Consumers, Commodities, and Choices: A General Model of Consumer Behavior

ABSTRACT

Results of present-day marketing and consumer behavior research suggest that consumer decision-making processes and commodity acquisition patterns differ depending upon a number of variables, including identity of the decision-makers, nature and type of commodity, perceived need for an item, and the socio-cultural environment. Archaeological research tends to focus on aspects of historical consumer behavior associated with specific commodities and exhibited by particular segments of the population. It is suggested that a general model of consumer behavior, one not linked to any specific commodity or population segment, will serve to place archaeological research in a broader context and permit the future development of consumer behavior models for other types of commodities and population segments.

Introduction

Is a general model of consumer behavior really needed? Archaeological research has offered some marvelous insights into consumer behavior—is it necessary to go any further? It is proposed that a general model will place previous and future research within a broader context, by providing an explanatory framework for archaeological research through a discussion of consumer behavior in general terms, not linked to any specific commodity or population segment.

"Consumer behavior" has been defined as "the behavior that consumers display in searching for, [acquiring], using, evaluating, and disposing of products, services, and ideas which they expect will satisfy their needs" (Schiffman and Kanuk 1987:6). A "consumer" is an individual or organization who acquires goods or services for his or her own use or for someone else's use (Schiffman and Kanuk 1987:7). The act of consuming, however, is not only economic behavior, it is also social behavior, as well as a means to an end, a way of reaching goals (see Schiffman and Kanuk 1987: chap. 3). The study of consumer behavior is an interdisciplinary one, conducted primarily by market researchers "drawing upon the theoretical foundations of psychology, sociology, social psychology, anthropology, and economics" (Robertson 1970:iii).

Market research tends to focus on consumption as psychological and economic behavior in order to identify and influence economic results (e.g., Schiffman and Kanuk 1987). Research approaches and models are derived primarily from problem-solving and decision theories (Burk 1967:23–24; Schiffman and Kanuk 1987:625–664). In order to identify and reach potential consumers, researchers have drawn from other disciplines to define market segments based on geography, demography, psychographics, socio-cultural factors, family life cycle, and usage rate and situation variables (Schiffman and Kanuk 1987:31–60).

Psychology is the study of individual behavior (Robertson 1970:1). Since consumer behavior is essentially individual behavior, psychological concepts and theories of motivation, personality, perception, learning, cognition, attitudes, and processes of communication are major components in understanding the consumption needs of individuals and how individuals behave in consumption situations (Burk 1967:3–11; Schiffman and Kanuk 1987:14, 66–360).

Sociology, as the study of group behavior (Robertson 1970:1), provides concepts and theories of group dynamics, the role of symbols, group membership, family structure, and social class, all of which influence consumer behavior (Burk 1967:11–16; Schiffman and Kanuk 1987:14, 368–550).

Social psychology is the study of individual behavior in a group context and deals with interpersonal behavior (Robertson 1970:1) as individuals are influenced by their peers, reference groups, and others whose opinions they respect (Schiffman and Kanuk 1987:14).

Anthropology, broadly speaking, is the study of groups of human beings and their behavior and productions (Kroeber 1948:1; Vivello 1978:4).
Anthropologists, however, have tended to focus consumer-behavior-related research on non-Western, non-market economies (Polanyi et al. 1957; LeClair and Schneider 1968). Nevertheless, anthropology offers valuable concepts of culture, acculturation, assimilation, innovation, diffusion, adaptation, and change through time and across space, which are relevant to the study of consumer behavior.

**Economics** is the study of "how a society chooses to employ scarce resources" (Robertson 1970:1) during production, distribution, exchange, and consumption of goods and services (Smelser 1976:43,95). Economic theories appear to play a large role in studies of consumer behavior (Burk 1967:17–26). For example, Engel’s Law (Zimmerman 1932; Burk 1967:18; Smelser 1976:137) and the “consumption function” of Keynes and Friedman (Keynes 1936; Friedman 1957; Burk 1967:19; Suits 1963:9–13, 24; Smelser 1976:132,134) deal with the relationship between income and expenditures; and Veblen’s "theory of conspicuous consumption" (Veblen 1934; Leibenstein 1950; Smelser 1976:132) and Duesenberry’s "demonstration effect" (Duesenberry 1949; Suits 1963:15; Smelser 1976:133) are concerned with the influence of others on an individual’s expenditures, including status symbolism and “keeping up with the Joneses.” Economists, however, tend to conduct research on a broad, national scale and focus on quantifiable variables, even though they do recognize the influential role of socio-cultural factors and individual tastes in consumer behavior (Smelser 1976:95, 132, 134; Burk 1967:18, 22, 26–27).

