

SHOULI, ROSANNA., M.S. Exploring the Decision-Making Process of Men's Branded Underwear Consumers. (2007)
Directed by Dr. Nancy Nelson-Hodges. 130 pp.

In the newly competitive market of men's underwear, leverage in product sales and advertising can be achieved through an understanding of consumer decision-making. The purpose of this paper is to explore the role of involvement, brand loyalty, and gender in the purchase of men's branded underwear, and specifically during the evaluation of alternatives and product choice stages of the decision-making process. Using a qualitative methodology, interviews were conducted with fifteen department store shoppers to explore their use of evaluative criteria and the impact of these criteria on product choice.

Results of a thematic interpretation of interview data reveal four main consumer profiles: high involvement /brand loyal, high involvement not brand loyal, low involvement/brand loyal, and low involvement not brand loyal consumers. The majority of participants were either high involvement/brand loyal, or low involvement/not loyal. Results of this study point to the need for marketers to better understand the men's branded underwear consumer in order to successfully market new products in an increasingly diversified apparel product category. Similarly, manufacturers could better cater to consumers' needs and wants by understanding consumer perceptions of brand value. Further research is needed to more fully explore the implications of such considerations as channel type, consumer demographics, and lifestyle marketing for the purchase of men's branded underwear.

EXPLORING THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS OF MEN'S BRANDED
UNDERWEAR CONSUMERS

By

Rosanna Shouli

A Thesis Submitted to
the Faculty of The Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Science

Greensboro
2007

Approved by

Committee Chair

APPROVAL PAGE

This thesis has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Committee Chair _____

Committee Members _____

Date of Acceptance by Committee

Date of Final Oral Examination

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks to my thesis advisor, Dr. Nancy Nelson-Hodges, for the countless hours she spent not only advising and directing me through my paper but mainly for her encouragement and support at all times.

I greatly appreciate the council I received from my thesis committee members, Dr. Tu Watchravesringkan and Dr. Gwendolyn O'Neal, their expert tutelage was necessary at some of the most crucial stages of my thesis.

I would like to extend a special thanks to Hanesbrands and Quixote Marketing group for their assistance with the research aspect of my paper and their support with data collection.

I am especially grateful to my colleagues and friends who supported me throughout my graduate career, without falter.

Finally, I am most grateful to my sister Rima Shouli, who has always seen the best in me and generously offered assistance, encouragement, and advice.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES.....	iv
LIST OF FIGURES.....	viii
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	1
Men’s Branded Underwear: Trend?.....	4
Men’s Underwear as a Product Category	7
Research Purpose and Objectives	13
Significance of Study.....	14
Definition of Key Terms.....	15
Summary	20
II. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	21
Statement of Purpose	21
Decision-Making and the Underwear Consumer.....	21
Involvement and the Decision-Making Process	30
Types of Involvement	32
Factors Influencing Involvement	36
Involvement and Brand Loyalty	39
Brand Preference.....	40
Brand Loyalty	42
Brand Loyal Consumers	44
Influences on Brand Loyalty.....	49
Gender and Consumption	51
Summary	57
III. METHODOLOGY	58
Research Purpose	58
Objectives	58
Research Design.....	59
Sample Selection.....	61
Data Analysis	61
Summary	62

IV. INTERPRETATION	63
Participant Demographics.....	63
Thematic Interpretation.....	64
Identity	65
“Because I like them”: Aspects of Personal Identity	65
“Because someone might see them”: Aspects of Social Identity	70
Form versus Function	72
“The Importance of Comfort”	73
“They have to fit well”	74
Brand as Function	75
Value	76
Quality versus Cost: Product-based value	77
Packaging and Promotion: Purchase-based value.....	80
Summary	83
V. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS	85
Research Objectives.....	85
Motivations	85
Role of Brand.....	86
Evaluation of Alternatives Stage	86
Product Choice Stage.....	87
Involvement Levels.....	88
Role of Involvement	88
Gender.....	89
Brand.....	90
Consumer Profiles.....	91
High Involvement/Brand Loyal	92
High Involvement/Not Brand Loyal	93
Low Involvement/ Brand Loyal.....	93
Low Involvement/ Not Brand Loyal.....	94
Limitations and Further Research.....	98
Summary	101
REFERENCES	103
APPENDIX A. UNDERWEAR TOTAL CATEGORY GROWTH GRAPH	113
APPENDIX B. INTERVIEW SCHEDULE.....	115
APPENDIX C. RECRUITMENT SCRIPT	117

APPENDIX D. CONSENT FORMS 120

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE	Page
Table 1. Consumer Trait Theory.....	38
Table 2. Participant Demographics and Purchase Decisions.....	64
Table 3. Brand Loyalty and Involvement Level by Participant.....	92

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE	Page
Figure 1– National Underwear Day	3
Figure 2 – Annual Men’s Underwear Dollar Volume from May 2004-May 2006 per store channel	6
Figure 3 – Layout of Channel Position Ranking	6
Figure 4 – Top Silhouettes	10
Figure 5 – Bottom Silhouettes and Fabrications	11
Figure 6 – Example of the Consumer Decision-Making Process	23
Figure 7 – Ad for Branded Image of Polo as a Lifestyle and Look	25
Figure 8 – Concepts of Involvement with Various Influences and Results	33
Figure 9 – Product Packaging for Polo Brand	52
Figure 10 – Percentage of Men Purchasing their own Underwear	55
Figure 11 – Underwear Models in Advertisements or on Product Packaging	56
Figure 12 – Trends in Men’s Underwear Silhouettes and Patterns.	57
Figure 13 – Participant Categorization by Involvement Level and Brand Loyalty	95
Figure 14 – Typology of Consumer Profiles: Involvement, Loyalty, Gender, Evaluative Criteria and Preferred Silhouette	97

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Underwear should no longer be merely the first thing you put on and the last thing you take off, but the most important thing you wear all day.

Michael Kleinmann, CEO of Freshpair.com

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this research is to explore the decision-making process of the men's underwear consumer. Men's underwear is currently a rapidly growing product category in the apparel marketplace (Capelaci, 2006). The growth in the men's underwear market reflects both innovative design and technology, in that what was once simply satisfactory and comfortable is now fashion forward. In the past, male consumers had very little choice when it came to underwear, and as a result, few expectations. Now flat fronts and horizontal flys are replacing classic vertical openings, pouch designs offer minimum or maximum frontage, and flat seams and longer legs reduce friction. Underwear, once a product category focused primarily on women's needs and preferences is now tending to those of the male consumer (Capelaci, 2006).

Both males and females are purchasing men's underwear, as it becomes a more fashion-forward product category. Changes in lifestyle and fashion trends have led to the development of needs and desires on the part of consumers making purchasing decisions about underwear. Many of the fashion forward elements now surfacing in men's underwear have been an important part of women's underwear (i.e. lingerie) for decades.

Intimate apparel for women has been an important product category in terms of both function and fashion and has seen growth at a rate of 10% each year in annual sales (National Panel Diary, 2005). The most critical difference today, however, is that women are oftentimes just as likely to buy underwear for their significant others as men are to buy it for themselves.

