

The Meaning of Consumption

And how it should be understood in the light of Catholic Social Teaching

358. Consumers, who in many cases have a broad range of buying power well above the mere subsistence level, exercise significant influence over economic realities by their free decisions regarding whether to put their money into consumer goods or savings. In fact, the possibility to influence the choices made within the economic sector is in the hands of those who must decide where to place their financial resources. Today more than in the past it is possible to evaluate the available options not only on the basis of the expected return and the relative risk but also by making a value judgment of the investment projects that those resources would finance, in the awareness that “the decision to invest in one place rather than another, in one productive sector rather than another, is always a moral and cultural choice”.^[744]

359. *Purchasing power must be used in the context of the moral demands of justice and solidarity, and in that of precise social responsibilities.* One must never forget “the duty of charity ..., that is, the duty to give from one's ‘abundance’, and sometimes even out of one's needs, in order to provide what is essential for the life of a poor person”. [745] This responsibility gives to consumers the possibility, thanks to the wider circulation of information, of directing the behaviour of producers, through preferences — individual and collective — given to the products of certain companies rather than to those of others, taking into account not only the price and quality of what is being purchased but also the presence of correct working conditions in the company as well as the level of protection of the natural environment in which it operates.

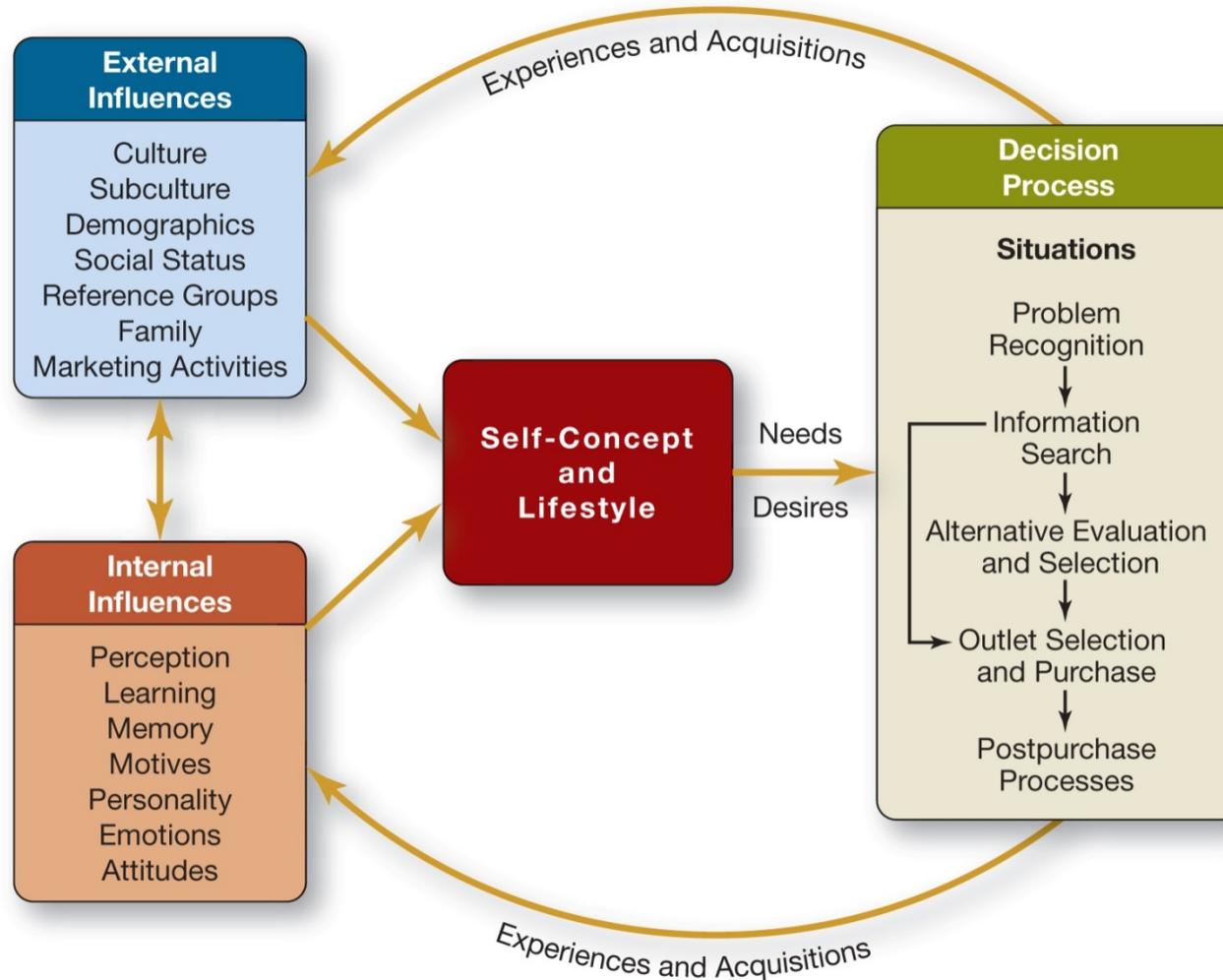
360. *The phenomenon of consumerism maintains a persistent orientation towards “having” rather than “being”.* This confuses the “criteria for correctly distinguishing new and higher forms of satisfying human needs from artificial new needs which hinder the formation of a mature personality”.^[746] To counteract this phenomenon it is necessary to create “life- styles in which the quest for truth, beauty, goodness and communion with others for the sake of common growth are the factors which determine consumer choices, savings and investments”.^[747] It is undeniable that ways of life are significantly influenced by different social contexts, for this reason the cultural challenge that consumerism poses today must be met with greater resolve, above all in consideration of future generations, who risk having to live in a natural environment that has been pillaged by an excessive and disordered consumerism.^[748]

