

Title: What influences consumer behaviour?

Context: GCSE Home Economics Revised Specification

Learning outcomes:

Students will be able to:

- Explore the concept of consumer behaviour
- Understand the factors that influence consumer behaviour
- Evaluate different shopping options.

Activity 1. What is meant by consumer behaviour?

Start by discussing with students what they understand by the term 'consumer behaviour'.

Then share the following definitions of consumer behaviour (see Activity Sheet 1):

Consumer behaviour is the study of when, why, how and where people do or do not buy products¹

The process and activities people engage in when searching for, selecting, purchasing, using, evaluating and disposing of products and services so as to satisfy their needs and desires²

Consumer behaviour is much more than buying things: it also embraces the study about how having (or not having) things affect our lives, and how our possessions influence the way we feel about ourselves and about each other – our state of being³.

Which definition do students feel best summarises consumer behaviour – and why?

Maybe all of the definitions are right but each provides a slightly different take on the term consumer behaviour.

Activity 2. What factors influence consumer behaviour?

Ask students to give an example for each of the following influencing factors:

- Cultural;
- Economic;
- Environmental and Ethical;
- Personal;
- Physiological;
- Psychological; and
- Social.

¹ Sandhusen, Richard L.:Marketing (2000, S.218)

² Belch, GE & Belch MA 2007, Advertising and Promotion: An Integrated Marketing Communication Perspective, 7th edn, McGraw Hill/Irwin, New York

³ Solomon, L, Bamossey, G, Askegaard, S & Hogg, M.K, 2006, Consumer Behaviour A European Perspective, Third Edition, FT Prentice Hall

Students' answers can be written up on the whiteboard or a flipchart and discussed.
Some examples:

Cultural

Someone of Chinese origin might shop for specific ingredients at an Asian supermarket.

Someone who feels strongly about saving the environment would give careful consideration to energy efficiency ratings on new electrical goods such as a fridge freezer.

Economic

A person living on a tight budget would be unlikely to purchase items such as luxury triple-chocolate Belgium biscuits as part of their essential food shopping.

Someone on a higher income might treat themselves to a weekend city-break.

Environmental and Ethical

Someone with concerns about the exploitation of workers in developing countries might think twice about buying from some budget clothing stores.

A shopper opposed to animal cruelty may choose not to buy products that have been tested on animals.

Personal

A teenager might feel comfortable ordering a CD online whereas an older consumer might prefer to buy from a high street music store.

One person may love high-waisted flared jeans and their friend may hate them and prefer skinny jeans.

Physiological

People with coeliac disease would need to be choosy about where they eat out and what they order to ensure it's gluten free.

Someone who is trying to lose weight may decide to avoid fast food and high sugar snacks.

Psychological

A person might avoid busy shopping malls because the environment makes them feel uncomfortable and disorientated.

Some shops play music designed to make customers feel good, stay longer and buy more.

Social

Some consumers are influenced by trends and will want the latest 'must-have' toys, fashion items or technology.

A person might shop in the supermarket their parents used or eat the same brand of cereal they were given as a child.

Activity 3. Shopping habits (see Activity Sheet 3 + Character Scenario Cards)

Using the Character Scenario Cards, ask students to say which character (or characters) they think were spotted doing everyday consumer activities and what factor(s) influenced these activities.

Students can work independently or in pairs.

This activity also links to the evaluation of different shopping options.

When everyone has completed their 'You Were Spotted!' sheets, discuss the answers as a class and discover where everyone is in agreement or if anyone has any different ideas!

N.B. There are no right or wrong answers for these but students must be able to outline their rationale for their answer.

Possible answers:

Name(s)	Factor (s)	Rationale (given in discussion afterwards)
Box 1.		
Malachy	Personal + Physiological	Enjoys cooking exotic food + trying to stay in shape
Caterina	Personal	Enjoys 'proper cooking' and might only be able to go on Saturday's to pick up the ingredients she needs
Box 2.		
Helen	Personal + Environmental	Loves a bargain + less packaging at markets
Jean	Personal	Might be buying for her cats!
Ricky	Economic	Saving for a new car
Box 3.		
Helen	Environmental	Hates excess packaging and waste
Box 4.		
Fiona	Personal + Social	Loves shopping (and chatting on the mobile!)
Box 5.		
Helen	Economic + Personal	Loves a bargain + enjoys gardening
Jean	Economic + Personal	Loves her rose beds and might be on a tight budget
Box 6.		
Patrick	Personal + Environmental + Physiological	Loves cycling, so could be using rucksack to cycle back with, and may also do this to save using the car. Might also do this to stay fit.
Box 7.		
Caterina	Personal	Her job means that she works unsociable hours.
Box 8.		
Malachy	Physiological	Is trying to keep fit
Ricky	Personal + Social	Loves the latest gadgets. Might want to keep up with trends.
Box 9.		
Patrick	Personal	Avoiding a supermarket trip to save time at the weekend and spend more time with the kids.

Caterina	Personal	Works unsociable hours so this might be a better option - especially as she's a frequent internet user.
Jean	Physiological + Personal	The local shop might not be sufficient for all of Jean's requirements and it may be difficult for her to travel further afield. Either Jean or a family member could do the ordering.
Box 10.		
Patrick	Personal + Economic + Physiological	Might be spending time with the kids; cutting down the cost of a cinema trip and avoiding the usual unhealthy cinema snacks.
Ricky	Personal + Economic	Likes going to the cinema but cutting the cost as he's saving for a car.

As you will see, there is not always a clear distinction between the influencing factors and there will be some overlaps.

Extension Activity:

Ask students to think about five recent purchases that they or their families have made. What factors influenced the buying decisions?

Activity 1. Definitions of consumer behaviour

‘Consumer behaviour is the study of when, why, how and where people do or do not buy products’

‘The process and activities people engage in when searching for, selecting, purchasing, using, evaluating and disposing of products and services so as to satisfy their needs and desires’

‘Consumer behaviour is much more than buying things: it also embraces the study about how having (or not having) things affect our lives, and how our possessions influence the way we feel about ourselves and about each other – our state of being’.

Activity 3. You Were Spotted! Using the character scenarios, say which character, (N.B. there may be more than one!), was spotted doing these things below and what the influencing factor(s) might be.

1. Spotted...shopping for chillies, sausages and sweet potatoes at Saturday's Farmers' Market.

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2. Spotted...buying fresh haddock reduced to £1 because it's nearing its use-by date.

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3. Spotted...disposing of used plastic carrier bags at the supermarket collection bin.

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4. Spotted...coming back from the sales, trying to juggle several shopping bags whilst chatting on the mobile.

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5. Spotted...loading a trolley with half price bedding plants and compost.

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6. Spotted...at the till, filling a rucksack with shopping essentials.

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7. Spotted...queuing at a late night Spar to buy milk.

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8. Spotted...at the electrical counter in Tesco discussing the merits of a camera phone with the salesperson.

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9. Spotted...taking delivery of shopping which was ordered online.

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10. Spotted...at the cinema with a home-made picnic of sandwiches, crisps and fruit juices.

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N.B. There are no right or wrong answers, you just need to be able to explain your rationale.