Strategies for building consumer brand preference

Pamela L. Alreck
Associate Professor of Marketing, Franklin P. Perdue School of Business, Salisbury State University, Salisbury, Maryland, USA

Robert B. Settle
Professor of Marketing, Franklin P. Perdue School of Business, Salisbury State University, Salisbury, Maryland, USA

Abstract *The marketer's principal objective is typically to build a relationship with buyers, rather than merely to make a single sale. Ideally, the essence of that relationship consists of a strong bond between the buyer and the brand. Outlines six strategies for building that relationship: linking the brand to a particular need; associating it with a pleasant mood; appealing to subconscious motives; conditioning buyers to prefer the brand through reward; penetrating perceptual and cognitive barriers to create preference; and providing attractive models for buyers to emulate. The choice of an individual strategy or combination depends mainly on the nature of the branded product or service. The success of the strategy depends heavily on the marketer's understanding of the preference building and bonding process.*

The branding objective

A marketer's main objective goes beyond a single sale to one customer. Usually the ultimate objective is to build a durable relationship between a specific brand and a particular customer group – to create a strong bond between brand and buyer! Whether it is between parent and child, friends, lovers, or consumer and brand, bonding is a process; not so much of war among rivals, but of courtship between suitor and beloved. Unlike a single seduction or conquest, the courtship process includes identifiable phases – introduction, familiarity, then preference, and finally, if successful, a loyalty that excludes relationships with rival suitors.

A good, sound game plan

Advertising and promotion provide the introduction and familiarity. The next two steps – building preference and loyalty – are a bit more sticky. A few good moves can win the day, but too many bad ones along the way will lead to rejection and failure. So the effective marketer, like the successful suitor, needs a good, sound game plan (Macrae, 1994, 1997; Low and Fullerton, 1994).

Consumer buyers almost always approach the marketplace with a well-established set of tastes and preferences (Christopher, 1996; Hoyer and Brown, 1990). Only very rarely do they make completely spontaneous impulse purchases. The vast majority of times, even their unplanned and unanticipated purchases are strongly influenced by pre-existing tastes and preferences. In a very real sense, marketing and promotion constitute a battle for the minds of consumers! While direct competitors strive to outdo one another to winning greater brand preference and loyalty, there is also rivalry between producers and marketers in very different industries, promoting very different kinds of goods and services (Knox, 1997). Virtually every advertiser competes with every other to rise above the clamor and gain the attention and interest of the buying public (Settle and Alreck, 1989). This means that virtually everyone who promotes and markets to them should be concerned with how consumers develop their likes and dislikes, so that they

can instill strong, favorable, positive preferences for their brand (Aaker, 1996; King, 1991; Uncles, 1995; Crimmins, 1992).

Six modes for building brand preference

Building brand preferences

Perhaps the first and most important question to ask is "How will my prospective consumers develop their preferences for my brand?" If we know the answer to that question, then we can help them build the kind of preference that will ensure greater patronage and loyalty. Consumers do not develop a preference for M&Ms candy in the same way as they develop a preference for Maytag washing machines. They do not prefer a BMW over other makes of cars for the same reason that they prefer Budweiser over other brands of beer. Consumer tastes and preferences for a product or brand might be built through one or more of six distinct modes:

(1) *Need association* – The product or brand is linked to one need through repeated association.

(2) *Mood association* – The mood is attached to the product or brand through repeated association.

(3) *Subconscious motivation* – Suggestive symbols are used to excite consumers' subconscious motives.

(4) *Behavior modification* – Consumers are conditioned to buy the brand by manipulating cues and rewards.

(5) *Cognitive processing* – Perceptual and cognitive barriers are penetrated to create favorable attitudes.

(6) *Model emulation* – Idealized social lifestyle models are presented for consumers to emulate.

These six modes are derived from the leading theories and perspectives on human learning that have evolved in the fields of psychology and social psychology. Need association and mood association are most closely linked to what is commonly called "classical conditioning" and the work of Pavlov and others of his ilk. Subconscious motivation is derived mainly from the work of Freud and his disciples while behavior modification has its roots primarily in the behaviorist learning theories of Skinner and his followers. The cognitive processing mode leans heavily on the information processing models so thoroughly presented and studied by cognitive psychological theorists. Finally, model emulation finds its foundation in social psychology and sociology, specifically in theories of the socialization process, social influence, social role playing and meeting the expectations of others.

