

PART ONE

The New Consumer Mind

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Rewired Brains

*Technology: it's not what we do with it, but what
it's doing to us.*

Sara, a waitress and San Francisco State University undergraduate student, alternates between Neuro Sleep and 5-Hour Energy shots to achieve just the right amount of stimulation for any given moment. “I need something during the day. But it’s hard to fall asleep after I’ve been waitressing.” Sara says that most of her friends also alternate between energy products and sleep aids to help them navigate “too much to do.” And they’re not alone. For a growing number of people, “listening to your body” is only for the pharmaceutically challenged. In 2012, sales of energy drinks grew 19 percent from 2011.¹ And sleep-inducing products like teas, supplements, botanicals, tongue strips, and bath salts have grown 8.8 percent annually since 2008.²

Sleep management is obviously a problem, but counting sheep is so passé. Today, the marketplace is where people turn for solutions. Whether it’s a supplement or an app (yes, there’s an app for that—2,938 in the iTunes store), the shift from sheep counting to sleep supplements reflects our newfound trust in innovation and our insistence on quick fixes—two of the many ways that our relationship with technology has changed our psychology, which has in turn changed how we shop and what we buy.

TECHNOLOGY AND CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

In 1993, the word “web” was more likely to have been associated with a spider than something we use every day for work, entertainment, communication, and shopping. In 1995, the word “Amazon” might have conjured up thoughts of a river or a robust woman, but not the second-largest retailer in the world—which is what Wendy Liebmann, CEO of WSL Strategic, predicts Amazon.com will be by 2016.³ And in just over thirty years, we’ve gone from pay phones and home phones to smartphones that are no longer simply talking devices—they’re what Resource CEO Kelly Mooney insightfully describes as “weapons of personal empowerment.”⁴

- The average American household has six Internet connected devices.^a
- By 2017, the average CMO will spend more on IT than the average CIO.^b
- More than one-third of marriages between 2005 and 2012 began online.^c
- In 2004, YouTube didn’t exist. Today, one hundred hours of video are uploaded every minute of every day, and over a billion unique users visit YouTube every month.^d

Although parents, psychologists, politicians, philosophers, scientists, and educators hotly debate whether technology and the Internet are good or bad for us, there’s one thing that cheerleaders, hand-wringers, and everyone between agrees on: technology *has* changed us. And the influence of technology will only increase. Two-thirds of kids between seven and thirteen would rather have technology, such as a tablet, to play with than a toy.⁵

I’ll explain in this chapter how in a relatively short period of time—so fast that we’ve barely had time to register the

impact—the pervasiveness of technology in our lives has affected every aspect of being human: how we think and make decisions, how we feel, what we crave, and how we relate to others.

Obviously this is of great importance to marketers. After all, people buy to elevate their emotional state, whether by removing a negative, satisfying aspirations, or gaining a positive. They are solving and improving both practical and emotional problems and situations. And even purely practical purchases will be strongly influenced by an emotional overlay of things like self-identity, belonging, obligation, or boredom. Technology has created a new set of “problems” and emotional needs, new ways of acquiring perceptions of products and brands, and new ways of interacting with the marketplace. The hunt for happiness has evolved.

There is immense pressure on marketers to conceptualize how to use the flood of new technology and platforms to engage with consumers. Although new platforms provide important tactical solutions in connecting with today’s consumer, I believe that the bigger opportunity is in driving new strategies that take their cue from how technology has changed the consumer.

Today’s frenzied pace of innovation renders “now” an increasingly untrustworthy predictor of what consumers will want tomorrow. Although meaningful insights (as well as tactical solutions) can be culled from market and technology trends, marketers with a deeper, empathic understanding of the psychology of consumers can build high-impact, sustained strategies swiftly and with confidence. It’s a significant opportunity for the marketers who get it, and it’s what I’ll focus on in this chapter.

FIVE PSYCHOLOGICAL SHIFTS

Five key psychological shifts catalyzed by our use of technology are of particular importance to how, when, and why people shop

and buy. These psychological shifts are also affected by the other two major sociocultural shifts we'll explore: our elevated levels of emotionality and an increased sense of isolation. Each of the three contributes to the effects of the others in a dynamic, mutually reinforcing manner. Our use of technology has changed our psychology in these ways:

1. Innovation optimism
2. Consumer empowerment
3. Faster ways of thinking
4. Symbol power
5. New ways of connecting

Innovation Optimism

Today we're all early adopters. Once hesitant, consumers have become eager to try new products. The usefulness, ubiquity, and intimacy of technology have transformed innovation-wary consumers into optimists.

Brenda, for example, has a problem with navigation. "I can get lost in a closet, I swear. I have no sense of direction. I remember clearly why I bought my first cellphone. I was driving around lost and late for a date. I couldn't find a pay phone, and I couldn't even find where I was on a map. I got there, but I was like an hour late. I was stressed and anxious, and my boyfriend was mad. That was only maybe fifteen years ago. What a different life I have—not just navi and cellphone, but it's hard to believe in my life I used a typewriter. It's all so much easier and better now."

The deep intimacy we have with our technology—phones that rest on our nightstands and computers that we interact with more than people—is unlike any relationship we've had with products in the past. And continuous brilliant advances in technology, coupled with the power of social media to champion new products, have created a trust in "new" unlike anything we've seen before.

Products of all sorts, not just technology, have benefited. In the past, most consumers would have fallen into the “wait and see” category of shoppers. Today, like Brenda, nearly everyone is less suspicious and more willing to try unfamiliar products.

I found my job, my apartment, and my boyfriend online.

—Jemie, 26

In fact, eagerness and even insistence might better describe many consumers' view of innovation. This is particularly true of those younger than thirty-three, the first generations to grow up in a digital world. They have high expectations, and, like Sara, who turns to the marketplace for sleep solutions, they want quick fixes to their problems, and they view innovation as the hallmark of excellence in product design and communication.

Sara's faith in the power of purchases to quickly fix problems is due, in part, to the brilliant innovation she's witnessed in the technology that's fundamental to her life. Every new generation of computer or cellphone is proof that new is better, faster, and hipper.

