus seems to cover a wide variety of impulse buying aspects with her definition. However, as her understanding of 'on-the-spot' is very restrictive, her definition also falls short of the aim to offer an all-encompassing description of impulse buying. Piron writes:

A consumer who views a commercial and immediately decides s/he wants the product would still have to transport him/herself to the point-of-sale to acquire the product. In other words, the purchase would then be planned. p. 513).

Many consumers would still regard such a purchase as an impulse buy (compare chapter six). The same applies to mood balancing purchases, which generally are also viewed as impulse purchases (compare Kacen, 1998). When in a bad mood, consumers in most cases make the decision

to buy something before they enter the store. Thus, the stimulus is not the product per se but the consumers' emotional state.

A further attempt to define impulse buying was made by Wood (1998). According to his view, impulse buying is an acrotic action. Acrotic actions are free intentional actions contrary to the agent's better judgement. Based on this assumption, he defines impulse buying as:

...unplanned purchases, undertaken with little or no deliberation, accompanied by affectual or mood states, which furthermore are not compelled, and which, finally, are contrary to the buyer's better judgement (p. 299).

It is measured with the following two questions:

Some people find that when they are out shopping, they can't help themselves and buy things they don't need at all. They can't control their shopping urges. Does this ever happen to you?

Did you ever lie to your spouse about how much an article of clothing you've purchased has cost, or concealed a clothing purchase from your spouse?

From the definition as well as from its operationalisation it becomes evident that Wood, like other authors, focuses only on one particular type of impulse buying. He completely leaves out the rational side of impulse buying, disregarding the fact that impulse buying can also be an efficient and sensible way of buying. Thus, it is obviously very difficult to come up with an all-encompassing definition for impulse buying.

Therefore, rather than further seeking to find a unifying definition, a more promising avenue to pursue seems to be to regard impulse buying as a multi-dimensional construct, as Stern has done. This was echoed by a number of other authors like Kollat and Willet (1969) and Hoch and Lowenstein (1991), who also perceive that a single construct may only obscure more than it illuminates. Based on this tradition, Rook (1998) proposed to present the various forms of impulse buying on a *fuzzy set impulse buying continuum*, going from perfect planning at one end, over contingent buying (in-store planning), casual impulse, prototypic impulse, compelling impulse and borderline addictive to addictive buying behaviour at the other end (see Fehler! Verweisquelle konnte nicht gefunden werden.). The presence of emotional factors on this continuum increases the more one moves away from perfect planning. All in all, Rook's fuzzy set seems to cover all types of impulse buying. Therefore, instead of re-inventing the wheel every time one wants to



without compromising their gender identity. The consequence however is that this ideology or frame of reference precludes men from perceiving shopping as an enjoyable activity and hence their attitude toward it is rather negative. The same but in the reversed way holds true for women. Women reject a purely instrumental and utilitarian frame of reference in favour of attributing enjoyment and the indulgence of wants and needs to shopping because they are socialized into being the aesthetically skilled gender and regard shopping as part of their role. Hence, both the male and the female ideology of shopping serve to maintain the respective gender status and to legitimise the corresponding shopping style.

Campbell however cautions that the expressed attitudes might not correlate very closely with actual behaviours. Men might be highly involved in certain shopping activities but may not regard this as 'shopping'. Instead they regard it as a "serious economic transaction" due to the frame of reference they have adopted (1997, p. 172). Equally if one asks women about food shopping they will be quick to tell you that this is not what they mean when they talk about 'going shopping'. Hence, it can be assumed that the group of recreational shoppers also includes men, in spite of the fact that they may not regard their behaviour as 'shopping'. For women a similar assertion can be made. Although generally they display a positive attitude towards shopping, they are likely not to embrace all types of shopping.

## **2.4 SUMMARY AND OUTLOOK**

Over the past centuries we have seen a shift from a prominence of product utility to an emphasis on the experiential aspects of consumption. Material goods have similarly undergone a change in this process. At first they served to satisfy basic needs, then they became social difference markers, and in contemporary consumer societies they also function as props in idealized images and dreams. This development has become possible due to the increased readiness of consumers to read meanings into consumer goods that go much beyond the tangible presence of the material objects. Advertising and promotion

efforts have aided this development by mediating the purchase and consumption process via diffuse images.