Although different consumers might build the same preference for a particular brand through different modes, certain modes are vastly more effective for a given type of product or service than for others. In this article we will explore the most effective ways to build consumer brand preference – the indispensable antecedent to brand bonding.

Need association

Constant repetition

American advertisers quickly adopted need association when the work on classical conditioning by the Russian physiologist Pavlov was first publicized in the USA during the 1920s. The essence of this simple brand preference-building mechanism is merely to present the product or brand name and a particular need, simultaneously and repeatedly. Constant repetition is the key. Those exposed to such conditioning eventually learn to associate the brand with the need (de Chernatony and McWilliams, 1990).

Advertisers who adopted this strategy abandoned the use of long, elaborate messages in favor of many, very brief messages delivered on a saturation schedule. Nor were they concerned about wear-out, since consistent repetition was important (Schuman *et al.*, 1990; Unnava and Burnkrant, 1991; Haugtvedt *et al.*, 1994):

Pepsi-Cola hits the spot,

Twelve-ounce bottle – that's a lot,

Twice as much for a nickel too,

Pepsi-Cola is the drink for you!

Those of us who can remember the heyday of network radio will probably recall that early jingle, used for several years by Pepsi-Cola, not to mention the slogan, Rinso White, Rinso Bright and the perpetual spelling-out of T-I-D-E Tide. Johnny, the hotel lobby page boy, forever crooned "Caaaaall Foooorr Philip Moooooorrisss" and the tag line for every Pall Mall commercial was precisely the same: "Pall Mall. Famous Cigarettes. Outstanding. And they are mild."

Brand name awareness

This simple brand preference-building mode was (and still is) effective for creating brand name awareness, but of course it does very little else. Thousands of brief name/need pairings may cause the brand name to come to mind every time the need arises for the consumer, but it says very little about how effectively the brand will satisfy the need. Consequently, few advertisers depended exclusively on this mode.

Today, the advertisers and promoters of consumer goods seldom depend very heavily on this simple brand preference-building mode. Slogans and jingles receive less attention and they tend to be changed much more frequently. When need association is used in contemporary advertising, its main objective is usually to build brand recognition when new brands of small-ticket, frequently purchased goods are initially introduced. Yet some marketers manage to make need association work for them throughout the life cycle of the product, simply by including a reference to the need right in the logo or the brand name, itself:

Joe pulled the well-stained drop cloth off of the mounting collection of tools and bits and pieces of lumber in the corner of the garage, then jumped back in dismay! A fairly impressive array of six-legged creatures scurried for cover, while a few others – undaunted by the sudden glare of light – stood their ground, reluctant to give up their new-found residence so easily. Joe muttered a few guttural sounds to himself as he surveyed the repulsive army that was taking over his workshop. But then a familiar cry arose in his mind's ear as he planned his vengeful counter-attack. He picked up the list of things to buy at the hardware store and added a bold entry at the very top – Raid!!!

Mood association

A positive aura

Associating a mood with a need quickly followed on the heels of need association. The objective of mood association is to imbue the product or brand with a positive aura, and it remains a popular consumer preference-building technique today (Knowles *et al.*, 1993). The mechanism is basically the same – close association as the result of repeated, simultaneous presentation. But rather than associating the goods or services with the needs they are to satisfy, mood association requires the brand name to be associated with a particular form of pleasant hedonic state – leisure, recreation, relaxation, achievement, companionship, or some such condition.

Imparting pleasant moods and feelings to a product or brand requires more than just a few words. It cannot be done with hundreds or thousands of very brief, simple messages. But it does imply consistency and repetition. A single pairing or even a few such pairings of the brand with the mood would not be sufficient to cause the audience to associate the feeling with the brand. It takes many such presentations. Nor does this preference-building mode work without consistency. It would not prove effective if the brand was paired with several, distinctly different moods or with one type of feeling in one message and a different type in another.

