

When I was a college kid, I was pretty free with my money. Sometimes, I would try to save it up, but most of the time I would spend it about as quickly as it came in. I was always making enough to stay above water, and I was having a good time. I knew that I could save up in the future, and there were so many nice things to buy. I would save as much money as I could by buying used textbooks, and spend the rest of my money on concerts, music, novels, and of course alcohol.

I had a limited amount of money, so I was always making buying decisions. Still, I never thought of consumer behavior as such until I got involved in marketing and advertising. This is strange because I have always been interested in social psychology. Issues like how people decide to vote and for what party, what music people listen to, and who they socialize with have always fascinated me. Yet some of the most basic issues of consumer research have eluded me. I never even really thought about how I made decisions to spend my money.

I got into advertising and marketing because I thought it would be a lucrative field, but it has also been an extremely intellectually rewarding one. Consumer research is some of the most interesting work that I've ever done. It is more than consumer behavior statistics and raw, dry facts. When you are researching consumers, you are trying to create a profile of your ideal purchaser. This doesn't mean that you're trying to understand the population as a whole, but rather you are trying to get inside the head of your niche demographic. Is your ideal consumer a middle-aged housewife, a twenty-something college student, a suburban teenager, or a young urban professional? What does your product offer them? Is the service useful in and of itself? How big of a role does brand name recognition play in their decision to buy? These are some of the countless questions that consumer behavior experts have to answer every day.

It all comes down to individual consumer behavior cases. When you are studying it in school, they try to reduce it down to some principles, but when you're working in the real world, the biggest concern is coming up with something that your clients can work with. You have to understand their brand image, and more importantly, how to improve it.