The literature of these disciplines was reviewed—although by no means exhaustively—for concepts and theoretical approaches to guide the formulation of the general model.

**The General Model**

The general model presented here (Figure 1) covers physical consumer goods, *not* intangibles such as services, savings, or credit. The model will focus on domestic consumer behavior, *not* on the behavior of other consumer entities, such as businesses and governments. Nor will the processes of commodity production and distribution be covered.

There are four main aspects of consumer behavior, and it is expected that different patterns of behavior would be associated with each: the decision to consume, acquisition (sometimes called "procurement"), use, and post-use disposition (Nicosia and Mayer 1976:68). The majority of consumer behavior research focuses on acquisition, but only in terms of "monetary purchase," disregarding other forms of acquisition. Consumer behavior research touches on use only in terms of the extent to which an object satisfies the need for which it was bought and results in a repeat purchase. Little attention has been given in consumer behavior research to post-use disposition. It is proposed that archaeology’s particular approach to studying human behavior can provide enhanced insights into these aspects of consumer behavior.

The model is derived from a general consumer behavior model based on decision theory (Schiffman and Kanuk 1987:634) and is framed from the point of view of the individual. However, as will be explained, an archaeological research perspective will, of necessity, have to be from a household or group point of view.

**The Decision to Consume**

There are two broad categories of influence that affect an individual’s consumer behavior: external influences and internal influences. Both are discussed below.

**External Influences**

External influences are those forces outside the individual that are either “directed to or actively sought by the individual” when consumer decisions are to be made (Schiffman and Kanuk 1987:635).

The product itself, its price, its distribution or availability, and promotion or advertising are in-
cluded in marketing efforts. Of prime importance to archaeological concerns is the product, which possesses inherent physical characteristics, such as appearance, size, color, and taste. Products are also characterized as durable (items purchased infrequently, such as furniture) or non-durable (items purchased frequently, such as clothing or food), or they may be new or used. A product is also a "complex stimulus," possessing a "perceived set of want-satisfying attributes and a generally symbolic character [that is] more than its physical properties" (Robertson 1970:2). In other words, "people buy things not only for what they do, but also for what they mean" (Levy 1959: see also Burk 1967:11, 14; Katona 1960:160; Martineau 1958:123), and different things have different meanings for different people (Martineau 1958:124).

The socio-cultural environment exerts considerable influence on an individual, who "exists among other people in society and is permanently affected by such association" (Robertson 1970:10), primarily through group membership. A group can be defined as "a collectivity whose members share common beliefs, values, attitudes, standards of behavior, as well as symbols that represent the group" (Henry 1987:360; see also Kasarjian and Robertson 1973b:292; Vivello 1978:107–108). An individual’s particular relationship to the group determines the extent of the group’s influence on him. His social integration (level of acceptance by other group members) and his role within the group (expected behavior pattern based on [his hierarchical position and corresponding status in the group]) relate—generally positively—to the degree of group influence. The more [important] the group to the individual, and particularly the more attractive the group, the more influence it can potentially exert on him. . . .

[Research has shown] that the greater the difficulty of group entry, the more the individual is likely to value group membership and adhere to group norms (Robertson 1970:74).

This position may be addressed further: "Group belonging exerts a powerful influence on [an individual’s] behavior, even without consultation or discussion" (Katona 1960:155).