The intersection of innovation and the demand for immediate solutions is highlighted by a new phenomenon the *New York Times* called “smartphone shrinks.”⁶ Apps like iStress, MoodKit, Fix a Fight, and Unstuck use algorithms to tackle the kinds of problems a therapist might have been called on to help with in the past. The popularity and prevalence of these apps are yet another indication of our quest for the quick fix—a direct result of our belief in the power of innovation and of the impatience we've developed through our use of technology.

New? Bring It ON

Consumer cravings for “new” are bolstered through the consumer championship and trust building of social media, rating, and review

sites. Products can go from introduction to popularity at an unprecedented rate through the reach and reassurance provided by social media. The ability of the Internet to provide a platform, voice, and marketplace for new companies and entrepreneurs has facilitated the rise of fresh, nimble brands that excite consumers and satisfy their craving for “new.” The growing clout of new brands is reflected in the annual decline in the average age of brands in Millward Brown’s Top 100 Global Brands survey, moving from eighty-four years old in 2006 down to sixty-four in 2012.⁷

Uber, an on-demand car service with the tagline “Everyone’s Private Driver,” is a case in point. Users can request a private car via a smartphone app and use their phone to monitor their designated vehicle’s arrival, knowing exactly when it will arrive. Their ride is charged to a credit card on file, and users can rate the service after their ride, ensuring that drivers will maintain their cars and offer great service. Drivers receiving ratings below 4.6 are fired. Uber has smartly tied in with businesses such as Nordstrom to propel word of mouth and enhance their image.

Uber was founded in 2009 and within three years had expanded to twenty-five countries and had received nearly 200,000 Facebook “likes.” Uber and services like it, such as Lyft and SideCar, were just the threat that traditional taxi cabs needed to embrace innovation. Enter Flywheel, a start-up that partnered *with* taxi cabs to offer nearly the same services. Consumers were craving innovation in private transportation—most notably accountability by drivers and the ability to know when a cab would arrive. As Clayton Christensen points out in his book *The Innovator’s Dilemma*, established companies often miss out on innovation opportunities.⁸ And most innovation is not happening in established brands.

Heritage as Baggage?

In my research, I’ve found that we’re not only more trusting of new things but also increasingly wary of brands and products that *don’t* innovate. Products that have “stood the test of time” are OK for a

retro thrill, but aren't as enchanting as the wizardry made possible by today's technology. For the first time, heritage can be baggage. Reverence for legacy brands, with a few notable exceptions, has diminished. Why? It has to do with an uptick in consumers' sense of individuality and self-reliance—a phenomenon we'll explore in more depth in the next chapter. Today's consumers are less interested in aspirational brands; rather than admiring brands, they're more interested in brands that admire them, know them, and serve them.

Heritage brands have great opportunity as long as they continuously innovate. Benjamin, a luxury traveler, says,

I've paid very hefty prices for rooms in grand old hotels that turned out to have terrible Wi-Fi. It's impossible to feel like I'm in a luxury hotel when the Wi-Fi reminds me of using a dial-up connection in my mom's kitchen. That's unacceptable. How can they not be keeping up with what travelers need? I stayed at the Four Seasons in Toronto, and they had thought of everything. I was completely connected, and the hotel was tricked out with loads of new technology. A hotel can be elegant and rich with tradition and still know what today's travelers need.

As John Digles, executive vice president and general manager of MWW, points out, "The biggest risk with being cool is that someday you won't be. You have to constantly reinvent yourself."⁹

Even products that are difficult to advance technologically (like soup and shoes) can still showcase the spirit of innovation through technological displays, apps, and social media. For example, Adidas' wall of virtual footwear features their entire collection of shoes in virtual 3-D format. Prototypes are available that consumers can try on for size, and after ordering, the shoe is shipped directly to their home. Adidas shoes appear more advanced because of the futuristic way they're displayed, and sales have increased between 77 to 500 percent in the stores that feature the

virtual wall.¹⁰ Similarly, retailers ranging from Brooks Brothers to Victoria's Secret have 3-D body scanners that electronically detect a shopper's size and shape and recommend particular brands and styles to match the user's figure. These kinds of innovation put the juice back into shopping, and intelligent use of technology shows harder-than-ever-to-impress consumers that companies are listening, thinking, and actively trying new things to satisfy them.

Beloved "mature" brands such as Mattel's Barbie stay relevant to a new generation of users by incorporating technological features. Barbie's Digital Makeover Mirror has plenty of hot pink plastic and girly girl features, but also incorporates an iPad and facial tracking technology—just enough magic to satisfy today's stimulation-demanding kids. An upscale Atlanta steakhouse hasn't changed its menu in twenty years, but saw a 30 percent uptick in wine sales after it put its extensive wine list on iPads. The interactivity, notes, and reviews have been a hit with their customers and elevated the perception of an ancient establishment.



Consumers are hungry for "new." New products and new experiences. Innovation is a demonstration of the coolness, smarts, and consumer-centricity that today's shoppers demand. Innovation that's tied to technology gets even higher marks. It's no wonder that the Neuro Sleep that Sara has come to rely on has a name that speaks innovation with a techno edge.

Marketers who understand our thirst for what's new and our trust in innovation know that they need to delight and inspire shoppers with a dose of technology—something we'll discuss more in Chapter Four.

Consumer Empowerment

According to Edelman's highly regarded "Trust Barometer," the source trusted by the largest majority is "people like me."¹¹ Before

the Internet, “people like me” would have been friends and acquaintances at work, school, or over the backyard fence. Social media have given “people like me” a huge megaphone and made them among the most powerful marketers in the world.

“I trust what Amy recommends,” says Emma, a thirty-year-old photographer. “She has a blog, *Cooking with Amy*, that I read, and I follow her on Facebook. She gave a thumbs-up to a fatless deep fryer I would never had tried without her recommendation. I love it.” Maggie, a fifty-four-year-old avid golfer, says that she was warned away from a discount golf store by online reviews from other golfers who told her their customer service was lacking.

