Review of *Psychological Foundations of Marketing* by Allan J. Kimmel

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Psychological Foundations of Marketing

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Psychological Foundations of Marketing provides a very detailed look at the field of consumer behavior, specifically how topics explored in psychology – motivation, attitudes and social influence, to name a few – play a role in marketing activities and consumer consumption. The author, a social psychologist, notes that psychology is at the core of marketing, something that he realized when meeting fellow psychologists at a marketing conference, one of whom put him at ease by remarking “Don’t be embarrassed – there are a lot of us in marketing.” Using top academic journals and practitioner resources, the author expands on each of the main concepts in a very readable style, giving enough depth to build a foundation while not getting bogged down in superfluous details. Each chapter is well paced and includes several mini-sections that highlight concepts in greater detail; these can serve as a starting point for research ideas or can be used in an educational environment to enhance discussions or serve as in-class activity material.

The first chapter, Psychology and Marketing, links both disciplines under the framework of consumer behavior, a subsection of marketing that asks why people buy products and services, what stimulates learning and consumption activity and what the underlying motivations and attitudes of purchase behavior are. Kimmel discusses multiple definitions of marketing, each of which states or implies the concept of value, the
cornerstone of delivering on the marketing concept. He establishes the idea that marketing, like psychology, is multidisciplinary, leveraging theories related to psychology, sociology, anthropology and economics. The remainder of the chapter describes how psychology has already found its way into marketing, providing examples of psychological foundations found in advertising, sales and research methods.

Chapter 2, *Motivation*, looks at how personal and social influences affect marketing consumption. Of interest is a subsection that asks whether or not we are born with predefined consumer characteristics. Researchers used twins to determine shopping behaviors, finding that some traits, like level of cautiousness and risk taking (in shopping activities), were ingrained at birth. In another section, the author reviews personal and social motives that lead to shopping activity. These motives, which include role playing, diversion and sensory stimulation (personal motives), along with social experience, peer group attraction and the pleasure of bargaining (social motives), can be used by retailers to design shopping experiences that increase shopping desires.

The third chapter, *Perception*, begins with an excellent summary of the consequences Gap, Inc. faced following a 2010 decision to change their iconic logo. The change prompted a rash of negative online comments that led to a reversal back to the original logo. The reason for this backlash was the consumer’s perception that the new logo cheapened Gap’s brand identity, likening the new design to a second-tier airline or thrift shop logo. Following a definition of perception – selecting, organizing and interpreting messages – the chapter discusses how some messages stand out while others disappear (focusing on the importance of message placement), how marketers attempt to stimulate consumer senses to stand out from the crowd and how consumers organize and assign meaning to a marketing message.

Consumers are constantly being exposed to marketing stimuli, which may or may not be retained in memory for use in a later purchase decision. How marketing information works through consumers’ memory is the focus of Chapter 4, *Learning*. While many concepts discussed in other consumer behavior textbooks are covered here (e.g. the learning construct, cognitive and behavioral theories, how learning leads to brand loyalty), the author highlights theories on the cognitive and social development stages that consumers go through from an early age into adulthood. Information on the characteristics that accompany various stages of development is presented in detail, from the perceptual stage (ages 3-7, unidimensional complexity and egocentric perception) to the analytical stage (ages 7-11, considering multiple dimensions and understanding others’ perspectives) and the reflective stage (ages 11-16, considering consequences and developing a social perspective). Brand and product knowledge is learned from an early age, with companies like Disney, McDonalds and even R.J. Reynolds (Joe Camel) earning prominent positions in the minds of young consumers.

Chapter 5, *Decision Making*, begins and ends with a discussion on the paradox of choice, the idea that the plethora of product choices available to a consumer lead to a reduction in purchase activity, as consumers become trapped in the decision-making process. Of particular interest is the section on the role procrastination plays in a purchase decision. Risks associated with a purchase decision tend to delay action, leading marketers to use closing techniques such as highlighting a product’s key features or creating a sense of urgency to induce purchase behavior.

Chapter 6, *Consumer Attitudes*, opens with snippets from consumers who are strong brand advocates. The author uses the framework of levels of consumer loyalty to show how a person goes from being a brand “switcher” (no brand loyalty, will freely switch brands) to a “satisfied” (reluctant to try new brands) and ultimately a “true loyalist” (based on Knox and Walker’s typology, p. 169).

Chapter 7, *Personality and the Self-Concept*, explores how brands cultivate and maintain brand personalities, which are then taken on by consumers who wish to express themselves by identifying with a particular brand.
Sections on personality traits and consumer lifestyles examine how people create unique personalities using products and services to signal to others who they are and what they represent.

The book closes with a section on Social Influence, which begins with a discussion on the origin of the phrase “word of mouth”, coined by William Whyte during his 1953 study on the adoption rates of air conditioners in a Philadelphia suburb. A section on reference groups includes a discussion of various influence groups, such as work groups, consumer groups and virtual communities, each of whom influences purchase decisions. One of the final sections focuses on opinion leaders, key influencers whom marketers are better able to target through social media to gain access to consumers who view them as important sources of marketing information.

Overall, the book is a valuable reference for academics, specifically those researching or teaching consumer behavior topics. It would not be too much of a stretch to have dissertation advisors ask their new students to read this book to build a foundation in the field that can lead to developing research questions aimed at completing a dissertation or submitting academic papers. Studies summarized and discussed in the book come from many of the most respected journals in marketing and psychology, allowing the reader to gain a baseline understanding of each topic. The book is also worthwhile to professors teaching courses in consumer behavior or marketing research; each chapter fits in nicely with existing textbooks to allow an educator to incorporate some of the real-world examples and research results into a lecture to punctuate main concepts. These vivid examples can help bring obscure concepts to life in ways that can enhance student retention of information.