Slogans supplemented by advertising messages

Today, mood association continues to be a popular method for building consumer preference for many brands of small-ticket, frequently-purchased consumable goods – beer, soft drinks, candy, or greeting cards – as well as for some brands of consumer services. Slogans (such as Hallmark's "When you care enough to send the very best") that strongly suggest a certain feeling are supplemented by advertising messages that convey the same basic mood. Michelob television commercials featured the melodious voice of a popular vocalist in a night-club setting, softly singing the slogan, "The night is made for Michelob". The atmospherics are carefully choreographed to convey a relaxed, romantic, seductive feeling:

> It was one of those terrible, frustrating, exhausting days when everything goes wrong and nothing goes right, starting with a car that wouldn't and ending with what promised to be another lonely evening at home, by herself. Lisa eyed the rather sterile-looking frozen entree and dessert she had dropped into the shopping basket, wondering if she had either the inclination or the energy to cook something decent for herself for dinner.

> "Forget it," she told herself in disgust. This just isn't the night to go organic. "Wondering about a beverage to go with her not-so-elegant dinner, her eyes fell upon Celestial brand herbal tea. Suddenly her tired mind was flooded with a host of pleasant, homey images – warm hearth, woolly sweater, good book, soft music – maybe it wouldn't be so bad to be at home, alone, at last. It might be fun to just lie back after such a day as this. She studied the display to see which flavor she should get, then decided to try a couple of them, since they all looked so good.

If this kind of conditioning is effective, each time consumers are exposed to the brand in the marketplace – on the supermarket shelf, at the convenience store, in a bar or restaurant, or wherever the product is sold – they will experience a pleasant, enjoyable feeling. No small wonder that their hands reach out for that particular brand, rather than another.

Subconscious motivation

Subconscious desires

During the 1950s and early 1960s, Freudian psychoanalytic theory captured the attention and interest of many in the advertising community. They adopted the view that many, if not most of the consumer drives and motives that underlie preferences reside in the id, deep within the subconscious mind. Thus consumers would not consciously know exactly why they entertained a given preference, and could not possibly express their true motives, even if they were disposed to do so. "Motivation research" was required to discover subconscious desires, and the only way to build consumer preferences was to stimulate subconscious drives.

This complex scheme required the advertising message to accomplish two things: first, the appropriate words and symbols had to be included to excite hidden drives and desires. Second, the product or service was offered as a surrogate for the actions that were inhibited by the consumer's super ego. Since consumers were prohibited from expressing their innermost urges and desires directly, they could express them symbolically through the purchase and consumption of goods and services.

Freudian symbols

Advertisers were quick to learn the vocabulary of Freudian symbols and include them in their promotional lexicon, in the hope of exciting the subconscious motives of the audience. Adherents to these concepts view the id as a unidimensional component of personality, that shuttles alternatively between sexual and aggressive drives. So the signs and symbols to be incorporated into advertising, packaging, and even the design of the product itself, were typically sexual, morbid, or both.

Unlike need association and mood association that are both confined to promotion of small-ticket consumable goods, preference-building through subconscious motivation was viewed as applicable to large- and small-ticket items alike. So the grills, fenders and hoods of automobiles took on shapes and dimensions that the uninformed often regarded as peculiar, indeed, just as the hand movements of a woman kneading dough in a television commercial formed some rather provocative shapes and curves. Meanwhile, the reactions of skeptics ranged from amusement to outrage.

The vast majority of marketers and promoters have moved away from subconscious motivation as a means of winning consumer preference in recent years. Yet there is still evidence of some lingering adherence to these concepts in such things as the shape of a bottle of Halston cosmetics, as well as those of other brands. The remnants of subconscious motivation are not so evident in broadcast media today as they are in slick magazine advertisements for a variety of consumer products and services, ranging from liquor to vacation resorts – from wearing apparel to cosmetic surgery:

> Harold stared at the gleaming, sculptured machine with the $38,224.35 sticker taped neatly to the left, rear window.