Online luxury fashion retailer Net-a-Porter has a ticker-tape-type banner of the products other shoppers (called “the world’s most stylish women” on the site) are buying or putting into their baskets. “It’s kind of cool to see someone in Denmark or Taiwan or France shopping with you, to see what they’re buying,” said Liana. “It gives the site huge credibility too.”

With trust for businesses at an all-time low, consumers increasingly rely on the words and actions of other shoppers to guide their purchases. Keller Fay Group, a word-of-mouth research and consulting firm, estimates that there are one trillion conversations going on about brands in the United States every year.¹²

Five-Star Commerce

Recommendations and reviews allow new products to move more swiftly into the hands of innovation-hungry consumers. And they are the assurance many need to trust and try new retailers and brands. Joan, a thirty-something online shopper, sums it up for many: “I don’t trust websites that don’t include product reviews. What are they trying to hide?”

Marketer-generated messages certainly have an impact on the perception and awareness that people have of brands and products, but they’re far less trusted than the words of other consumers. More than 70 percent of consumers say they trust reviews, an increase of

15 percent in four years.¹³ Eighty percent of consumers said that they changed their mind about buying a product after reading a negative review they found online.¹⁴

According to my own research, when it comes to trustworthiness, reviews written by other consumers are second only to the recommendations of friends and family. Except for electronics and cars, they are even more trusted than professional reviews.

In addition to the star count, the *number* of reviews sends a message to consumers about the popularity of a product or service. So, for example, two 5-star reviews are less trustworthy than one hundred 4.5-star reviews. In part this is because consumers are aware that there are plenty of fake reviewers out there. Clearly it's essential that brands and retailers encourage and facilitate reviews.

Consumers typically post reviews when they're either very happy or very unhappy. Slightly more consumers will post only positive reviews than those who are willing to post both positive and negative reviews. As Carmen said, "You know what they say, if you can't say anything nice, don't say anything at all. I only post a negative review if I'm really mad."

As it matures, the culture of online reviewing is evolving. Although consumers are increasingly comfortable leaving reviews, many are also tiring of what Elise describes as "working for free," and are leaving fewer reviews now than they did a year ago. Consumers tell me that the conditions for reviewing are especially dependent on how emotionally connected they feel to a retailer. "Nordstrom lets me send back anything without even paying postage, so I try to leave reviews when I have time to help them out," says Elise.

A robust review platform and the ability to filter reviews by demographics or geography are increasingly important to consumers—and therefore to the success of brands and retailers. And according to my research, there's lots of room for improvement in encouraging and facilitating product users to submit reviews. Beyond their emotional attachment to a retailer or feelings about a product, here's what consumers tell me motivates them to

review: an email request with a tone of gratitude, being thanked for previous reviews, the ability to see when their review has been helpful to others through review rating functions, and the chance to win a prize or a gift certificate.

Facilitating customer commentary and reviews has another benefit for marketers. Positive comments create an illusory snowball effect. Our “herd instinct” kicks in, and what shoppers might have liked, they tend to like a lot more after reading positive comments. Negative reviews do not generate the same response. Consumers tend to be more skeptical of negative social influence.¹⁵

Power to the People

The consumer power of ratings, reviews, and social media has contributed mightily to the diffusion of innovation. It has also given voice to the average Joe and Jane and created a new consumer mentality of empowerment.

Once upon a time, there was a hierarchy that guarded the gates to fame and fortune. Top models, pop musicians, and television stars got there by pleasing the “experts” otherwise known as agents and executives. Today, *consumers* are the experts and are increasingly influential in helping promote brands, products, and celebrities.

Aspiring stars now have the ability to circumvent traditional routes and gatekeepers through the powerful voice of the consumers who are their champions. Justin Bieber and *Sports Illustrated*’s two-time cover model Kate Upton both rose to prominence through YouTube videos, and the best-selling novel *Wool* was initially self-published.

Bank of America, Netflix, and Verizon have experienced the harsher side of that consumer muscle—all have been forced to reverse new fee policies because of consumer outrage fueled by social media. Likewise, when a British Airways passenger didn’t get an immediate response from the airline about allegedly lost baggage, he targeted all 302,000 of British Airways’ Twitter followers and purchased promoted tweets to vent his anger.¹⁶ Never before

have consumers had so much power and such great ability to make or break products and businesses.

Review and ratings sites such as Yelp make or break local businesses. Karl detailed a horrifying example of plumbing gone wrong. “In all my years of homeownership, I’ve never had a problem like this. The plumber tried to do the electrical work, and he wasn’t qualified. He crossed wires, and we ended up flooded with, well, waste under the house. To make matters worse, his company would not take responsibility. My wife posted a scathing review on Yelp, and within days he made amends. I think we would have ended up having to go to court without Yelp.” On a happier note, Karl also said that one of his wife’s Yelp reviews was responsible for a mom-and-pop picture framing shop’s getting the success they deserved. “We’d been going to Westlake Art and Framing for twenty years, and they are better than fancy, high-priced framing shops. Bad location though. My wife posted a great review, and the next time she went to the shop, the owner said that they were packed with new business and that people were driving from twenty miles away to go to their shop!”

Consumers not only have the ability to learn about and trust products through their use of technology but also like having the power to champion the little guy. Investment through crowdsourcing platforms like Kickstarter has given everyone the opportunity to be an investor—and, more important, a champion. It takes consumer voice to a new level, and the emotional benefits are huge. Kickstarter has a 45 percent success rate for the full funding of campaigns.¹⁷

For example, Judith had been attending “purse parties” to snap up Sarah Oliver knitted handbags for years. The bags are made by a group of seniors (average age eighty-eight) in a retirement community who call themselves “The Purlettes + 1” (+1 is the lone male knitter in the group). When Sarah Oliver wanted to start a bridal collection, she turned to Kickstarter and quickly funded her nearly \$30,000 goal. More important, she turned consumers

into advocates and deepened their affection for the brand. “I am so excited,” said Judith. Although Judith has never met Sarah Oliver or her Purlettes, her sense of involvement and belonging is evident in her comment, “We did it!” According to Sarah Oliver, “The Kickstarter campaign plus our use of Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Instagram contribute to an important emotional connection with our customers. This connection is what helps us stand out among our competitors.”¹⁸



Once people have power—whether they exercise it through Yelp or Kickstarter, or by liking or linking on social media—there is no turning back. Consumers know their influence, and it has permanently affected their expectations and relationships with retailers and businesses.