Men's underwear became profitable in 1994 when Calvin Klein's innerwear line earned over \$100 million in sales. Popular because it has a high inventory turnover and good profit margins, since the 1990's designers such as Tommy Hilfiger, Alexander Julian, DKNY, and Puma have been adding men's underwear to their apparel lines (Hart, 1994). Other brands like Calvin Klein, Polo, and Levi's have benefited from brand extension by capitalizing on their name recognition among consumers who have purchased the label for years (Bailey, 2005). Even Speedo has moved their products 'out of the water' in order to design high-performance underwear engineered using the technological expertise that the brand had already been known for in its swimwear.

In addition to lifestyle motivations, consumers are also looking more closely at the value-added offerings of today's men's underwear. For example, Speedo offers 'no sweat' garments with moisture movement properties built into the fabric, while brands such as Puma and Champion Brands offer fabrics with antimicrobial benefits. Many garments previously considered as innerwear are now being designed as leisure wear and meant to be worn as outerwear. Polo, a proponent of this idea, has recently designed undershirts that are made of stretch mesh fabrics with contrast stitching detail and style effects which can only be seen when the garment is worn as outerwear.

National Underwear Day was founded in 2003 by Freshpair.com, one of the largest on-line retailers of innerwear and was prompted by the fact that Americans spend over \$13 billion on intimate apparel each year. National Underwear Day happens every August 9th, when the streets of Manhattan and especially the heavily trafficked areas of Times Square and Penn Station are bombarded with underwear marketing efforts (see Figure 1).



Figure 1- National Underwear Day, August 9th, in New York. (Source: Freshpair.com).

Underwear ambassadors urge shoppers and tourists to sign petitions and complete surveys about their consumption habits. Sponsors such as Diesel, Puma, Hanes, and 2(x)ist come out to support this day. An effort to drive home the notion that underwear is clearly an important aspect of a man's wardrobe, the purpose of National Underwear Day is to communicate the variety of ways the consumer can 'make sure [he's] wearing a fresh pair' (Freshpair.com, 2006) and in turn, increase nationwide sales of this product.

The need for men's innerwear has always existed; however, until recently, function was emphasized over fashion. Although this category has traditionally been slow to evolve, a convergence of trends and innovations in both fabric and fit has propelled

men's underwear forward (see Appendix A). In 2003, strong consumer demand for sexier silhouettes spurred sales and introduced men to something women had known for years: that underwear can be more than just white cotton briefs (Askin, 2004). Indeed, what was once a rather stale product category known for its focus on the basics and little or no hope for sales growth has taken an abrupt turn, as manufacturers such as Polo and Tommy Hilfiger previously focused only on outerwear garments, are becoming equally competitive in their underwear product lines. Today, similar to their female counterparts, more male consumers are looking into the innerwear category for both function and fashion. This research, therefore, sets out to examine the variety of attributes of men's underwear that influence the decision-making process and ultimately lead to purchase. Given the explosive growth in sales and variety of styles of men's underwear now available to the consumer, the process has become more complicated, yet its importance has been overlooked in the literature.

Men's Branded Underwear: Trend?

Throughout the 2000s there has been a steady overall rise in men's underwear sales, climbing 8% annually from 2003 through 2005 (NPD, 2005). Mass retailers, such as Wal-Mart and Target, experienced an 11% growth from 2003-2005, while specialty stores such as Champs and Sports Authority have seen the greatest overall increase at 26% during the same period (NPD, 2005). In 2005 alone, men's underwear reflected a dollar growth of \$2.4 million. In 2006, annual percentage growth for the total category has been 8.7% (NPD, 2006).

As shown in Figure 2, from May 2005- May 2006, mass retailers such as Wal-Mart, Kmart, and Target that carry basic brands such as Hanes and Fruit of the Loom showed the highest dollar sales in the men's underwear product category, at over \$1 million in one year (NPD, 2005). This is largely due to their value-oriented product offerings and large inventories (The DNR List..., 2005). During the same year, department stores (store channel rank shown in Figure 3) carrying designer label underwear, like Macy's, Nordstrom, and Saks experienced over \$340K in sales. Specialty stores that offer more technical garments, like Gap, Banana Republic, and Dick's Sporting Goods, sold slightly more than department stores, with 2005-2006 sales over \$345K. Also during this period, mid-tier stores like Kohl's, JC Penney's, and Sears, which carry labels like Chaps and Jockey, have sold over \$470K while other sources, such as outlets and online retailers like Freshpair, HisRoom, and TJ Maxx, experienced \$529K in sales.¹

According to Bailey, (2005), men are beginning to look at undergarments as more of a style statement and are placing almost equal emphasis on their inner wear as their outerwear garments. Bailey (2005) affirms that this reflects the consumer trend of adopting a lifestyle perspective that involves wearing the same brand name for every layer. Hajewski (2005) discusses the success of Kohl's department stores in sales of their exclusive Chaps line of underwear as linked to its deliberate marketing of a lifestyle.

¹ In the mass channel, Hanes offers basic cotton fashion low-rise briefs in a pack of 4 for approximately \$13. In the mid-tier channel, Jockey offers low-rise briefs ranging from \$13.50-\$21. In the department store channel, brands such as Adam+Eve, C-IN2, 2(x)ist and Polo use Pima cotton (a longer staple yarn resulting in softer fabric) and sell their products at \$14-\$22.50 per pair.

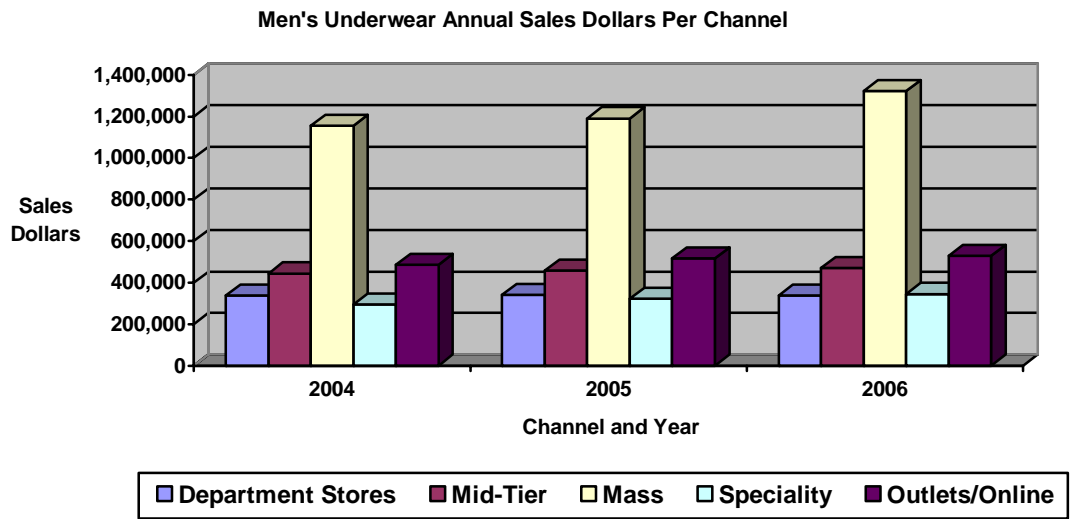


Figure 2 - Annual Men's Underwear Dollar Volume from May 2004-May 2006 per store channel (Source: National Panel Diary, 2006).