> "And 35 cents," he exclaimed to nobody in particular. "I wonder what they'd do without those 35 cents!"

> The mature, male executive in him told him in no uncertain terms that this was not a mature, male executive's car! No way! Forget it!

> Then, from the back of his mind – or maybe from the bottom of it – the boy, that little kid buried deep within him, screamed something inside his head so loudly he flinched for fear that the salesman would hear it: "I want that car!!!" "A two-seater isn't practical", he told himself. "And why on God's good earth would anybody want all that power?" "Buy that car!" The kid was getting a little shrill. "Buy it!!! Buy it!!!"

> Only then did the calm, cool voice of the salesmen cut through to interrupt his internal conversation: "You know, one of the nice things about having worked so hard for many years is that you can afford to treat yourself well at this point. This car is at the cutting edge of technology, it's as safe as it is fun to drive, and it holds its value just as well as it holds the road. Why not take a few minutes to take it out for a ride?"

> "Go for it! Go for it!" yelled the little kid, poking a fist in the air, while the mature executive in him agreed that it wouldn't cost anything just to take it out for a drive.

Behavior modification

Springing from the work of the psychologist Skinner, behavior modification through instrumental conditioning first caught the attention of marketers and advertisers in the 1950s (Skinner, 1953). The four main elements of a behavior modification program are:

(1) drive,

(2) cue,

(3) response, and

(4) reinforcement.

Basic consumer needs such as hunger or thirst typically comprise the drives with which marketers work. Such marketing stimuli as advertisements, signs, logos, or packages constitute the cues. The responses that are to be conditioned by marketers consist mainly of purchase and/or consumption. The reward (or possibly the punishment) that results for the consumer provides the reinforcement.

In this behaviorist model, learning is defined as: the increase in the probability of response (purchase) on cue as the result of previous reinforcement. In simple terms, a hungry (drive) consumer may notice a package (cue) of snack food at the check-out counter, buy and eat the snack (response), and find it very tasty and satisfying (reinforcement). If so, the probability that this person will buy the same thing on a subsequent, similar occasion will increase. Each time it happens, the probability of purchase will increase until the individual has developed a strong brand preference.

Principles and complexities

All this sounds quite simple and straightforward, but in fact, there are several principles and complexities that advertisers and promoters of consumer goods and services have to consider to use this preference-building mechanism effectively. These are the four most basic ground rules:

(1) The stronger the drive, the more quickly and completely the conditioning will be. The consumer may not respond on cue when there is no drive whatsoever.

(2) The cues should be as distinctive as possible. If they are not, consumers might generalize them to other responses, such as purchasing another brand.

(3) The easier it is for consumers to respond, the more likely they will be to do so. If the price is too high or the purchase or use is too difficult, they may not buy it.

(4) The reinforcement should be a strong, positive reward – the stronger the better. If they are punished, they are likely to learn not to buy or use the product or brand.

Strong, sensory satisfaction

Behavior modification can be used for goods and services that provide social or psychological rewards, but this preference-building mode works best for products that provide strong, sensory satisfaction – especially consumable products containing substantial amounts of sugar, alcohol, caffeine, or nicotine. Products containing these substances not only have strong reward value, but in a short period of time they also tend to regenerate the drive state, leading to the next conditioning cycle. The "high" that results from consuming them is closely followed by a "slump" that encourages the user to return for another bite, sip, or drag. The high levels of brand loyalty for products such as candy, chewing gum, beer, coffee, cola, and cigarettes attest to the effectiveness of this kind of behavioral conditioning.

Goods for which preferences are built through behavior modification demand a very high degree of quality control and quality assurance! In the first place, initial conditioning takes place much less rapidly and surely if the rewards are only sporadic, rather than highly consistent. Second, a product failure that results in punishment for the unfortunate consumers, rather than reward, is very likely to condition them negatively, rather than positively. Put another way, their behavior is modified to avoid the product or brand, rather than to seek it. This is the worst possible situation, since they will never know that the problem has been corrected because they are not likely to try the same product or brand again. If a large proportion of the market has

been "turned off" to the goods, it may be necessary to retire the brand (cue) and introduce a new one that is completely distinct from the one that has been spurned:

> Two quarters clutched tightly in her fist, six-year-old Cindy stood pensively before the vending machine on a pedestal at the front of the drug store, gazing at the shiny globe of glass containing what looked like thousands of multi-colored bits of candy. It was no easy decision, this! But finally she turned away.

