

## 6.1: Why It Matters - Consumer Behavior

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### Please Welcome a New Arrival

At 1:26 a.m. this morning, in Houston's Memorial Hermann Hospital, a consumer was born. His name is Finnegan Henry James. By the time he goes home three days later, some of America's biggest marketers will be pursuing him with samples, coupons, and assorted freebies. Proctor & Gamble hopes its Pampers brand will win the battle for Finn's bottom, but retailer Target has a lower-priced contender. To welcome Finn's family, Johnson & Johnson has already sent his mother a sample of its gentle baby wash. Bristol-Myers Squibb Company is sending a free, bulky box of Enfamil baby formula.

Like no generation before, Finn enters a consumer culture surrounded by logos, labels, and messages almost from the moment of birth. As an infant, he may wear Sesame Street diapers and a miniature NBA jersey. Right away, this little boy will begin influencing his parents' purchasing decisions—that's what spitting out spoonfuls of baby food is all about. By the time he is twenty months old, he will start to recognize some of the thousands of brands flashed in front of him each day. Around age four, Finn will begin making decisions about how to spend his own money. At age seven, if he is anything like the typical kid, he will see some forty thousand commercials a year.<sup>[1]</sup> By the time he is twelve, he will have his own entry in the massive data banks of marketers.

Many forces are at work influencing Finn's consumer choices from a very early age. Some of these forces are social: his parents, cousins, and playgroup. Some of these forces are cultural: Finn is a Texan and an American. As Finn grows and matures, his age, gender, education, economic status, life stage, and personality all play a role in his decisions as a consumer. Multiply Finn by millions of babies born in the U.S. every year, and you have new, increasingly marketing-savvy generations flooding the market.

This is Finn's story. And if you're living in the U.S. today, your story probably sounds a lot like his.

### You Are the Target and the Hunter

Setting aside the ethics of marketing to children, the fact remains that you are a consumer living in a highly commercialized, modern society. Marketing artifacts are so woven into the fabric of our lives that many people hardly recognize them. Every year, companies and marketing organizations spend billions of dollars focused on one central goal: to influence consumers' purchasing decisions.

As a consumer, hopefully, your growing understanding of marketing is helping you see the world around you a little differently, with more and better information about the forces that are trying to influence you.

With your increasing skills as a marketer, you recognize how important it is to understand your customers if you are going to reach them effectively. Part of that is understanding the factors that influence their purchasing decisions. Once you're educated about those influencing factors, they'll be tools you can use to create effective marketing.

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1. <http://www.apa.org/pi/families/resources/advertising-children.pdf>