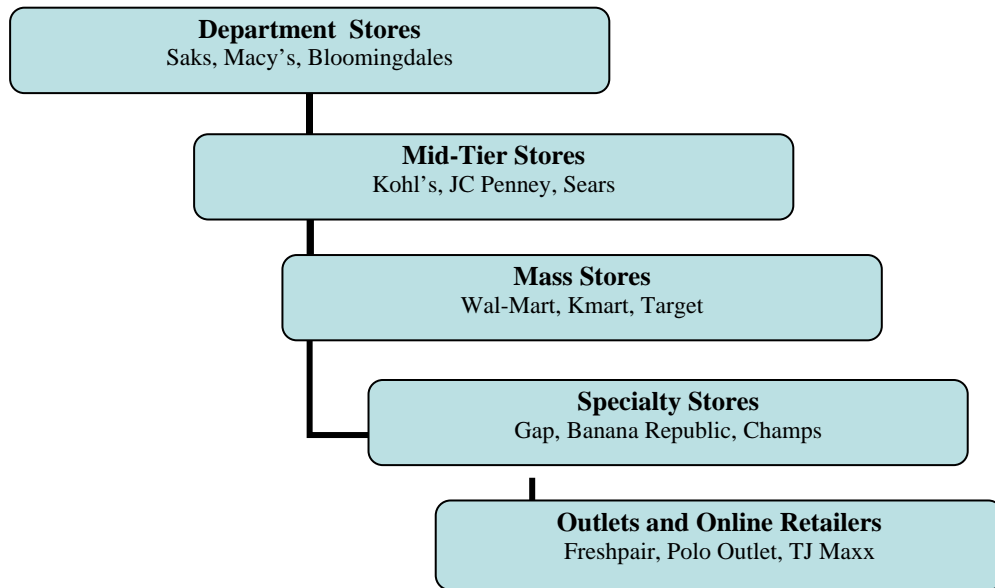


Figure 3 - Layout of Channel Position Ranking (Source: NPD, 2006)

Kohl's Chaps line offers outerwear as well as underwear and socks. For Kohl's, the lifestyle marketing approach has not only helped to increase sales but it has also boosted brand loyalty (The DNR List..., 2005). By shopping in the Chaps area for a particular item, the consumer is introduced to several other items of the same brand, which thereby enhances brand familiarity. This lifestyle-marketing strategy does have its limitations however, in that it has been found to be more influential for those consumers who are not necessarily cost conscience and who are more self-focused and fashion-oriented (Quixote, 2005).

Because men's branded underwear is generally sold at department stores, this research will focus specifically on the department store consumer. The department store consumer who typically purchases their undergarments from retailers such as Macy's, Bloomingdales, and Nordstrom's differs in many ways from the mass consumer who frequents Wal-Mart, Target, and Kmart. For the department store consumer, social needs are heightened and quality and variety are expected and related to product cost (Quixote, 2005). As a result, this consumer is willing to spend more for their underwear garments in an effort to fulfill these needs.

Men's Underwear as a Product Category

Men's underwear as a product category is quite broad. Like outerwear, innerwear (commonly known as underwear) consists of tops (clothing for the upper torso) and bottoms (clothing for the lower half of the torso). Innerwear tops are essentially shirts worn under outerwear clothing as a base layer. Underwear bottoms are worn in the same manner, as the layer closest to the skin with outerwear garments placed on top. The

essential purpose of top and bottom garments is to shield the body from the effects of outerwear fabrics, which tend to be made of harsher fabrics such as denim. Underwear may also provide warmth as an additional layer, and protect outerwear garments from perspiration and oils. For men, specifically, underwear bottoms function as a base layer to provide support for the anatomy of the lower torso.

In recent years, technical fabrics have been used to better meet consumer needs regarding the function of the base layer and particularly those technological advances that allow for better fit and comfort. Much like stain-resistant pants and wrinkle-free shirts, underwear has become as much about performance as it is a necessity. Technical fabrics have invigorated the underwear business, and have changed the needs of the traditional underwear consumer. Underwear is becoming fabricated for better performance, a criteria that has become standardized for many brands like Hanes and Calvin Klein. Fabrics manufactured with moisture-wicking properties are chemically treated to be fast drying, and sometimes use hydrophobic fibers to help provide breathability (SLU Market Insights, 2004).

From designer brand to private labels, all manufacturers of men's underwear are incorporating varying degrees of technically enhanced features, resulting in differing price points. Products range from true performance with moisture management, temperature control and antimicrobial attributes to characteristics designed for true comfort like heat-transferred tags and seamless silhouettes (Askin, 2004). Products from Hanes like "Comfort Cool" or "Tagless Tee" are among these innovations now available

to the consumer. Speedo incorporates all of these technologies into one garment with their tagline 'No Stink, No Stain, No Sweat' (Bailey, 2005).

Beyond the technical properties of the fabric, movement and flexibility are also critical to men's underwear design. Garments are now made with spandex fibers, which offer excellent stretch capability, especially for garments worn in an athletic capacity. From techno-fabrics to cotton blends with new weaves, the end result is a second skin that is designed to stretch with movement and to fit snugly against the skin while remaining loose at the same time (The Shape of Things..., 2006). Comfort is being addressed in new ways to accommodate certain types of latex or rubber allergies. For example, Hanes offers the "Comfort Soft" waistband design and has introduced a layer of cotton fabric placed between the waistband and the skin. Similarly, Hanes Brands introduced a tag free undershirt, which eliminated the irritation caused by the manufacturing tag on the inside back neck collar seam. Instead, a heat-seal label is imprinted onto the fabric, much like a screen print. Such technology has not only led to an increase in sales, but has become part of what the consumer now expects from the product. Moreover, with an increase in sales of underwear in fashion forward colors (NPD, 2005), many such garments are now being worn as accents to outerwear.

Silhouette is defined as the basic shape of a garment. For underwear tops, there are four silhouettes and for bottoms there are six. Some manufacturers have created other versions of these silhouettes to provide competitive differences in the market, however, the basic silhouette, minus trend or trim differences, remains the same. As shown in Figure 4, tops consist of a short-sleeve crew neck shirt (round-neck collar), a v-neck (v

construction at front of collar), a muscle shirt (crew construction without sleeves) or an a-shirt, more commonly know as a tank (containing wide shoulder straps and a low rounded neckline).