Consumption is one of the more important ways of signifying membership in a group, particularly in class, status, and ethnic groups (Myers and Gutman 1974; Weber 1972). Consequently, "consumption is a very important reflection of life-style (Robertson 1970:124). Life-style has been defined as "a discernible pattern of activities that mesh together to form a way of life" (Thielbar and Feldman 1972:453) and "as the totality of activities, interests, opinions, and personal characteristics which are peculiar to a given individual" (Myers and Gutman 1974:235). Since an individual is influenced by the groups to which he belongs, people can, therefore, conceive of group life-style (Myers and Gutman 1974; Burk 1967:16; Lamann and House 1973; Thielbar and Feldman 1972:453–458). However, since the magnitude of a group’s influence on any individual varies depending on a number of factors (Robertson 1970:74), there will be variability in the group life-style as expressed by its members, although there will be more similarity among individual life-styles within the group than between groups (Robertson 1970:122; Kasarjian and Robertson 1973a:396).

Some of the more important sources of consumer influence include friends, "opinion leaders," the family, and reference groups, most particularly social class and subculture.

Informal sources of consumer information and influence are provided by friends, neighbors, and "opinion leaders." Since friends and neighbors tend to share similar needs, attitudes, and expectations, personal knowledge of their use of consumer goods tends to encourage an individual’s acquisition of those items (Katona 1960:156, 157). "Opinion leaders" are people who, because of the esteem in which they are held, or because of their status or role in society, exert personal influence on the actions or attitudes of other consumers, especially in the acceptance of new products (Robertson 1970:81; Schiffman and Kanuk 1987:555). A similar concept in anthropology is that of the "culture broker," a person who serves as a catalyst for change in mediating the introduction of new ideas, technologies, or products (Press 1969). Recent research indicates that opinion leaders are characterized by higher—but not too much higher—social status than those influenced, greater social participation—but they are not necessarily the formal leaders, an orientation beyond
their own communities, and early acceptance of new products. They also tend to be more educated and more gregarious and deviate less from group norms than the average group member (Robertson 1970:84–85; Schiffman and Kanuk 1987: 567–569). Additionally, the influence of opinion leaders varies depending upon the product. One researcher suggests, however, that characteristics of opinion leaders may change over time: prior to ca.1910, the upper class/high income brackets tended to exert a great deal of influence downward to the middle and lower classes, while after that time new opinion leaders developed from within the middle class (Katona 1960:160–161).

The family or household “functions as the context wherein individuals are brought to an awareness of their culture’s rules, and conversely, where those rules are frequently expressed in physical form” (Deetz 1982:718). Additionally, the patterns of “artifacts and structures that formed the physical focus of family or household activity . . . are reflective of the shared beliefs and behavior of their owners and users, a minimal and understandable level of cultural behavior which nonetheless embodies the worldview of the society at large” (Deetz 1982:719). A “household is a domestic residential group, consisting of the inhabitants of a dwelling or set of premises and . . . is usually coterminous with the family (extended, nuclear, fraternal, etc.), but it may also include nonrelated family members such as boarders or servants” (Henry 1987:360; see also Laslett and Wall 1972: 86). Each family or household tends to require a certain level of spending to maintain a “minimum of possessions and level of consumption of food and other goods and services described as ‘a standard package’” (Burk 1967:13; see also Parsons and Smelser 1956:222; Suits 1963:11). Two aspects of the family or household as a consuming unit are of particular importance: decision-making roles of family members and family life cycle.

Who makes the decisions in the family? Although all family members influence decision-making to some extent, the husband and wife generally share this responsibility. The more important the purchase, the more the decision tends to be made jointly. Specialization tends to increase the more the decision depends upon special knowledge or skills held by one family member and “to the extent that the purchase is individual rather than family related” (Robertson 1970: 75–76). For example, decisions on high cost purchases tend to be made jointly, while the majority of decisions associated with the operation of the household and with children tend to be made by the wife (Katona 1960:155–156; Schiffman and Kanuk 1987:400–409). Research results indicate that the patterns of decision-making—joint vs. autonomous—vary according to the type of product under consideration, social class, degree of social mobility, ethnic background, family life cycle, and the presence of children (Robertson 1970:76–77; Katona 1960:155–156; Schiffman and Kanuk 1987:400–409; Komarovsky 1970). Klein’s research (this volume) explores the decision-making role of women in household expenditures for ceramics.