Consumer empowerment has contributed to a less reverential relationship with brands and products, which means that marketers need to work harder to engage and involve consumers—something we’ll discuss in Chapter Six.

Faster Ways of Thinking

Through our use of technology, we’ve become mental speed demons. Our sense of time, ability to focus, and capacity for attention have shifted gears. Because our malleable, adaptive brains respond to our experiences, the areas we use become even more efficient, faster, and more powerful, and what we don’t use becomes less effective. In other words, our brains have adapted to a new, digital world, and we’re neurologically different as a result.

That digital world is a place where we scan and view rather than read, and where we’re bombarded by stimulation and constant interruptions. It is an environment that trains us to want everything faster and to crave stimulation. We’re more easily distracted,

and we have less tolerance for ambiguity—and nearly everything else that requires patience.

The shift in our neurology is driven not only by the loads of information we take in but also by the often accompanying anxiety to keep track of all that information and an expectation that we be available around the clock—which requires speed and often robs us of focus. In his book *iBrain: Surviving the Technological Alteration of the Modern Mind*, Gary Small describes the resulting mental state as “continuous partial attention.”¹⁹

*It takes an average of sixty-four seconds to recover your train of thought after an email interruption.*²⁰

Our lack of focus is a partial explanation for the popularity of products like Plated, a delivery service that provides every single ingredient down to little baggies of salt and pepper—to make “home-cooked” meals. Plated and the many services like it take the “cake mix” concept and put it on steroids. They address not only our craving for “fast and easy” but also the forgetfulness and anxiety that accompany a lack of focus. Even canning is making a comeback due to kits and automatic jelly makers that truly require only sugar and fruit—focus and patience are optional. Ball Mason jars are experiencing the highest sales ever in their 125-year history.

The consumers I’ve interviewed appreciate kits and semi-prepared products not just because they’re easier and faster but also for peace of mind and anxiety reduction.

Lisa, a busy working mother, says, “I always seem to forget something, paprika or onions or something, and that means another trip to the store. Or I get there and round steak is on sale, but I can’t remember if I have peppers, so I buy more and get home and there they were; now they might be wasted.” Obviously it’s

not just convenience that consumers are looking for—it's also a way to accommodate their increasingly overloaded, less focused minds.

The sweet spot in semiprepared dinners is fifteen to thirty minutes of prep time. Any less and it “doesn’t count.”²¹

Time Warp: The Need for Speed

Those who digitally engage the most will experience this neurological shift more intensely. And because our brains are the most malleable when they're developing, children will experience these effects more powerfully and permanently. In focus groups that I conducted, older members of Generation Y, those in their late twenties and early thirties, were adamant that they were really very different from their younger cohorts. “My younger sister is constantly on her cellphone; she just can't stop,” said Amy, twenty-nine, of her sister who is nine years younger. Pamela, thirty-three, describes a similar scene at her office: “They are constantly distracted; I walk by and they're sort of working but also texting and checking Facebook.”

To demonstrate how our minds have adapted, consider a typical high school task: writing a research paper. Baby Boomers most likely went to their local library, scoured card catalogues, took longhand notes, and painstakingly typed their papers on a typewriter. Their challenge was in finding information. They memorized things like how to spell words, because reference materials weren't readily available and the process of checking was time consuming. And they were careful and precise when typing—correcting took time. Baby Boomer brains were trained to focus, pay attention to detail, be patient, and have fortitude. Haste meant waste.

Fast-forward to today. The Baby Boomer challenge of finding information is less relevant—information is extremely accessible. Memorization and precision are less essential as well—it's easy to check facts and spelling. This means that those brain activities don't get the workout today that they did for previous generations of high school students. Today's young brains are heavily focused on scanning and processing mountains of information. Their brains are trained for speed.

But it's not only the young who are increasingly addicted to speed. Their saturation in and early use of technology makes them ultra-primed to require more stimulation and become more easily bored—but everyone's brains are changing. We're all less patient and less able to focus, and we all want things faster. It's no wonder we've replaced the word “trend” with “trending.” We barely alight on a new idea long enough for it to be a trend; it's just zipping by or “trending.”

Ellie, thirty-seven, says she's bored with shopping in stores. “I used to love to browse. Now it feels boring. I think part of it is that I browse online almost every day. I can see everything, every size is there, what matches. It's so much faster. I hadn't realized how time consuming it was to go to stores, plus there isn't much to see—at least compared to online, when I can check four or five stores in a half hour.” Most consumers still like to shop in stores—today. But unless retail evolves to incorporate more technology into the mix, Ellie's attitude will become the dominant one. Chapter Four is full of ideas about how to do this.

Stimulation Junkies

Here's a secret: multitasking isn't really multitasking. What we think is multitasking is actually our mind's quickly shifting back and forth between tasks—it can actually be a form of distraction for eager, stimulated, and easily bored minds. Our brains are not actually capable of focusing on two things at once. This explains why short interruptions, even of less than

three seconds, doubled the number of errors on simple tasks in a recent study.²²

- More than 68 percent of adults who own multiple devices use two or more screens simultaneously to “graze” unrelated content.^e
- Nearly 40 percent of time spent on tablets is spent doing something else simultaneously.^f
- Mobile media consumption tripled from 2009 to 2013.^g

Stanford communications professor Clifford Nass studies how humans interact with machines. He notes that technology-enabled multitasking results in serious changes to the brain. “For adults it has effects on their cognitive and thinking skills. For younger kids we’re seeing effects on their emotional development.”²³

Interruptions influence how we make purchase decisions. A UCLA study examined how participants made purchase decisions across a wide variety of categories—from high-priced luxuries to hiking trips. The authors found that brief distractions interrupted “detail-oriented and price conscious” decisions in favor of “goal-oriented, price insensitive” decisions.²⁴

Minds that are bombarded with stimulation get bored more easily, and for many the solution is *more* stimulation. When we become habituated to high levels of stimulation, ordinary downtime and relaxation can feel empty and boring, so we gravitate toward more stimulation—which further habituates our senses. Ultimately, our ability to focus takes a hit when snippets do the trick.