> "Did you get your candy?", Mom asked when she went running back to her mother's side.

> "Nooooo," she asserted seriously, wagging her head from side to side for even greater emphasis. "I want M&Ms and those candies don't have the Ms on um!"

> "Okay," Mom smiled. "I just thought you'd like to try the machine. But we can get the kind you want at the check-out counter. You know what the bag looks like, so you can pick it out when we get up there."

Cognitive processing

Conscious choices

The more important the purchase is to the consumer, the more likely the buyer's preferences will result from cognitive processing (Blythe, 1997). This brand preference-building mode is most likely to apply to conscious choices where the buyer is highly involved in the purchase decision process.

Those who market large-ticket consumer products such as cars or appliances and those who provide and sell important services such as medical care or higher education use advertising and promotion to create positive attitudes toward their products or brands. These attitudes are composed of two main parts:

(1) the consumer's knowledge or beliefs about the product, and

(2) their positive or negative evaluations of it.

Knowledge and beliefs are created by informative messages. But such advertising or promotion has to overcome several, strong communications barriers:

(1) *Selective exposure* – Consumers choose the media to which they are exposed, so only part of the audience will be exposed to any message.

(2) *Selective attention* – Despite exposure to a message, some consumers will merely ignore it, rather than paying attention to the message.

(3) *Selective perception* – Even when paying attention, some of the elements will be ignored, some will be distorted, and some will be added.

(4) *Selective retention* – Some or all of the information that is perceived will be lost almost immediately, rather than being retained in memory.

(5) *Selective recollection* – At best, only part of what has been retained may be remembered later, and perhaps no information will be recalled.

(6) *Selective application* – Rather than applying the information that was recalled, the consumer may ignore the recollection and act differently.

Recollection of information

Only a small part of the information actually gets through intact. To penetrate these communications barriers, advertisers use media that will reach their target audience, with sufficient frequency to provide repeated exposure. The messages may use devices such as novelty, humor, or even satire in an attempt to gain the audience's attention. The grammar and vocabulary of the messages are designed for easy perception and

comprehension. The messages must be relevant to the audience, so there will be retention of the information. Careful organization, frequent repetition, and reference to familiar cues are provided to improve recollection of the information at the time of purchase.

But despite all these measures, the audience may decide not to apply the information by choosing the brand that is advertised. Whether or not they apply what they have come to know or believe depends heavily on their evaluations – the other major component of their attitudes.

Informative marketing communications create the knowledge or belief component of consumer attitudes, but it takes persuasive communications to develop positive evaluations of the goods or services. When prospective buyers evaluate something, they compare what the know or believe about it with what they value. If their knowledge or beliefs correspond to their values, the evaluation is positive. But if what they know or believe contradicts their values, the evaluation will be negative.

Positive links

The objective of persuasive communications is to make positive links between what the audience knows or believes about the brand and the various values they hold. This is essentially what advertisers do when they select the appeals to be used, and at first glance it looks fairly simple and straightforward. The difficulty arises when some of the product features are negatively related to important values. This creates objections to purchasing in the minds of prospective buyers. Both those engaged in advertising and those in personal selling often feel that at this point they should try to overcome the objections! Do not do it!

Those who truly understand the art of persuasion know that it is far more effective simply to go around objections or to overwhelm them than to deal with them directly by disputing them. For example, a survey reveals that buyers object to the relatively high price of a brand and comment negatively about its complexity; conventional wisdom dictates that the brand manager should deal with the objections by "justifying" the higher price or contradicting the perceptions of complexity in the marketing communications. But these negatives are designated as "danger zones" on the evaluation circle diagram (see Figure 1).