“As [families] pass through the stages in the life cycle, from single unmarried, to newlywed, to a family with children, to older couples whose children have set up their own households, to the elderly single, needs for consumer goods change in quantity and quality” (Henry 1987:362; see also Wells and Gubar 1970; Schiffer et al. 1981). In fact, one researcher has noted that “the impact of the [family] life cycle . . . on investment in consumer durables is striking” (Smelser 1976:137; see also Katona 1960:165–167).

Reference groups are those groups which “have more meaning for, or exert a greater level of influence on, an individual” (Henry 1987:361). Reference groups are “sources of values selected by an individual” (Shibutani 1962:128) and are used as a “point of reference in determining his judgments, beliefs, and behavior” (Kassarjian and Robertson 1973b:292; see also Hyman 1960).

“The individual does not need to be a member of a group to use it as a point of reference (e.g., when an upwardly mobile person aspires to become a member of another group), nor must the reference group function in a positive way (as in the avoidance of the values and behavior standards of a negative reference group)” (Henry 1987:361; Kassarjian and Robertson 1973b:293; Shibutani 1962:
A person will look to a number of different reference groups depending upon the situation, and not everyone relax on the same combination of reference groups for guidance (Shibutani 1962:138-141). Additionally, the various reference groups an individual turns to, and the extent of influence exerted by those reference groups, may change over time (Burk 1967:14).

Two powerful reference groups are social class and subculture.

The social class “into which a person is born . . . colors his view of life, influences his attitudes, . . . helps determine his personality, [and] governs the groups to which he will belong” (Robertson 1970:9). Social classes are levels in the social stratification hierarchy, which is based on “differential access to the resources, goods, and skills . . . available to the society as a whole” (Vivello 1978:121; see also Robertson 1970:116). Numerous researchers have noted difficulties in objectively measuring social class (Robertson 1970:117; Thielbar and Feldman 1972:371-375, 405-458; Katona 1960:160; Myers and Gutman 1974). Although “it does appear that social class can be approximated by means of objectively measurable variables” (Robertson 1970:119), such as occupation, income, education, and house value or type, any aggregation made on this basis “omits the role of prestige” or status in ranking individuals (Robertson 1970:117). In fact, Max Weber (1972:171; also Bottomore 1972:128-129) felt that status stratification exists separately from, but is linked to, social class stratification. Prestige has been defined as a “social estimation of honor” (Weber 1972:171), or a “deference or attitude of respect” (Kahl 1957:19). Prestige, or status, is “derived from the variety of roles a person played in a community” (Myers and Gutman 1974:237). Status is defined, validated, and even sought after through the appropriate consumption of certain consumer goods (Burk 1967:14; Katona 1960:160; Robertson 1970:124; Laumann and House 1973:430; Martineau 1958:123-124, 130).

Although archaeologists can, for research purposes, categorize a number of social classes, they “are not discrete . . . categories,” and the social hierarchy may actually be a continuum (Robertson 1970:121; see also Martineau 1958:123); within any social class, however it is defined, is a great deal of variability, plus a certain amount of social mobility, or movement through the stratification system (Robertson 1970:122; Kassarjian and Robertson 1973a:396; Smelser 1976:91). Not everyone is upwardly mobile, and the degree of mobility or stability is an aspect of life-style (Martineau 1958:124,130). “The values which dictate judgments about actions, such as the kinds of objects which are consumed and accumulated, will vary by class level and the presence or absence of vertical mobility” (Martineau 1958:124). Research indicates that the “behavior of the mobile individual is characterized by spending for various symbols of upward movement” (Martineau 1958:124). It is also worth noting that social mobility is also associated with geographical mobility (Martineau 1958:126).

A subculture has been defined as a “distinct cultural group which exists as an identifiable segment within a larger, more complex society” (Schiffman and Kanuk 1987:513). Two types of subculture are of particular interest: regional or geographic subcultures, and ethnic subcultures. Market research has identified differences in consumer behavior associated with different regions in the country and with urban, suburban, and rural life-styles (Schiffman and Kanuk 1987:518-519; Robertson 1970:105-106). Holt’s research (this volume) identifies urban-rural differences in the use of floral materials, and Friedlander’s research (this volume) identifies aspects of a rural life-style.