Abundant choice and stimulation affect our decision making in another way: we make riskier decisions when we’re overloaded with choices. A recent study found that people faced with larger numbers of options did less research per option and were more swayed by risky outliers.²⁵

For marketers, knowing how consumers think differently is essential information:

- Consumers will spend less time exploring detailed information and will consider a wider variety of sources when searching for product solutions. New and novel ideas and products have a much greater opportunity for consideration than ever before—but the emotional connection has to be made quickly.
- Consumers will look for faster, simpler solutions to match the way they think. For example, brands that simplify consumer decision making are 115 percent more likely to be recommended.²⁶
- It's simply going to take more intensity to get the attention of consumers and for them to feel inspired to pull the trigger on a purchase. What's required is not just ramped-up messaging but also more intense products, experiences, and promotions.
- Consumers will get bored more easily: with the products they own; with any impediment to purchasing, such as waiting in line; and with long explanations.
- Consumers will increasingly rely on faster, more symbolic forms of communication rather than the written word.

IWWIWWIWI

When we can get what we want when we want it—be it new shoes, medical information, research for a paper, or an update on a cousin's wedding—we come to expect immediate solutions. Impatience is the new virtue. Consumers respond to just-in-time information and ignore news before they need it. IWWIWWIWI (I want what I want when I want it) has never been more essential to satisfying the expectations of today's consumers.

Popcorn has been around for literally thousands of years. It's been served in theaters and at sporting events since the 1900s. Because it's inexpensive, it surged in popularity during the Great

Depression. Popcorn exploded in popularity during World War II, when sugar rations diminished candy production. In the 1950s, Coca-Cola and Morton Salt helped the Popcorn Institute convince consumers that popcorn was the perfect companion to their new television sets. The microwave reenergized sales of popcorn once again in the 1980s with ad claims like “You shouldn’t have to wait for great-tasting popcorn.” Today, the fastest growth in popcorn is in ready-to-eat packages, which grew nearly 12 percent last year (compared to a less than 1 percent increase in microwave popcorn). Colleen Bailey, brand director of Orville Redenbacher’s, told *Advertising Age*, “Microwave popcorn at its inception was all about convenience, having only to wait three minutes to get warm delicious popcorn. But as times have changed, the definition of convenience has changed.”²⁷ For many, three minutes has become simply too long to wait.

*The breathless anticipation of the 3-D printer makes sense. Resource CEO Kelly Mooney describes it as the ultimate “maximum immediate gratification.” Think it, want it, have it.*²⁸

Waiting? That’s for yesterday’s shopper. A one-second delay in the time it takes to load a web page typically results in a 7 percent reduction in purchases.²⁹ Waiting to check out feels like punishment to shoppers. Not that shoppers have ever liked waiting, but today it feels personal. Herb described a recent visit to a new “fast” food chain near his office: “Why couldn’t they get another clerk up here? Didn’t they see people were waiting? There were six people behind that counter and six people waiting in line. Why? It’s so disrespectful. I’m not going back.”

From on-the-floor checkout to paying with your smartphone to speedier online checkout, smart retailers are finding ways to satisfy speed-oriented shoppers. For example, luxury retailer Selfridges

is now offering a drive-through pickup service for online orders. Removing impediments to purchase—most notably wait time—is essential.

Science writer Sam McNERney points out that a person's perception of wait time is more important than the actual time he or she spends waiting. Attacking the psychological issues behind the frustration with waiting, such as boredom and fairness, by offering consumers distractions or a well-orchestrated queuing process, has the same effect as decreasing the actual wait time.³⁰

Naturally, Gen Y, who are digital natives, are the most sensitive to waiting, which is why they're the heaviest users of same-day delivery services, despite the costs. A Shop.org survey found that this generation of shoppers was more than twice as likely as average consumers to pay for same-day delivery services.³¹

IWWIWWIWI is behind three psychological hurdles to purchase. Here's what the hurry-up mentality means to marketers and retailers, and what they can do about it.

Anticipating needs squelches impatience. Marketers can no longer wait for consumers to tell them what they need—they have to anticipate future needs. By the time someone can articulate what she wants, she's frustrated that she doesn't have it. Understanding your consumer's life and figuring out what she'll want next—whether it's a product alteration, a faster way to check out, or more excitement—before she even knows she wants it tames impatience and creates a bond.

Immediate solutions calm exasperation. Consumers go from zero to exasperated in less time than ever. In the time it takes for a customer service agent to check with her manager, a customer's opinion can shift all the way from happy to hopeful to exasperated to angry. Preparing in advance or empowering sales and service personal to implement their own on-the-spot solutions provides the type of immediate response that consumers increasingly demand. You can also

avoid exasperation by streamlining and simplifying the processes by which consumers come to know, want, and buy products.

Confidence quells anxiety. An unexpected side-effect of IWWIWWIWI is the anxiety that accompanies wanting, waiting, and wondering. Consumers who are more demanding and emotional are reassured by calmness and confidence—they can relax knowing that they’re in capable hands.

Out with the Old

Consumers have clearly fallen in love with “new.” But what to do with the old?

In the dark recesses under Michelle’s bathroom sink is a nearly full bottle of shampoo that’s at least five years old. She won’t throw it out because “that would be so wasteful.” But she hates it. So she tries to ignore it. In almost every home I’ve visited to conduct ethnographic research, I’ve found at least one unwanted product that was often several years old. It might be hiding under the sink or stuffed in the back of a kitchen, dresser, or cabinet drawer or in the bottom of a freezer or collecting dust in the garage. I’ve found everything from disposable razors to diet soda, from frozen fish to thong panties. Waste is a source of guilt to most Americans. We’re a country built on Puritan values. And though we’ve adjusted to the idea of buying and having more, we still hold on to the notion that wastefulness is a sin.