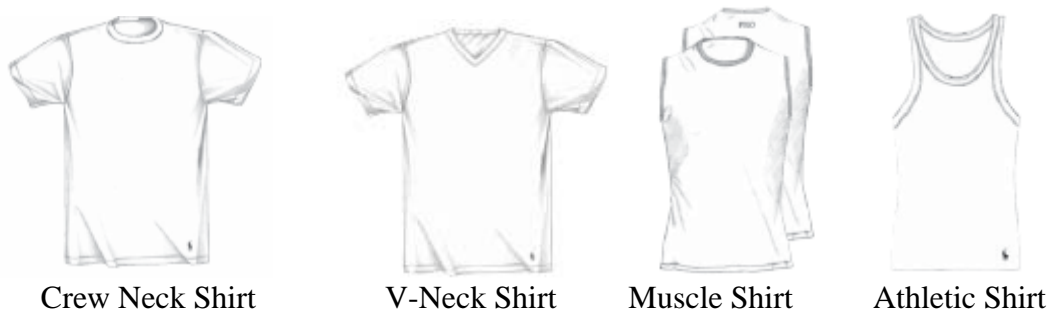


Figure 4 - Top Silhouettes

Figure 5 depicts silhouettes for the bottoms. Typical silhouettes consist of either an underwear brief (coverage from the lower midsection stopping at the upper part of the thighs), a boxer brief (similar to the brief but with legs that reach mid-thigh), a trunk (similar to a boxer brief with shorter legs, covered to top of thigh at leg), a traditional boxer, which usually comes in a woven fabric (like dress shirts) and are essentially like loose shorts, the knit boxer, similar to traditional boxer but in a jersey fabrication (like t-shirts) and finally a bikini or low-rise style of underwear (coverage from lower hips to upper thigh, cut very narrow on sides of hips), similar to a women's bikini bottom.

Different product-oriented consumer needs have been identified relative to tops and bottoms. A study by Solution Partners (March 2006) identified a total of twelve need states, seven of which relate to bottoms and five to tops.

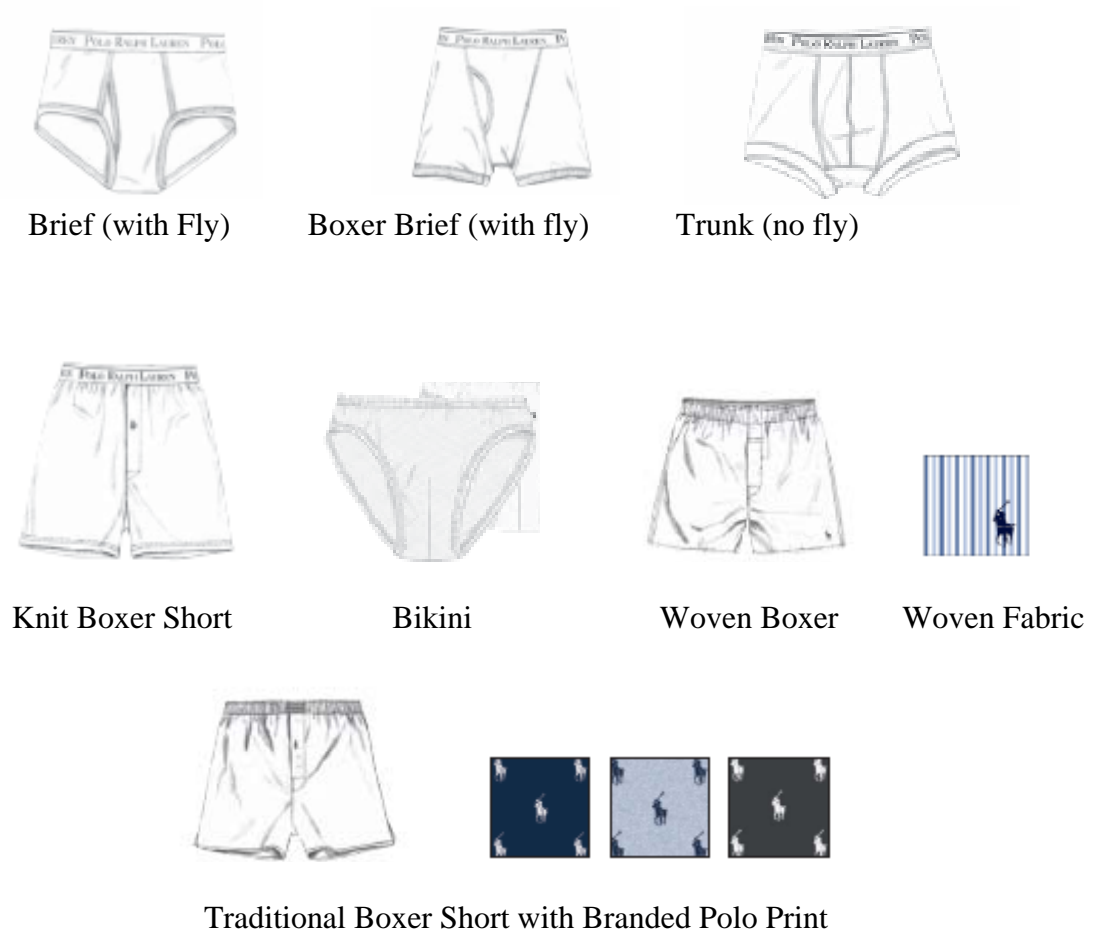


Figure 5 - Bottom Silhouettes and Fabrications

For bottoms, the need states are: (a) *Nothing Fancy* (inexpensive underwear), (b) *Basic White* (durable and value driven), (c) *All Day Comfort* (fabric conscious and comfortable), (d) *Relaxed and Refreshed* (fashionable, technical fibers), (e) *Physical Activity* (enhance performance and protect), (f) *Put Together* (stylish, trend right) and (g) *Sex Appeal* (unique styles and textures). For tops, the five need states are identified as: (a) *Nothing Fancy*, (b) *Basic White*, (c) *Super Shirt* (odor/stain resistant, durable), (d) *Put*

Together and (e) *Sex Appeal*. Much of the styles are meant to provide the same basic functions for both bottom and top silhouettes, such as durability and stretch comfort. Other features are specific to the silhouette, such as stain-resistance for underarm perspiration for the *Super Shirt* silhouettes.

Specific wearing occasions were also identified, these include: (a) work in an office, whether formal or informal, (b) physical work (labor), (c) athletics (working out), (d) with friends (casual outings), (e) lounging around (hanging out at the house), (f) romantic occasion, and (g) sleeping. Men's underwear manufacturers have addressed such findings as an opportunity to introduce fashion elements and increased wearability attributes of men's underwear for specific occasions. For example, Calvin Klein and 2(x)ist are two major proponents of designing underwear using a sexy image geared toward fashion conscious consumers. Low-rise boxer briefs are the most recent addition to the men's underwear category, mainly because they fit with the current trend in low rise jeans. Colors and patterns are also appearing on different silhouettes, from Valentine heart prints on boxer shorts to Hawaiian print low-rise briefs (Latest Underwear Marries..., 2005). Variety in product offerings has proven successful as sales in dyed and patterned boxer briefs have risen to more than double that of their basic white counterparts (NPD, 2005). Indeed, the volume growth in annual sales for the men's underwear product category has been greatly influenced by fashion. Until the past three years, briefs were the most popular of basic silhouettes, as indicated by the highest sales figures. Since then, however, brief sales have decreased by 6% annually, as the boxer brief silhouette has taken over and now ranks first with an increase of 20% in annual sales (SLU, 2006).

Fashion colors and textures have increased sales in all categories of silhouettes, but particularly in bikinis, briefs, and t-shirts. Although most consumers are still purchasing basic white, annual sales have risen approximately 4% in the fashion color offerings per silhouette category (NPD, 2005).