Ethnic groups are important points of reference for their members, “who share a common traditional heritage, which differs from that of the society at large . . . on the basis of race, religion, language, or national origin” (Henry 1987:362; see also Gordon 1978; Schuyler 1980; Robertson 1970:102; Smelser 1976:78). The ethnic group is directly linked to the family, “since it is through the family that ethnic status is usually inherited and through the family that many ethnic influences are exercised” (Smelser 1976:78). One researcher notes that “differences in consumption [may] exist among ethnic groups and within an ethnic group, as a function of such variables as generation and assimilation” (Robertson 1970:103). Ethnic con-
Consumer behavior may, in fact, be influenced by the degree of assimilation (Robertson 1970:103). However, research also suggests that, while ethnic group membership is an important influence on an individual’s behavior, the influence of social class may actually be greater (Gordon 1978:262).

Internal Influences

Just as these external factors exert influence on an individual’s consumer behavior, so do factors within the individual. The particular nature of these internal influences is affected by the external factors just discussed, but the processes involved, as well as those of the internal factors themselves, are beyond one’s ability to observe and measure archaeologically. The “Internal Influences” section of the model lies in the realm of psychology and will have to remain a “Black Box” insofar as archaeology is concerned, but it is quite important to be aware of some of what occurs there.

Every individual has needs. Maslow’s (1943) “hierarchy of human needs” outlines general categories of needs. Maslow proposed that lower-level needs must be satisfied before higher-level needs become apparent (Schiffman and Kanuk 1987:83–86). Additionally, except for the basic physiological needs, the other needs are conditioned by the socio-cultural environment (Schiffman and Kanuk 1987:68). Even the physiological needs, however, are social needs under certain conditions: if one is not living at a base subsistence level, the particular kinds of food, shelter, or clothing acquired to satisfy these needs are governed by socio-cultural pressures (Schiffman and Kanuk 1987:68).

Motivation is “the driving force within individuals that impels them to action” as a result of an unfulfilled need (Schiffman and Kanuk 1987:67). Goals are “the sought-after results of motivated behavior,” and “for any given need, there are many different and appropriate goals” (Schiffman and Kanuk 1987:69). The actual goals selected, and the action taken to achieve them, depend upon the individual’s self-perception, experience, physical ability, socio-cultural values and standards, and the physical and social accessibility of the goal (Schiffman and Kanuk 1987:68–69).

Perception can be defined as “the process by which an individual selects, organizes, and interprets stimuli into a meaningful and coherent picture of the world” (Schiffman and Kanuk 1987:174). This process does not operate in a vacuum, however; it is conditioned by the individual’s experience, expectations, motives, the nature of the stimulus, and the socio-cultural environment (Schiffman and Kanuk 1987:221–222).

Learning in the context of consumer behavior, is “the process by which individuals acquire the purchase and consumption knowledge and experience they apply to future related behavior” (Schiffman and Kanuk 1987:231).

Personality has been defined as “those inner psychological characteristics that both determine and reflect how a person responds to his or her environment” (Schiffman and Kanuk 1987:109). Research suggests that “personality variables (e.g., dogmatism, sociability, risk-tolerance) . . . appear to be linked logically to product usage” (Schiffman and Kanuk 1987:133).

An attitude is a “learned predisposition to respond in a consistently favorable or unfavorable manner with respect to a given product” (Schiffman and Kanuk 1987:270).

Market researchers are able to study how these psychological aspects influence an individual’s consumer behavior, primarily through questionnaires or interviews. Since it is usually not possible to interview the previous occupants of archaeological sites, this entire model element remains a “Black Box,” unless, however, the archaeological study of mind-set can provide some guidance.