The speed with which consumers sample and embrace what’s new is matched only by how quickly they get bored with what they perceive to be old. Technology and clothing are the biggest sources of waste angst. “If I could give this to someone who would use it, I would. I mean it’s a perfectly good; I just prefer reading real books,” says Hank of his Kindle. The cognitive dissonance aroused by the mixed emotions of desire for the new and shame about waste is a problem for consumers.

How do consumers manage this conflict? In part through Goodwill stores, resale shops, buying or swapping parties, yard sales, and, like Janine from the introductory chapter of this book, selling on eBay. But there's an opportunity for the companies that find ways to give consumers an "out."

Through trade-ups, trade-ins, recycling or donation programs, repurposing, and even image management, consumers get the reassurance they need to purchase "new." For example, H&M will recycle unwanted clothing in exchange for discounts on new merchandise, and jewelry stores will often take back merchandise for trade-ups.

Taking it a step further, Patagonia's advertising campaign is a plea for consumers to buy less, and they also sell used clothing in several of their stores. Apparently just the association with a company that takes a stand against wastefulness is enough to tamp down the guilt of buying—annual sales at Patagonia have increased by almost 38 percent in the two years they have been running the campaign.³²

As a professor, I'd like to think that the textbooks I assign never fall into the "unwanted" category. Unfortunately, that's not the case. Knowing that, bookstores are innovating. Paula Haerr is a popular trend forecaster in the college bookstore industry and VP of retail services for Connect2One. According to Haerr, "There is abundant competition for used textbooks in the online market. Campus stores are therefore finding unique ownership options to offset some of that competition, most notably rental options for textbooks. New, used, and even digital books can now be rented."³³

Ownership issues and the need for new have also spawned the swift and exuberant adoption of a host of peer-to-peer (P2P) product-sharing services made possible by consumers' ability to connect via the Internet. People are renting out or sharing spare rooms, parking spaces, cars, and even dogs.

Symbol Power

“Pictures, pictures, pictures, he’s always wanting me to send him pictures,” said Susan of her boyfriend of three months. “Do you mean, like, sexting?” I asked. “No, I don’t do that. He wants to see what I’m wearing to work, of me in a tank top, whatever.”

As the adage goes, “a picture paints a thousand words.” Today we’ve taken that idea and run with it. The super-speedy adoption of Instagram and Pinterest, the migration of Facebook postings from primarily words to primarily photos, and the ubiquity of photo text messages are testaments. Photos and videos are fast, easy, emotionally potent, and evocative—which makes them essential in an era when we have less patience for writing or calling yet are hungrier than ever for human connection.

In 2002, I conducted a study for a major cellphone manufacturer as they were preparing to launch the first camera phone. The purpose of my involvement was to determine how consumers would use photos, in order to inform the messaging of the launch. Initially the group I was studying sent posed or artistic photos similar to what they might have taken with a film camera—a remembrance. But the group quickly caught on that photos that were unusual, quirky, or provocative would elicit a greater response from others. Their photo content shifted away from what might be saved to remember an event or a person toward a more immediate expression and a way to connect emotionally. I saw how, even in its earliest stages, photo messages shifted home photography from a medium of stored memory to a vehicle for connection.

- In October 2012, Facebook users uploaded 300 million photos a day, up 20 percent from earlier in the year.
- Facebook posts that have photos generate 53 percent more “likes” and 103 percent more comments than text-only posts.^h

Consumers increasingly skim and scan rather than read—favoring photos, visual cues, and symbolism over words. It’s an ideal context for a social shopping website and app like Wanelo (want, need, love), which is a runaway success. Wanelo looks a lot like Pinterest. There are lots of lovely photos, masterfully designed and visually juicy sections, and the ability to see what your friends admire and to be admired for your own taste. But Wanelo differs from Pinterest in that you can click on any image and be taken to a site where the item is for sale. In two years Wanelo has acquired eight million users (primarily young women and girls) who spend an average of fifty minutes a day wanting, needing, loving—and buying—the products they see on the app or website. Five million products are saved for later consideration a total of eight million times a day.³⁴

The Hidden Brain Power of Our Unconscious Minds

Although we’d never admit it, partly because we’re unlikely to be aware of it, most of our purchase decisions are driven by unconscious cues. For example, car studies have found that consumers tend to purchase cars they emotionally relate to—ones that represent their lifestyle and personality. They then look for data to justify their decisions. Car specs are important, but not to inspire someone to purchase a particular car; it’s vice versa: they’re used to validate a car that’s already been chosen.

Through all five senses, we’re exposed to millions of bits of information and stimuli every second. Obviously we can’t attend to all of it. We therefore focus consciously on what’s new, threatening, and especially interesting, and on problems that need to be solved. The rest—which represents 99.99 percent of the information we receive—gets sent to “internal processing,” formally known as our unconscious mind and colloquially known as things like gut reactions, cravings, habits, and impulses. The unconscious mind may be hidden from us, but that doesn’t diminish its power. The fact that people generally—and mistakenly—believe that they make

decisions logically and consciously only increases its influence. Let me give you an example.

Some time ago, I conducted a two-part study for a frequently purchased, low-involvement grocery store product. In the first part of the study, I had consumers “shop” a mock grocery shelf packed with variations of the package I was testing and competitor products. They could choose three or four products they’d like to “buy.” Nearly everyone who chose the product I was testing picked a package that had a slightly off-kilter logo, part of which was cut off on the top of the package. I later brought those who had chosen the off-kilter logo into another room and gave them just two packages to consider: the one they chose and another that had a straight, fully visible logo. In nearly every instance, they thought they had chosen the straight logo and had plenty of good reasons for their decision: “I think it should be straight so that you can read it,” “I think it’s disrespectful to cut off the top of the logo,” and so forth. What made sense to them when they were thinking about it wasn’t in keeping with how they would have acted in a normal grocery store. Although the consumers weren’t consciously aware of it, the off-kilter logo was what grabbed their attention in a crowded shelf space. Because this was the type of product and purchase decision that doesn’t typically get a lot of conscious attention and is easily replaced by its competitors (and vice versa), getting noticed was paramount.