Research Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this study is to explore the decision-making process of men's branded underwear consumers. Motivations will be identified and differences in levels of involvement between male and female consumers will be investigated. Factors important to product choice in the purchase of men's underwear will be explored in order to examine the significance of gender and brand name in the decision-making process. To explore the decision-making process for men's branded underwear consumers, specific research objectives include:

1. To identify motivations for men's branded underwear consumers.
2. To determine if these motivations differ for female versus male consumers.
3. To examine the role of brand name within the decision-making process and specifically during the evaluation of alternatives and product choice stages.
4. To explore the concept of involvement and its connection to gender and brand name within the decision-making process.
5. To consider this connection for the marketing of men's branded underwear.

Significance of Study

This study will focus on the evaluation of alternatives and product choice stages of the decision-making process (Solomon, 1999), and thus will add to the existing body of apparel consumption knowledge. Very little research has been done on the men's underwear consumer, likely due to the fact that it was considered a "boring" or staple product category until only recently. Therefore this research will fill a gap in knowledge about the men's underwear consumer's experiences, the overall decision-making process with regard to men's underwear, and will ultimately aid in developing a better understanding of what makes this consumer unique.

Taking into account the fact that the men's underwear consumer is part of a largely untapped consumer group whose motivations are relatively unknown, this study will contribute to both marketer's and retailer's knowledge of the "why" behind consumption for this apparel product category. Ultimately, by addressing the research objectives, this study will explore what is important to men's underwear consumers during the decision-making process, and in particular, the evaluation of alternatives and product choice stages of the process. Findings will also shed light on the motivations of both genders and how their motivations may differ within the consumption process. With the rapid increase in men's underwear sales, a wider variety of product offerings, and broader consumer interest, insight into this product category could prove to be invaluable. In addition, this study will contribute to the general understanding of consumer behavior in terms of men's apparel, as well as male consumers, both currently understudied areas within the existing literature.

This study is unique in several ways. First, it focuses on men's underwear, an understudied product category. Second, it will apply a qualitative approach in order to fully explore the decision-making process for men's underwear from the perspective of the consumers themselves. Third, the research will explore how product attributes impact decision-making for male versus female consumers. Lastly, the study will highlight different motivations and involvement levels of consumers with regard to the various choices in men's underwear available in the marketplace today. Identifying consumer needs is important for marketers and retailers alike. Understanding the motivations that drive the consumption of men's underwear is essential for successful product development and brand positioning strategies. An in-depth awareness of the different consumer groups currently purchasing men's underwear will help marketers to reach their target markets more effectively, and develop strategies to ensure that their consumer's needs are met.

Definition of Key Terms

This section presents and discusses the definitions of major key terms that are used throughout the text.

Absorbency	The ability of a fabric to take in moisture. Absorbency is a very important property in men's underwear as it affects many other characteristics such as skin comfort, static buildup, shrinkage, stain removal, water repellency, and wrinkle recovery (Vintageskivies.com, 2006).
A-Shirt	An athletic (or sleeveless) undershirt, usually made of ribbed or flat knitted fabric. Also called a tank top, especially when worn as an outer garment. Originally called an athletic shirt due to the freedom of movement

facilitated by the sleeveless design (Vintageskivies.com, 2006).

Boxer Briefs	A hybrid style of male undergarment that emerged late in the 20th century. Of knitted fabric, patterned like a brief with a pouch and often a fly opening in the front, but with a tubular leg design extending several inches down the thigh (Vintageskivies.com, 2006).
Boxer Shorts	Under drawers made with an elastic waistband, introduced into wide usage in the mid-20th century. Also called just "boxers." The elastic waist band alleviates the need for button, snap or tie closures (Vintageskivies.com, 2006).
Brand Loyalty	Repeat buying because of a commitment to a brand (Assael, 2004).
Briefs	Close fitting, knitted undergarments with an elastic waist band, with or without an overlapping fly front. Typified by the famous Jockey brand Y-front brief and produced in the mid to late 20th century by many manufacturers in many designs. Originally inspired by the brief swim suits worn in the South of France in the 1930s (Vintageskivies.com, 2006).
Broadcloth	A plain weave, tightly woven, twilled napped fabric with smooth lustrous face and dense texture. Usually of cotton, cotton/polyester blend, silk, or rayon made in plain and rib weaves with soft semi gloss finish. Sometimes in wool or worsted. Often characterized by a slight ridge effect in one direction (Vintageskivies.com, 2006).
Cotton	A unicellular, natural fiber that grows in the seed pod of the cotton plant. Fibers are typically 1/2 inch to 2 inches long. The longest staple fibers, longer than 1 1/2 inch, including the Pima and Egyptian varieties, produce the highest quality cotton fabrics (Vintageskivies.com, 2006).
Crew Neck	In the world of underwear, a term that applies to a T-shirt with a neckline that forms a round, collarless circle around the neck (Hisroom.com, 2006).
Decision-Making Process	Making decisions through a process of active search for information. Based on this information, alternative brands

are evaluated on specific criteria. The cognitive process of evaluation involves consumer perceptions of brand characteristics and development of favorable or unfavorable attitudes toward a brand. The assumption is that consumer perceptions and attitudes will precede and influence behavior (Assael, 2006).

Evaluation of Alternatives Once alternatives have been identified, the consumer must decide which are preferable. There are two components to this stage of the decision-making process. First, a consumer, armed with information, identifies the set of products they are interested in. Then they narrow down their choices by deciding which of all the possibilities are feasible and comparing the advantages of each remaining option (Solomon, 2006).

Evaluative Strategies Processing strategies for brand evaluation that require the organization of information about alternative brands; most likely to be used when involvement with a product is high. Evaluative strategies are: Category-based and Attribute-based processing, compensatory and non-compensatory (Assael, 2004).

Fiber The basic entity, either natural or manufactured, which is twisted into yarns, and then used in the production of a fabric (Vintageskivies.com, 2006).

Finished Fabric A fabric that has gone through all the necessary finishing processes, and is ready to be used in the manufacturing of garments (Vintageskivies.com, 2006).

Fly Front An opening in the front of a pair of trousers, pants or underwear. When used on men's drawers, a vertical, slightly overlapping opening in front, which may be kept closed by buttons, snaps or simply by the overlapping design. When used on men's briefs, a vertical, slanted or even horizontal overlapping opening in front of the pouch, which is kept closed simply by the overlapping design. Made famous as the Cooper's Jockey Y-front closure (Vintageskivies.com, 2006).

Heuristics Simple, efficient rules, hard-coded by evolutionary processes which have been proposed to explain how people make decisions, come to judgments, and solve problems,

typically when facing complex problems or incomplete information (Wikipedia, 2006).

Involvement

A state where the consumer feels a product is important to him/her and is motivated to process information about the product (Assael, 2004).

Jersey Knit

The consistent inter-looping of yarns in the jersey stitch to produces a fabric with a smooth, flat face, and a more textured, but uniform back. Jersey fabrics may be produced on either circular or flat weft knitting machines (Vintageskivies.com, 2006).