Market researchers do not include income as a variable in consumer behavior models, although it does play a role in market segmentation studies (Schiffman and Kanuk 1987:42–43). Scholars studying social class and consumption, however, nearly always discuss income—or sometimes wealth—as an important variable in defining class (e.g., Thielbar and Feldman 1972). There are varying levels of income within any social class, no matter how class is defined, and research has suggested that social class membership exerts
more influence on consumer behavior than does
income (Martineau 1958:130). Income, therefore,
is treated in this model as an economic variable
which is distinct from, but related to, the socio-
cultural variables discussed earlier, and which acts
as a facilitator of, or constraint on, consumer be-

havior (Suits 1963:21). This discussion deals with
disposable income, as opposed to "wealth,"
which often includes non-liquid assets that are
themselves accumulated through consumer behav-

ior activities, and which are not readily translatable
into other consumer goods.

A household's level of income is dependent
upon many factors, not the least of which are oc-
cupation, household life cycle, and prevailing eco-
nomic conditions (Suits 1963:20). As noted ear-
erlier, each household tends to require a minimum
standard of consumption to maintain its life-style
(Burk 1967:13; Parsons and Smelser 1956:222;
Suits 1963:11). This minimum standard "has first
claim" on a household's income (Keynes 1936:
97). A high level of income, over and above that
needed to maintain the minimum standard, gives
the consumer flexibility in choosing consumer
goods and in responding to prevailing economic
conditions (Suits 1963:18). A household with a
low income has considerably less flexibility (Suits
1963:51). In periods of prosperity, or when in-
comes are rising, the level of consumption for the
minimum standard tends to increase, although ini-
tially household expenditures are relatively cau-
tious (Suits 1963:16, 17, 24; see also Zimmerman
1932:96). In periods of depression, or when in-
comes are falling, a household's previous con-
sumption level will continue, either until spending
adjusts to the new income (Suits 1963:17; Smelser
1976:133), or until additional sources of income
are found—for example, another family member
may go to work (Suits 1963:2, 22). Obviously,
high income households spend more than low in-
come households, but to identify differences in be-

havior, comparisons are needed among, not the
absolute amounts spent, but the proportions of in-
come allocated to different categories of consumer
goods (Katona 1960:163). Research suggests that
"most income groups spend substantially the same
share of their income" on certain general catego-

LeeDecker's research (this volume) explores this
trend by examining historical studies of household
budget allocations.

Acquisition

Once the consumer decision has been made,
there are a number of ways any particular item
might be acquired, such as: (1) purchase, (2) bar-
ter, (3) gift, (4) home production, (5) hunt and
gather, or (6) theft. It is proposed that the extent to
which any or all of these ways comprise an acquis-
tion strategy depends upon the particular item
sought, and on socio-cultural and economic fac-
tors. For example, high-income households might
purchase nearly all of their consumer goods, while
low-income households might rely on all the strat-
egies mentioned. A study of late 19th- and early
20th-century poor black alley dwellers in Wash-
ington, D.C., showed that all of these strategies
were necessary for many households to acquire the
basic necessities of food, clothing, fuel, and a few

Use

Once acquired, how were the consumer items
used? Explanations equating artifact patterns with
use patterns have figured in most archaeological
research. It is not altogether clear, however, that
"use" has been examined in terms of general cat-
egories, such as the roles played by specific ob-
jects within a larger socio-cultural context, or as
the satisfactions of needs that led to the acquisition
of certain items in the first place. The only excep-
tion might be studies of socio-economic status,
where researchers address—either explicitly or
implicitly—the role of objects in the maintenance
or attainment of social status (Spencer-Wood
1987). Material culture research, often coming out
of history museums and "American Studies" de-
partments in universities, provides some insights
(Glassie 1968, Schlereth 1982, St. George 1988),
although a data collection technique used by these
scholars—oral history—would normally not be
productive for archaeological research. Schiffer’s (1976) concept of “systemic context” may be the only attempt by an archaeologist to delve into the processes of use. It might be worthwhile to re-examine this concept in light of this model.

Post-Use Disposition

The term “post-use” disposition, rather than “discard,” is used because not all consumer items are thrown away after they have been used. Once a household perceives that an item has served its purpose and has satisfied household needs, the item may have some further use, either by the household itself, or by someone else, or it may have no further use at all. If an item is still usable, it may be recycled or re-used by the household in the same, or a different, functional category, or it may be sold or given away for use by another household (Schiffer et al. 1981). Occasionally, usable items are lost or abandoned, making their way into the archaeological record as “de facto refuse” (Schiffer 1976). When the item is perceived to have no further use, either no “residue” may remain after use, or the “residue” is discarded. The discarded “residue” then becomes part of the archaeological record as primary or secondary refuse (Schiffer 1976). It comes as no surprise that, as an aspect of consumer behavior, discard behavior is influenced by socio-cultural factors, as South (1977) and others (e.g., Deetz 1977) have so eloquently demonstrated.