Evaluation of each attribute

It would be far more effective, both in advertising and in personal selling, to point out the relationships between other product attributes and other personal values! The results of the prospective buyer's evaluation of the product is the sum of the evaluations of each individual, relevant product attribute. In the situation depicted in the diagram, there are a total of five minus signs or negative "points" and a total of eight plus signs or positive "points", for a grand total of plus three – a "buy" indication on balance. In effect, even though the negatives were not disputed, the positives associated with other attributes have overwhelmed the negative factors:

> After studying the catalog for over half an hour, Allen handed it to his wife with the booklet opened to the page showing a boxy, white counter-top appliance called "The Bread Bakery."
>
> "Just look at that, Helen," he exclaimed. "What will they come up with next?"
>
> She looked at it all right, and the first thing she saw was the $200-plus price tag. Helen had never in her life spent that much money on a kitchen gadget and she really didn't think this was the time to start. But it was important to him, so she read on.
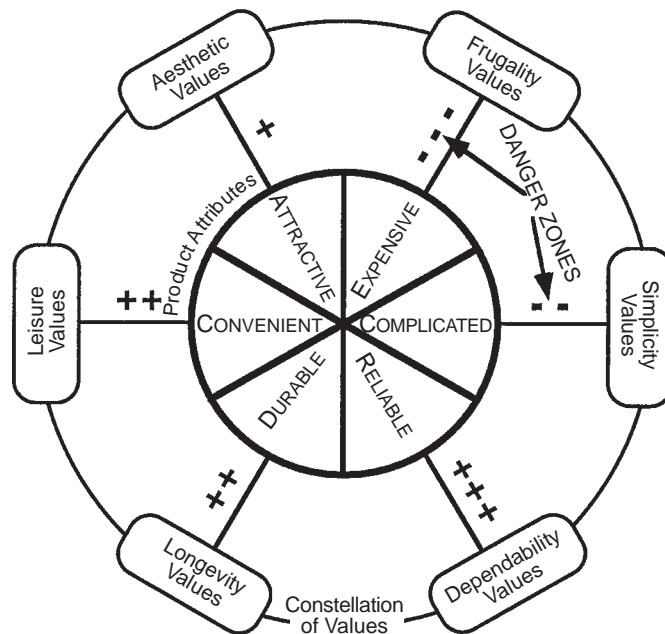
Figure 1. The evaluation circle

Not that she would buy it, mind you. She wasn't really into spending that much money on herself. All you had to do was put in the ingredients and this expensive machine would mix, knead, and even bake a loaf of bread for you! It seemed indecent to her to spend large amounts of money on such a "labor saving" device.

The product description pointed out that few women had time to bake bread any more, especially if they were working. It referred to the marvelous aroma of fresh-baked bread, just like Grandma used to make, and how much the whole family would love it.

Suddenly Helen saw the appliance in a whole new light! This was something that would let her do more for her family – something that would help her to be a better wife and mother, not just make it easier for herself. What kind of woman was so tight she would refuse to spend anything to please her husband and children?

The Bread Bakery arrived at Helen's house a few weeks later.

Model emulation

People learn by emulating models

People learn far more by emulating models than in any other way. Yet most people would probably be surprised at that statement, and many would probably take issue with it. We are all more aware of cognitive learning – thinking and studying – than any other kind. In fact, we learned the vast majority of our behavior by emulating others when we were very young children, including speech, gestures, and everyday behavior, as well as what is good and bad, right and wrong, desirable and undesirable.

Even as adults we still depend very heavily on this kind of learning, especially when we are thrust into an unfamiliar situation or role. Think of it for a moment: what would you do if you were to attend a bar mitzvah or a Catholic wedding and you were not of that faith? Your first impulse (and probably the most effective approach) would be to look around at others who were familiar with the situation and simply do what they do – put another way, model emulation!

This mode of building consumer brand preference has been used very heavily for a long time by those who market and promote consumer goods and services. Virtually every ''slice-of-life'' advertisement implicitly

depends on the audience's ability and willingness to emulate the model presented in the ad. Many advertisements that include celebrities – movie or television stars, famous athletes, or other prominent personalities – also depend on the consumers' tendency to emulate such famous models.