Knit Fabrics

Fabrics made from only one set of yarns, all running in the same direction. Some knits have their yarns running along the length of the fabric, while others have their yarns running across the width of the fabric. Knit fabrics are held together by looping the yarns around each other. Knitting creates ridges in the resulting fabric. Wales are the ridges that run lengthwise in the fabric; courses run crosswise (Vintageskivies.com, 2006).

Lycra

An extremely elastic fabric made of synthetic fiber. Facilitated the ultra-form-fitting design of male underwear that became popular in the 1960s and 1970s (Vintageskivies.com, 2006).

Micro-Fiber

Very fine Nylon or Polyester filaments that, when woven, produce light, soft, and breathable fabrics ensuring comfort and durability (Vintageskivies.com, 2006).

Mock fly

The front fly of the garment has the appearance of a functioning fly, but in fact has been sewn shut. This is done primarily for modesty (Vintageskivies.com, 2006).

Nylon

A synthetic fiber that, along with polyester, made the fabrics of underwear more user-friendly by being easily washed and wrinkle resistant (Vintageskivies.com, 2006).

Overlapping Fly

Name given to the traditional brief front fly where two layers of fabric are sewn on top of one another (Vintageskivies.com, 2006).

Oxford	A fine, soft, lightweight woven cotton or blended with manufactured fibers in a 2 x 1 basket weave variation of the plain weave construction. The fabric is used primarily in shirtings, boxer shorts and drawers (Vintageskivies.com, 2006)
Placket Fly	Name given to the traditional boxer fly. Design is similar to the front placket on a shirt. Can also have a button closure (Vintageskivies.com, 2006).
Product Choice	Deciding on one product and acting on this choice. This step comes after evaluation of alternatives in the consumer decision-making process (Solomon, 2006).
Rib Knit	A basic stitch used in weft knitting in which the knitting machines require two sets of needles operating at right angles to each other. Rib knits have a very high degree of elasticity in the crosswise direction. This knitted fabric is used for complete garments and for such specialized uses as sleeve bands, neck bands, sweater waistbands, and special types of trims for use with other knit or woven fabrics. Lightweight sweaters in rib knits provide a close, body-hugging fit (Vintageskivies.com, 2006).
Synthetic Fiber	Yarns created from various petrochemical technologies. Includes nylon, polyester, Dacron, orlon, lycra and the like. Used in the manufacture of men's undergarments in the second half of the 20th century, reaching a peak in the 1960s and 1970s (Vintageskivies.com, 2006).
Trunks	A word sometimes used to refer to men's under drawers that are cut with short legs extending only down far enough to cover the upper thigh (Vintageskivies.com, 2006).
T-Shirt	A knitted undershirt with short sleeves, usually with a crew neck, although sometimes produced with a V-neck. Also called a tee-shirt. Made universally popular after World War II. Became the ubiquitous undergarment-as-outerwear after it appeared as such in the movies of the 1950s (Vintageskivies.com, 2006).
Undergarment	A garment to be worn under another (Vintageskivies.com, 2006).

Underpants	A man's undergarment that covers the bottom half of the torso. Can be made of knitted or woven fabric. Worn with some form of undershirt (A-shirt, T-shirt and so on) (Vintageskivies.com, 2006).
Undershirt	A collarless man's undergarment, with or without sleeves, that covers the top half of the torso. Can be made of knitted or woven fabric. Worn with some form of underpants (briefs, drawers, boxers and so on) (Vintageskivies.com, 2006).
Underwear	Clothing or an article of clothing worn next to the skin and under other clothing. Examples of underwear include: drawers, speed shorts and union suits (Vintageskivies.com, 2006).
V Neck	In the world of underwear, a term that applies to a T-shirt with a neckline that dips into a "V" in the front (Vintageskivies.com, 2006)
Woven Fabric	Fabrics composed of two sets of yarns. One set of yarns, the warp, runs along the length of the fabric. The other set of yarns, the fill or weft, is perpendicular to the warp. Woven fabrics are held together by weaving the warp and the fill yarns over and under each other (Vintageskivies.com, 2006).

Summary

This chapter provided a background for the research topic. Research objectives, the overall purpose of the research, and the significance of the topic were explained. The next chapter will provide a review of the literature pertinent to the topic.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Statement of Purpose

In this chapter, the decision-making process will be explored for its relevance to the underwear consumer. The concept of involvement will also be analyzed along with its definition and application. Literature on brand loyalty and the decision-making process will then be reviewed, as well as that of gender and the decision-making process.

Decision-Making and the Underwear Consumer

The purpose of this research is to examine the decision-making process for the men's underwear consumer. According to recent literature on consumer behavior, the decision-making process begins when a consumer develops a need. Once a need has been established, the consumer will proceed through a series of steps (shown in figure 6) in order to satisfy that need. These steps are generally categorized as: *Problem Recognition*; *Information Search*; *Evaluation of Alternatives*; *Product Choice*; and *Outcomes* (Solomon, 1999). "Problem Recognition" is described as the stage where the consumer realizes there is a problem to be solved; a need for a certain product or service. For example, the consumer wears out a t-shirt through use and needs to purchase a replacement. The next stage, "Information Search" involves the consumer's efforts to

gain information in order to fulfill the need. Thereafter, the consumer enters into stage three which is the “Evaluation of Alternatives” stage. Here, the consumer compares several products against one another in terms of reputation or features. For example, a consumer can go into a variety of stores that carry t-shirts in order to consider different types of fit, colors and styles. The fourth step in the decision-making process is defined as “Product Choice.” This stage engages the consumer’s analysis of a variety of options in order to fulfill the need. Through this exercise of deduction, the consumer will identify a product that has the features or benefits that appeal to them, such as through the trying on of a variety of t-shirts. This brings the consumer decision-making process to the final stage which is defined as “Outcomes” (Solomon, 1999). The consumer makes a choice to buy one of the t-shirts, more than one, or none at all.

The process may take more or less time depending on the consumer or the product being sought to meet the need. For example, the purchase of a vehicle will take more time and consideration than an underwear purchase. More time may be spent on one stage than another. Elements important in one study may not be important in another. For example, Chen-Yu and Kincade (2001) identify the elements of the consumer decision process for apparel products through the stages of alternative evaluation, purchase, and post-purchase with regards to effect of product image. Their research found that product imagery positively influenced the perceived quality and performance expectation of the consumer in the evaluation of alternatives stage. However, it was not a determinant for purchase intention. Interestingly, the imagery did, indeed, influence those consumers who were willing to pay for the product. Post-purchase satisfaction with imagery was influenced by