Our brains typically delegate the processing of nonverbal messages to the unconscious mind; this is why symbolic communication has always been an especially potent marketing communication tool. Symbolic marketing cues often circumvent the more analytical and rational parts of the brain and make a direct connection to our emotion and memory centers. Images, scents, sounds, and symbols are emotionally loaded, and we process them quickly.

The difference with today’s consumer is that those hidden, unconscious cues are even more influential to the purchase

decision process. Interruption-driven, overstimulated, distracted consumers have less ability to focus and less conscious brain space available to make decisions.

Want more proof? Here are a few of my favorite studies that show us just how much those tiny unconscious differences matter when it comes to establishing consumer choice. Many of these influences have long been known and used by marketers; the key difference now is that in our stimulus-drenched consumer environment, their power is much greater.

Seeing Red Color and light have a powerful influence on our unconscious minds, a fact that savvy marketers use to their advantage. For example, in a comprehensive study of logo colors, red was highly correlated with excitement; white and pink were associated with sincerity; brown with competence and ruggedness; and black and purple with sophistication.³⁵ Participants in another study felt that hot chocolate tasted better in an orange or cream-colored cup than it did in a white or red cup. The study also found that drinks consumed from pink containers are perceived to be sweeter.³⁶

Red appears to have a particular power. Merchandise displayed on red backgrounds gets higher bids than merchandise displayed on blue backgrounds.³⁷ Waitresses wearing red uniforms get 16 to 24 percent higher tips from men than waitresses wearing any other color.³⁸ When HubSpot conducted a test of two web pages, everything about the test pages was exactly the same except that in one, the “Get Started Now!” call-to-action button was red, and in the other, it was green. The red button outperformed the green button by 21 percent.³⁹

Research participants in a room containing a lamp mimicking sunlight were willing to pay 38 percent more for green tea and 56 percent more for a newspaper subscription than participants questioned in a room without a sun lamp.

Word Power Just as colors are symbols with potent emotional power, so too are words. Without pausing to understand meanings,

we often jump right into associations. For example, how much would you pay for a bottle of Kit's Tasty Red Wine? Would you pay more for Appellation Bordeaux Contrôlée Mis en Bouteille a la Propriété? In blind taste tests of identical wines, consumers indicated a preference for the taste of a wine with a fancy name—and they were willing to pay \$2 more per bottle.⁴⁰

In a different blind taste test of wine (wine is evidently a favorite topic among consumer researchers), consumers said that a \$5 wine with a \$45 price tag tasted better than a \$5 wine with a \$5 price tag. They even thought that the \$5 bottle with the \$45 price tag tasted better than a \$90 bottle of wine with a \$10 price tag. In another pricing study, researchers found that prices that take longer to say are perceived to be higher than shorter sounding prices. Whether consumers see the price or say the price, prices with more syllables and commas seem higher to them.⁴¹

Attach the word “organic” to a cookie, and consumers say they'll pay 23 percent more than they would for an identical regular cookie. They also perceive the organic cookie to be lower in fat and calories than its twin “regular” cookie. Whether or not consumers will actually make that purchase is less clear: in a taste test of identical cookies bearing “organic” or “regular” labels, consumers said the regular cookie tasted better.⁴²

Words are so powerful that they can change our self-image. Research participants who were primed with words associated with aging, including “bingo,” “old,” “Florida,” “gray,” and “wise” walked more slowly following the experiment than did non-stereotype-primed participants.⁴³

Product Placement Products located in the center of a horizontal display get longer looks and are more likely to be chosen than those on the left or right. In one study, products to the left of center were chosen only 24 percent of the time.⁴⁴ Why? Bruce D. Sanders, author of *Retailer's Edge*, notes that our eyes move to the right when the left hemisphere of the brain, where we do the math, gets active.

Therefore, when we think we've gotten a good deal, our happy left side of the brain dominates, and our eyes shift right. It's an explanation for why right-of-center products are more frequently purchased than left-of-center products.⁴⁵ This preference for right over left has nothing to do with conscious or rational decision making. When asked to rate four *identical* pair of stockings, the pair positioned to the far right was chosen four to one over the pair on the far left. Even when experimenters suggested that the position of the stockings might have influenced their selection, participants' responses ranged from confused to dismissive.⁴⁶

Research participants asked to judge the effectiveness of everything from acne cream to fabric softeners consistently felt that products placed closer to images of the desired effect were more effective. As the study's authors state, "Merely changing the spatial proximity between the image of a product and its desired effect in an advertisement influences judgment of product effectiveness."⁴⁷

The Nose Knows Olfactory cues have a strong influence on our perceptions, behavior, and unconscious decision making too.

- In one study, when research participants were exposed to the mild scent of a citrus cleaning product, they were tidier than the control group when eating a crumbly biscuit—and they were unaware of the scent or their behavior.⁴⁸
- In another experiment, slot machines in Las Vegas sprayed with a pleasant scent received 45 percent more play than those left unscented.⁴⁹
- Diners spent 20 percent more money in a restaurant scented with lavender than they did when it was scented with lemon or when it was not scented. They also spent 15 percent more time in the restaurant.⁵⁰
- Students exposed to the scent of peppermint scored 26 percent more hits during a video snowball game and were more engaged

with the game than those who played in an unscented area, suggesting that peppermint scent might also result in more attentive shopping too.⁵¹



Symbols and sensory input (especially imagery) deeply influence consumer decisions, and that means that now, more than ever, marketers need to understand semiotics—the study of nonlinguistic signs and symbols. Messaging with an emphasis on nonverbal cues is the mental shortcut today’s consumers need in order to quickly and effortlessly understand product benefits. We’ll go deeper in Chapter Five, and learn more about how to intensify your marketing efforts in Chapter Seven.

New Ways of Connecting

We’re a society that is, in some senses, more connected than ever. We can easily develop relationships with fellow dog lovers and wine lovers, and even future lovers we’ve yet to meet in person; stay in touch with classmates and colleagues we no longer see in person; and share our opinions with strangers we’ll never meet. It’s a paradox of our age that although we have more “friends” than ever, we increasingly feel unheard, unseen, disconnected, or alone. At the very least, this calls in question the quality of all these connections. For marketers, it’s a crucial piece of the consumer environment to understand and contend with.