Model emulation is attractive to consumers because it is a simple, easy way to make a choice. In effect, the buyer is letting someone else study the product or service alternatives and do the evaluation for them. When consumers emulate models the only choice they have to make is which models to emulate. Given the increasing number of choices available in the marketplace, this method of choosing among alternatives is very economical and efficient. Yet this method for creating consumer preference has become increasingly ineffective!

Difficult to find suitable models

To be effective, most of the consumers in the market have to be willing to emulate the models that marketers present. But as the buying public becomes more and more diverse, it becomes increasingly difficult to find suitable models that most potential buyers are willing to emulate. The days when we could use Isabel Squat, the garden-variety housewife from Peoria, in a slice-of-life commercial for laundry detergent or floor wax are gone forever. Today, Isabel would be an appealing model to emulate for only a very small fraction of the buying public. A young, professional career woman certainly would not be impressed; nor, however, would the well-educated suburban homemaker with a pre-school child or the mature, cosmopolitan matron living in a high-rise condominium. This is no longer a society of would-be Donna Reeds or Ozzie Nelsons.

The trend from homogeneity to diversity

The trend away from homogeneity and toward diversity in consumer values, attitudes, and lifestyles is likely to continue and even accelerate, rather than reverse itself. It presents marketers and advertisers who have traditionally depended on model emulation with a huge dilemma: how can we be build brand preference when the buying public no longer emulates a common, conventional set of models?

The solution to the problem is to use model emulation in a different way than in the past – to tailor the models that are presented to the various social roles that consumers adopt. There is no one, standard role model. Instead, consumers adopt one role for a period of time, then shift to another, entirely new and different one.

Marketers and advertisers should consider consumer role dynamics, rather than merely studying a static picture. When consumers adopt a new role pattern, they do not do it instantaneously. Instead, they go through a four-step social role adoption process:

(1) *Anticipation* – The consumer develops an idealized image of the role, based on observation of media stereotypes.

(2) *Acquisition* – The consumer learns the essential ingredients of the new social role through early experience in the role.

(3) *Actualization* – The consumer becomes familiar with the role's basic requirements through day-to-day experience in it.

(4) *Accommodation* – The consumer tailors the role to his or her own personal tastes in order to reestablish individual, personal identity.

Developing new preferences

They build their product preferences in a different way at each step in the process. The consumer is most likely to develop new preferences by emulating models during the anticipation phase of the role adoption process. Media stereotypes are an especially important source of information about

what people in this kind of role buy and use, regardless of the nature of the role to be assumed.

During the acquisition phase, the second step in the process, the aspirant ordinarily depends less on media stereotypes for information. At this point he/she will probably have contact with others playing the same role. So the newcomer to this way of life may emulate them, as well as copying some models from the media.

During the third stage, actualization, the consumer has assumed tenure in the new role configuration. Daily experience has taught the individual all of the basic requirements and accruals associated with the role. Individuals at this point often become the models to be emulated by those who are newer to the role. They are, in effect, the ''trend-setters'' that determine what is and is not appropriate for someone of that particular ilk.

At the final stage of the process, accommodation, the consumer has become a little tired of the norms and requirements of the role. So the person is likely to abandon some of the more restrictive aspects, preferring instead to follow individual personal tastes and preferences. This may be a precursor to abandoning the old role in favor of yet a new one – either a close variant of the old, or perhaps an entirely new and very different social one.

Different value orientation

Meanwhile, competitors and those who market other products enviously study such notable successes – ''What we really need is a lucky break like that! But it does not have to happen by chance, and in fact it probably would not. So rather than trying to meet such competition head-on, it might be more lucrative and effective to study social role patterns and strive to identify how your product, service, or brand will meet the distinctive requirements of specific social roles. Volvo does not attempt to imitate BMW. Instead, it has won a handsome brand share by appealing to those with an entirely different value orientation, related to personal and family safety and security.