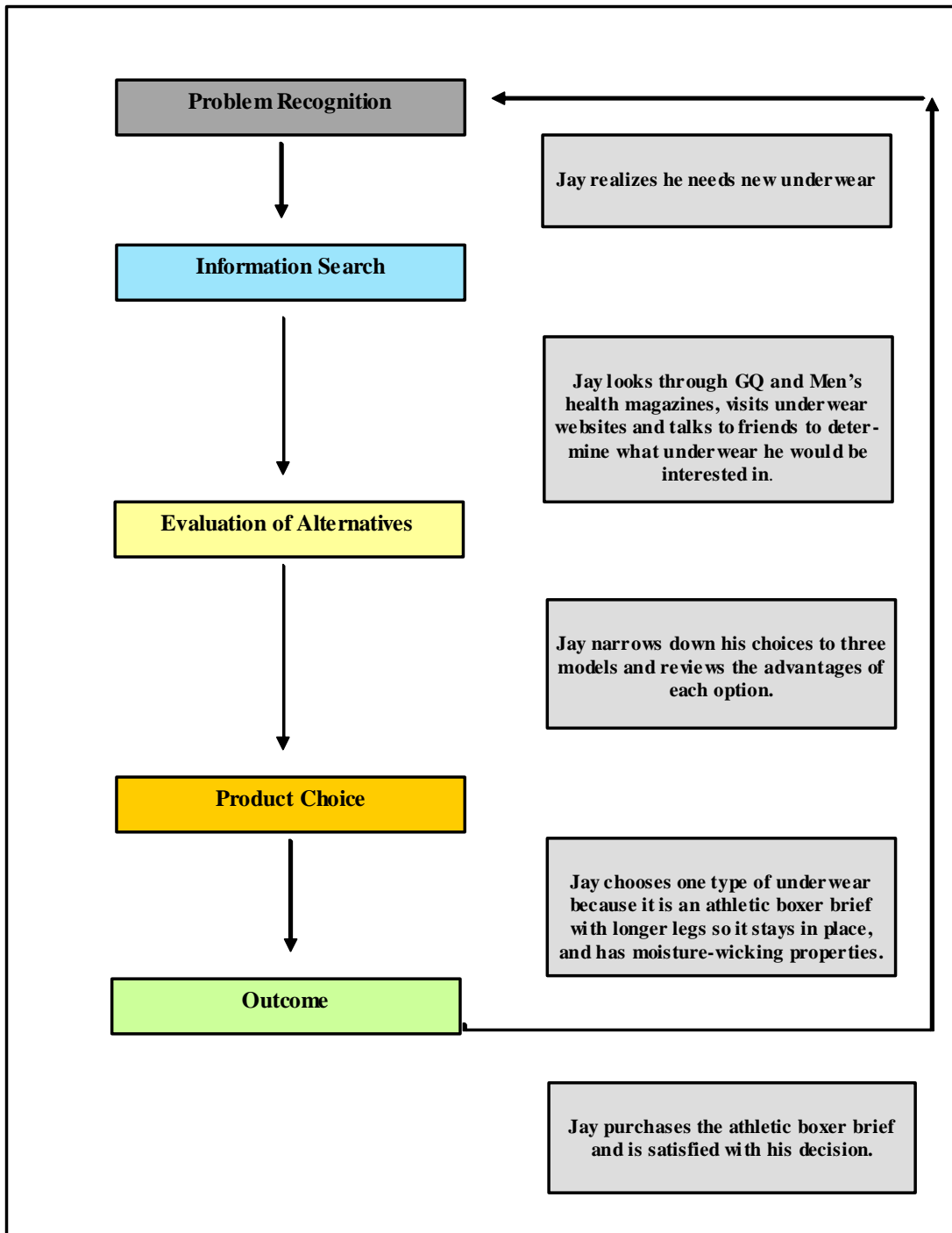


Figure 6 – Example of the Consumer Decision-Making Process

(Source: Solomon, 2006).

the product itself: if consumption was satisfactory, association with product imagery was positive. Alternatively, if consumption was unsatisfactory, product association was negative (Chen-Yu & Kincade, 2001, p. 30).

The decision-making process is complex and can vary based on the consumer's nature. At times it might require a lot of time and effort, while at other times it can be automatic. As Solomon (1999) describes, from a rational perspective, consumers research the product, determine preferred criteria, and then weigh these factors as pros and cons until they reach their final decision (p. 270). Solomon (1999) suggests that consumers go through a process called 'constructive processing' which is a series of strategies used to narrow down the number of choices in order to reach a decision using the least amount of effort. Marketing plays an important role in this process as it will often emphasize appealing attributes of a product. It is important to note that depending on the consumer's need, this can be used to trigger a faster purchase (Solomon, 1999).

As part of constructive processing, levels of involvement can affect consumer purchases. For example, *Behavioral Influence Perspective* is a term that describes those consumers who have low purchase involvement and are easily swayed by environmental cues like signage in a store or end of aisle special advertising (Figure 7). These purchases are considered to be impulse purchases and do not require the consumer to expend a lot of effort or even to have a need (Solomon, 1999).



Figure 7 - Ad for Branded Image of Polo as a Lifestyle and Look (dress shirts, ties, blazers)

In contrast, consumers who have higher levels of involvement in the decision-making process (also known as the *Experiential Perspective*) typically emphasize the gestalt resulting in decisions that may not have a particular reason guiding them. In this case, the product is chosen based on its totality and not one single feature (Solomon, 1999). In a study on food packaging by Silayoi and Speece (2004), it was revealed that product packaging played a large role in the ultimate decision to purchase a product. Silayoi and Speece (2004) argue that the product package that stands out on the shelf has the most impact on the consumer's decision process. Package design can help to ensure that the consumers' response to the product is favorable. Underwood, Klein, and Burke (2001) studied the effects of product imagery and importance for communicating favorable or unfavorable implied meanings about a product. It was found that the consumer will visualize aspects about a product based on the picture on the package.

Before a consumer makes a purchasing decision, he or she goes through an information search for the best product, followed by an evaluation of that product's alternatives. Ultimately, deciding on a product from several alternatives requires substantial cognitive processing for the consumer (Solomon, 1999). Choices are influenced by a variety of sources including marketing, beliefs, and prior purchasing experience. Chernev (2006) developed an experiment to test decisions and choices among alternatives. The study revealed that the respondents' familiarity (recognition through brand name, marketing, or experience) with the product impacted their purchasing decisions. The initial part of the evaluation of alternatives stage involves "evaluative criteria", requiring the consumer to differentiate between products and their features in order to select the best choice. Oftentimes, the attributes are similar to one another, making it difficult for the consumer to choose. As a result, the consumer may base his or her decision solely on past purchases. The products may be very different in which case the consumer will need to weigh the 'determinant attributes' or the attributes that are most important (Solomon, 1999). For marketers, it is important to differentiate products of the same category, such as in men's underwear, so the consumer can then differentiate among brands that are similar. If there is too much cognitive work involved, the consumer may be deterred from making the decision altogether (Solomon, 1999). Dhar (1997) observed that when consumers have to choose among many alternatives, they face uncertainty and therefore defer the decision until they can better evaluate the attractiveness of each choice alternative.

When it comes to making decisions for the sake of purchasing, consumers tend to take mental shortcuts and use general rules for themselves to achieve quicker decisions. This is known as “heuristics.” For example, a product signal is one heuristic that assists in marketing or selling a product. Another tactic used for quicker decisions is ‘covariation’, which is described as “perceived associations among events that may or may not actually influence each other” (Solomon, 1999 p.270). For example, some consumers determine the quality of a product by the price: the more expensive the product, the better the quality. Men’s underwear brands are often associated with different price points to suggest a price-quality relationship. Solomon (1999) states that this heuristic alone may not fully sway the decision as oftentimes price is associated with other information. In the case of underwear, pima cotton is an important factor leading to the softness of the garment as compared to regular cotton and may not be used as an evaluative criterion. Some consumers use country of origin as a product signal and will purchase products that are made in countries that are perceived to make better quality products. Consumers may prefer to purchase products made in their own country for a variety of reasons, including supporting their domestic market (Solomon, 1999).