486. *Serious ecological problems call for an effective change of mentality leading to the adoption of new lifestyles,*[1012] “in which the quest for truth, beauty, goodness and communion with others for the sake of the common good are the factors that determine consumer choices, savings and investments”.[1013] These lifestyles should be inspired by sobriety, temperance, and self-discipline at both the individual and social levels. There is a need to break with the logic of mere consumption and promote forms of agricultural and industrial production that respect the order of creation and satisfy the basic human needs of all. These attitudes, sustained by a renewed awareness of the interdependence of all the inhabitants of the earth, will contribute to eliminating the numerous causes of ecological disasters as well as guaranteeing the ability to respond quickly when such disasters strike peoples and territories.[1014] The ecological question must not be faced solely because of the frightening prospects that environmental destruction represents; rather it must above all become a strong motivation for an authentic solidarity of worldwide dimensions.

487. The attitude that must characterize the way man acts in relation to creation is essentially one of gratitude and appreciation; the world, in fact, reveals the mystery of God who created and sustains it. If the relationship with God is placed aside, nature is stripped of its profound meaning and impoverished. If on the other hand, nature is rediscovered in its creaturely dimension, channels of communication with it can be established, its rich and symbolic meaning can be understood, allowing us to enter into its realm of *mystery*. This realm opens the path of man to God, Creator of heaven and earth. *The world presents itself before man's eyes as evidence of God*, the place where his creative, providential and redemptive power unfolds.

The Nature of Consumer Behavior

Overall Conceptual Model of Consumer Behavior



The Nature of Consumer Behavior

External Influences

- *Culture*
- *Demographics and social stratification*
- *Ethnic, religious, and regional subcultures*
- *Families and households*
- *Groups*

The Nature of Consumer Behavior

Internal Influences

- *Perception*
- *Learning*
- *Memory*
- *Motives*
- *Personality*
- *Emotions*
- *Attitudes*

The Nature of Consumer Behavior

Self-Concept and Lifestyle

Self-concept is the totality of an individual's thoughts and feelings about oneself.

Lifestyle is how one lives, including the products one buys, how one uses them, what one thinks about them, and how one feels about them.

The Nature of Consumer Behavior

Situations and Consumer Decisions

Consumer decisions result from perceived problems and opportunities.

Consumer problems arise in specific situations and the nature of the situation influences the resulting consumer behavior.

The Meaning of Consumption

- Consumption has meaning beyond satisfaction of minimum or basic consumer needs
- Symbolic needs
 - Status
 - Identity
 - Group acceptance