The key to becoming firmly established as an inherent feature of a particular social role is to provide those at the anticipation stage of adoption with models they can emulate. At this stage, aspirants are most sensitive to media stereotypes. As the incumbents mature and become more experienced in the role, they become less and less responsive to media models. At later stages of the role adoption, other modes of building consumer preference will probably be more effective:

> The youngest of four brothers, Ted didn't show any signs of following in his siblings' foot-steps. He had rejected accounting and law, early on, taking his degree in engineering, instead: ''Forget about BMWs, Brooks Brothers and wing-tips. I wouldn't be comfortable in anything that pretentious.''

> It wasn't that he couldn't afford it. Two years out of college and pretty well established with a high-tech company, he was doing OK financially. But a lot of the old values he had learned from Dad were still important to him, so he saved a few bucks every month and watched his spending.

> Ted plunked himself down on the couch, put his feet up on the coffee table, picked up a magazine and started thumbing through it. Then an ad for the Ford Explorer Eddie Bauer model sport utility vehicle caught his eye, mainly because the model in the ad was wearing a flannel shirt exactly like his.

> ''Good ol' Eddie Bauer,'' he thought to himself. ''I've got pretty good taste in clothes, if I do say so myself.''

> Then he started looking more closely at the ad and reading the copy. The vintage Toyota sedan he had been driving since he was a Junior in college was about to expire and he knew it wouldn't be worth it to fix it up again. He liked the

Explorer's rugged lines. It looked like a vehicle that would last, and he didn't like to trade cars very often, once he'd gotten used to driving one.

Ted sat there, musing to himself for several minutes, while he studied the picture in the ad. He recalled how his Dad had always driven Fords. He liked the idea of buying an American car, even if some people didn't think that was very chic, but he also felt he'd get a better deal because there weren't any import duties to pay. He wasn't really interested in checking on other makes of utility vehicles, but he decided to check this one out at a couple of local Ford dealers to see what kind of a deal he might be able to make.

Choose your weapons

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Strategy based on product or service characteristics

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Each of the six consumer preference-building methods outlined here requires a particular kind of product, pricing, promotion, and distribution. The choice depends partly on the nature of the branded product or service itself, and the extant or "given" aspects of the marketing mix. The strategy selection guidelines contained in Table I provide an outline of the requirements and prohibitions for selecting a given strategy based on the product or service characteristics.

Need association	
Product	Frequently purchased, routinely used
Pricing	Relatively small ticket, competitively priced
Distribution	Extensive, easily available, conventional outlets
Promotion	Short-message, saturation, highly repetitive
Life cycle	Early stages, typically to create awareness
Mood association	
Product	Frequently purchased, routinely used
Pricing	Relatively small ticket
Distribution	Easily available, conventional outlets
Promotion	Affect-laden, vivid media, highly consistent, repetitive
Life cycle	Both introduction and retention at maturity
Subconscious motivation	
Product	Highly symbolic, socially visible, sexuality-related
Pricing	Moderate to expensive goods, often premium priced
Distribution	Selective, compatible outlet ambiance
Promotion	Visual and pictorial, with suggestive symbols
Life cycle	From introduction through early maturity
Behavior modification	
Product	Frequently purchased, viscerally rewarding impulse goods
Pricing	Relatively small-ticket for small unit sizes
Distribution	Very extensive, very easily identified and available
Promotion	Short, highly repetitive, cue-laden messages
Life cycle	From introduction through late maturity or decline
Cognitive processing	
Product	Complex, durable goods
Pricing	Typically large-ticket goods, popular to prestige pricing
Distribution	Outlets providing sales support and/or demonstration, trial
Promotion	Selective media, substantial message content
Life cycle	Late introduction through late maturity
Model emulation	
Product	Often socially visible, sometimes symbolic goods
Pricing	Medium-ticket goods, popular to prestige pricing
Distribution	Selective to extensive, depending on production and price
Promotion	Demonstrational, with celebrity or audience-similar models
Life cycle	From introduction through early maturity

Table I. Matching marketing mix with brand preference strategies

Finally, the characteristics of the target market, the company's experience and expertise, and executive preference should influence the selection of a strategy for building consumer brand preference. In an increasingly frenetic marketplace, successful development of brand preference rarely results by chance. Rather, it calls for a deliberate choice of strategy followed by intelligent implementation and patient, persistent execution.

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