Applicability to Archaeology

How does archaeological research contribute to understanding consumer behavior? Consumer behavior is behavior associated with acquiring, using, and disposing of material things. Archaeological research focuses on patterns of behavior associated with material things. Archaeological studies of consumer behavior are, therefore, a natural. However, archaeological data are only a very small subset of the material objects that a household acquired, used, and discarded. Although it is assumed that the non-random patterns observed in the archaeological record represent non-random human behavior associated with the objects found, is it possible to make the leap from the residues of use, to behaviors associated with the decision to acquire and the acquisition of those objects, and with the acquisition of objects not present in the archaeological record? Yes, it is possible—if both archaeological data and documentary data are used to their fullest.

It is necessary, however, to understand the potential and the limits of one’s data. For which model elements can archaeological and documentary data provide information? Which model elements lie outside the capabilities of the data? Archaeological and documentary data cannot help with those model elements that require data on individuals. Motivations, goals, perceptions, personalities, and attitudes, in addition to the processes of learning and decision-making, would be virtually impossible to identify in ceramic sherds and tax records. Archaeological and documentary data contribute little to measuring or understanding the “Black Box” of “Internal Influences” on consumer behavior. Additionally, it is unlikely that the actions of friends, neighbors, and opinion leaders in influencing consumer choices will be directly represented in the archaeological or documentary record. Although archaeology is of some help in identifying product distribution and promotion, the documentary record has much more potential, as Friedlander’s study of probate inventories (this volume) demonstrates.

Archaeology and documents can provide information on consumer products, households, social class, ethnicity, status, income, use of consumer goods, and post-use disposition. Archaeologists have been doing this for years, although maybe not exactly within a consumer behavior framework.

The majority of the archaeological data base is generated by the household, which is the basic unit of analysis (Deetz 1982:717). A household’s behavior is idiosyncratic, however, and its site assemblage reflects that idiosyncrasy. There is no way of knowing how well any household serves as a typical example of any group, unless the parameters, norms, symbols of membership, and life-
styles of a group have been clearly defined in terms of data that archaeology and documents can provide. In order to investigate and understand consumer behavior, it is necessary to aggregate data from individual households—use a large sample, rather than a sample of one. The value of this approach is demonstrated by the research presented in this volume. Using this model will require more archaeological syntheses and higher levels of collaboration with historians than done in the past.

A major contribution that archaeological and historical research can make is an understanding of broad patterns of consumer behavior over time. One researcher has pointed out that:

Broad changes in [consumer] demand in Western industrialized countries [since the mid-19th century] have been influenced by three historical trends: (a) the increase in per capita income, which makes for generally increasing demand; (b) the continued improvement of technology, which generates ranges of new products . . . available to be demanded; and (c) the shortening of working hours and the accompanying increase in leisure time for most categories of workpeople, which increases the capacity to “consume” various leisure-related products (Smelser 1976:136–137).

These are research issues archaeologists and historians can deal with.

Regrettably, there are no neat, clean hypotheses or easy answers here that can be put to work immediately. This model is in its early stages of development and obviously requires fine-tuning. However, this general model of consumer behavior does provide a broader context for understanding consumer behavior and offers an explanatory framework for the articles in this volume and for future consumer behavior research.

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This examination of consumer behavior is an outgrowth of earlier research in Phoenix, Arizona, and builds upon subsequent re-evaluation of that and other research in an attempt to identify the broader socio-cultural processes responsible for what is observed in the archaeological record. This work could not have been done in the absence of the large body of research into urban phenomena and "socio-economic status." I owe a debt of gratitude to all those researchers whose work inspired me to search wider arenas. I am especially thankful to Terry H. Klein for challenging my concepts and to Robert W. Keeler for his insightful feedback.

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