Virtual Relationships

In the twenty years that I’ve been teaching graduate psychology, technology has been responsible for a tiny change in behavior that’s had a big effect on the friendships and connections among my students. Where once I’d enter the classroom to find my students chatting or sharing notes, today there is significantly less interaction. Instead, they’re almost always glued to their phones

or computers. And it's not just in the classroom that people are opting for their smartphones and computers over interacting with real, live human beings. It's at parties and concerts, on dates, at the beach, during family dinners, and even during sex. Yes, that's right. Nearly 20 percent of smartphone-owning young adults and 9 percent of Baby Boomers will check a text that comes in while they're having sex.⁵² (Which makes you wonder if they're doing it right. The sex, that is.) Nearly one-third of Internet users report spending less time with their families since being connected to the Internet. And when they *are* with them, they may be simultaneously multitasking on the phone.⁵³

Although many of us use technology to orchestrate and facilitate existing relationships, plenty of us have also given over big chunks of face-to-face time to technology-infused time with others. Fully 39 percent of Americans spend more time socializing online than they do face-to-face with other people.⁵⁴

Why does this matter? Because deep relationships and a sense of belonging are essential to our physical, emotional, and mental health. Psychologically, we respond differently when our communication is buffered by technology. For starters, the neurons associated with empathy don't activate in the same way. We don't get that calming, bonding flow of oxytocin. Our natural tendency to understand and empathize with others is diminished with each layer of separation—from face-to-face, to voice alone, to text and email. Further, even when we are connecting in person—be it with a close friend or a sales associate (because, yes, even those fleeting transactions bond us to each other and our communities)—the distraction of our cellphones can interfere with genuine connection.

People who have used online dating services tell me that a photo and online description can be enticing. The next step, email exchanges, can be downright exciting. After talking on the phone and texting, people can come close to feeling sure they've finally met their soul mate. And then within thirty seconds of meeting in person, that "soul mate" can be ruled out. Even if their appearance

exactly matches their photos. Obviously something essential happens when we're face-to-face with other people.

Also, the very aspects of technologically enhanced communication that we love so much—speed, reach, and the ability to craft messages (rather than engage in spontaneous dialogue)—maintain a level of superficiality and invulnerability that inhibits the authenticity and intimacy that are the foundation of connection and belonging.

So technology has made communication more convenient and has certainly facilitated the development of relationships, but in itself it's also less bonding and nurturing. This affects our sense of belonging as we gradually replace in-person communication with online communication. As a result, our high-tech, low-touch society has left consumers looking for a sense of connection and belonging—something they increasingly find online, including through brands and retailers.

A Binky for Adults

Perhaps one of the most pervasive and important ways we use technology to connect while still keeping our distance is text messaging. These days, "I'm speechless" is taking on a whole new meaning. Data messaging revenues will eclipse voice messaging revenues by 2014.⁵⁵ Nearly half of those under thirty-five say that text communication is as meaningful as voice communication.⁵⁶

People I've interviewed say that texting is more convenient and gives them time to consider responses; they appreciate the immediate gratification of sharing experiences, thoughts, or emotions as they occur; and they always feel connected to other people. Few mention what they might be missing while their focus is directed downward, but they're keenly aware of feeling ignored when the people around them are multitasking on their phones.

Robert, for example, visits San Francisco's popular Saturday farmer's market less frequently than he did in the past. "It's crowded. But now with everyone busy looking at their cellphones,

you can barely get through. It's like everyone thinks they're the only one there. No manners, no sense of community." Even if you don't intend to converse with the people around you, playing bumper cars because nobody sees you is isolating, even alienating.

For many the cellphone has become an adult binky. Instead of shouldering through messy, real-time social situations, we very nearly suck on our cellphones for comfort. Cellphone messaging in social situations is modern navel gazing—not just because our heads are directed downward, but also because it's a form of self-absorption. At the very least, when we're absorbed by our phones, we're less focused on the people, scenes, or events of the moment. And it's increasingly prevalent, and expected, even though we find it alienating and rude when others engage in it.

People aren't the only things we ignore when we're so phone focused. Now that more than 50 percent of Americans own smartphones, they're ignoring checkout-line magazine and gum displays while waiting to pay for their groceries. Impulse purchases at the checkout lines are in steep decline. In the second half of 2012, sales of single-copy magazines fell 8.2 percent over the previous year, and sales of gum declined 5.5 percent.ⁱ

David Carr describes his experience of texting's intrusion into social interaction in his article "Keep Your Thumbs Still When I'm Talking to You." He calls cellphones "digital wingmen" in his take on texting at the South by Southwest Interactive conference, which he describes as "the annual campfire of the digitally interested." Says Carr, "At the conference, I saw people who waited 90 minutes to get into a party with a very tough door, peering into their phones the whole while, only to breach the door finally and resume staring into the same screen and only occasionally glancing up."⁵⁷

Pamela attends several charity dinners a year, and she's noticed a trend: people ignoring table companions to text and tweet

to people who aren't there. She describes it this way: "It reminds me of a high school dance where you clung to your friend because it was so awkward to feel like you might be alone. People ignore other people to focus on somebody who isn't there just so they won't have to face stressful social situations."

Socializing stressful? Even the most articulate, extroverted, and gregarious among us experience a touch of anxiety or stress in social situations. At its most fundamental level, anxiety is simply the body's preparation for action—our senses are sharpened. Small levels of stress and anxiety are proven to enhance performance. Still, it's uncomfortable. Therefore, people often take smaller steps toward anxiety-provoking situations than they can handle. Which is why at any given moment, at a table full of strangers, many retreat to the safety of their cellphones (aka binky). Practice diminishes the level of stress we experience. We're not getting that practice if we consistently resort to the technological alternative.

As a result of this sense of disconnection, retailers and brands that feel authentic, that create a sense of community and belonging through their values, that inspire consumers to connect with each other, or that appear to see and honor their customers will hit the mark in a major way. We'll talk about how in Chapter Five.