In using heuristics, the consumer relies on short-cuts in order to arrive at a decision faster and more efficiently. Contrast rules are similar and help the consumer further distinguish between brand choices based on attributes. When consumers are not familiar with a product, they may also use the Lexicographic rule (a procedure that requires consumers to rank product attributes from most important to least important) to assist in selecting a brand that is most important or at the top of the consumer’s attribute list

(Assael, 2004). If two products are equally good with respect to this attribute, the consumer will begin comparing products on the second and third important attributes, and so on. The “Elimination by Aspects Rule” occurs when the consumer uses the most important attribute when evaluating brands as a process of elimination. Finally, the “Conjunctive Rule” differs from the other rules because the brand itself is evaluated. Brand is considered through cutoff criteria established by the consumer. If none of the needs are met, the brand will be rejected. It is important to point out that if none of the brands meet the criteria, then some of the requirements may be modified or adjusted (Solomon, 1999).

Alongside decision rules, Solomon (1999) describes several market beliefs that consumers rely on in order to make decisions. Some of these beliefs include the idea that (a) all brands are the same, generic or not, (b) the best ones are the ones sold out first, and, (c) when in doubt, choose the product made domestically. Consumers have similar beliefs about stores, including: (a) local stores have better service and large stores have better prices, (b) advertising and promotions are viewed as a way to get rid of hard-to-sell products or a way to sell a name not necessarily a product. Product and packaging market beliefs include: (a) larger packages do not necessarily mean the prices are a better value, (b) new products are always expensive at first and then the prices go down, (c) new products should be avoided until they have had time to test them (Solomon 1999, p. 291).

Papatla and Krishnamurthi (1996) found that price promotions affect the decision-making process by making consumers more price-sensitive and thus could have adverse effects on brand choice behavior as a result. Price promotions can affect consumers of

different income levels depending on the type of promotion. For example, they found that consumers with higher incomes are less responsive to price promotions and temporary price cuts. This makes the decision-making process less difficult. Bridges and Briesch (2006) reported similar findings on decision-making for children's product categories. In contrast, according to Fader and McAlister (1990) some consumers seek out promotions of their preferred brands. This was also found by Heilman, Bowman, and Wright (2000), who reasoned that certain consumer characteristics and elements of purchase history may influence response to promotional offers. In their study of apparel consumption, Mohamadou, Sukant, and Ocatvio (2005) concur that price promotion, among other factors, contributes to purchase decisions. Moreover, they found that price promotion affects behavior at the category and brand levels. For example, consumers may switch brands within a product category in accordance with a promotion, such as purchasing the same garment silhouette in Calvin Klein rather than Polo due to price. Chao and Gupta (1995) found that high risk purchases, such as cars, affect the consumer decision-making process through perceived risk or quality and value for the money. Thus, they found that pre-purchase searching had a significant impact on the efficiency of consumer choices, important to ultimately influencing consumer choice of product or brand.

As Chernev (2006) found, consumer choice among alternatives is guided by the need to maximize decision flexibility and to avoid future preference uncertainty. Although Chernev (2006) found that consumers preferred a large assortment and variety when searching for the best alternative, they were less confident than if they were to choose from smaller assortments or less variety. For example, with regard to men's underwear,

the number of product choices can be overwhelming if a consumer was searching for a basic crew neck shirt, therefore the process of decision-making would be more extensive because of the vast assortment of product choices. If the assortment was narrowed, the search will require less effort and consumers will more readily make a choice. Similarly, Hart and Dewsnap (2001) explored the consumer decision process for women's intimate apparel. Ultimately they discovered that the consumer is highly involved and motivated by a desire to be brand loyal in order to benefit from a less extensive decision-making process. They concluded that high involvement reflected high levels of risk; therefore, the extent of the decision-making process was influenced by the consumer's perceived importance of a product.

Involvement and the Decision-Making Process

Involvement is an important component of the decision-making process. It is generally defined as the amount of time and effort a consumer spends when making a decision. Rothschild (1984) defines involvement as: "...a state of motivation, arousal or interest, evoked by a particular stimulus or situation, displaying drive properties" (p. 217). Likewise, Laurent and Kapferer (1985) point out that involvement is dependent on each individual's varying level of motivation given the situation. As a result, each purchase choice will be based on multiple evaluations that reflect the importance of such factors as the number of attributes used for the comparison of brands, threshold level of satisfaction, length of information search, and receptiveness to advertisements (Laurent & Kapferer, 1985, pp. 8-9). Most definitions associate involvement with motivation or the degree of effort involved in the decision-making process:

Higher involvement might be necessary to motivate a consumer to make the cognitive effort required to fully process and evaluate the comparison. Thus, what is the relationship between motivation and involvement? Motivation is a determinant of the level of involvement. The higher the level of involvement and the more important the purchase, the more motivation the consumer has when making a purchase (Petty & Cacioppo, 1981 p. 137).

Assael (2004) further suggests that involvement varies by individual because there are different degrees of value that consumers place on particular purchases. What may be important to some consumers is insignificant to others. Each situation is identified by level of importance and each attribute is weighed against the other.

The literature describes different levels of involvement. Each type is comprised of high and low level characteristics which are determined by the individual consumer according to his or her needs. Assael (2004) describes the differences between low level and high level involvement as also dependent upon product category importance. For instance, in some low-level purchase situations, a consumer may look for the shortest method of decision-making in order to quickly solve the problem. On the other hand, high dollar purchases such as cars or computers entail higher risk which requires higher levels of involvement.

There are several characteristics of a purchasing scenario that impact the level of involvement. According to Assael, (2004) with each purchasing scenario there are different characteristics that contribute to the decision-making process. These characteristics include: (a) *physical surroundings* such as the store décor and layout, (b) *social surroundings*, whether or not it is a social occasion or others are present when consuming a product, (c) *time* between product consumption, (d) *task definition* such as

shopping for oneself or for a gift, and, (e) *antecedent states* such as shopping while tired or anxious, in that mood can lead to impulse purchasing (pp. 129-130).

Types of Involvement

In general there are two types of involvement experienced by consumers as identified in the literature: “situational” and “enduring.” Situational involvement is defined as temporary involvement with a product only in specific situations, such as when a purchase decision is required. In contrast, enduring involvement is a continuous, more permanent involvement with a product reflecting interest in a product category on an ongoing basis (Assael, 2006).

A situation can influence a purchase decision when consumers are more inclined to buy particular products that they did not previously intend to buy. Products purchased due to situation tend to be more high risk and associated with brand loyalty since they often stem from the use of brand recognition to aid in the decision process (Assael, 2006). However, as shown in Figure 8, there are different types of situations that can influence consumers in the decision-making process, each with its own characteristics and means of affecting consumer behavior. For example, a common purchase situation is the in-store purchase situation. This situation involves in-store stimuli, including product positioning and display, which can impact the purchase decision. Assael (2004) points out that as a result, situational involvement can lead to unanticipated decision-making.

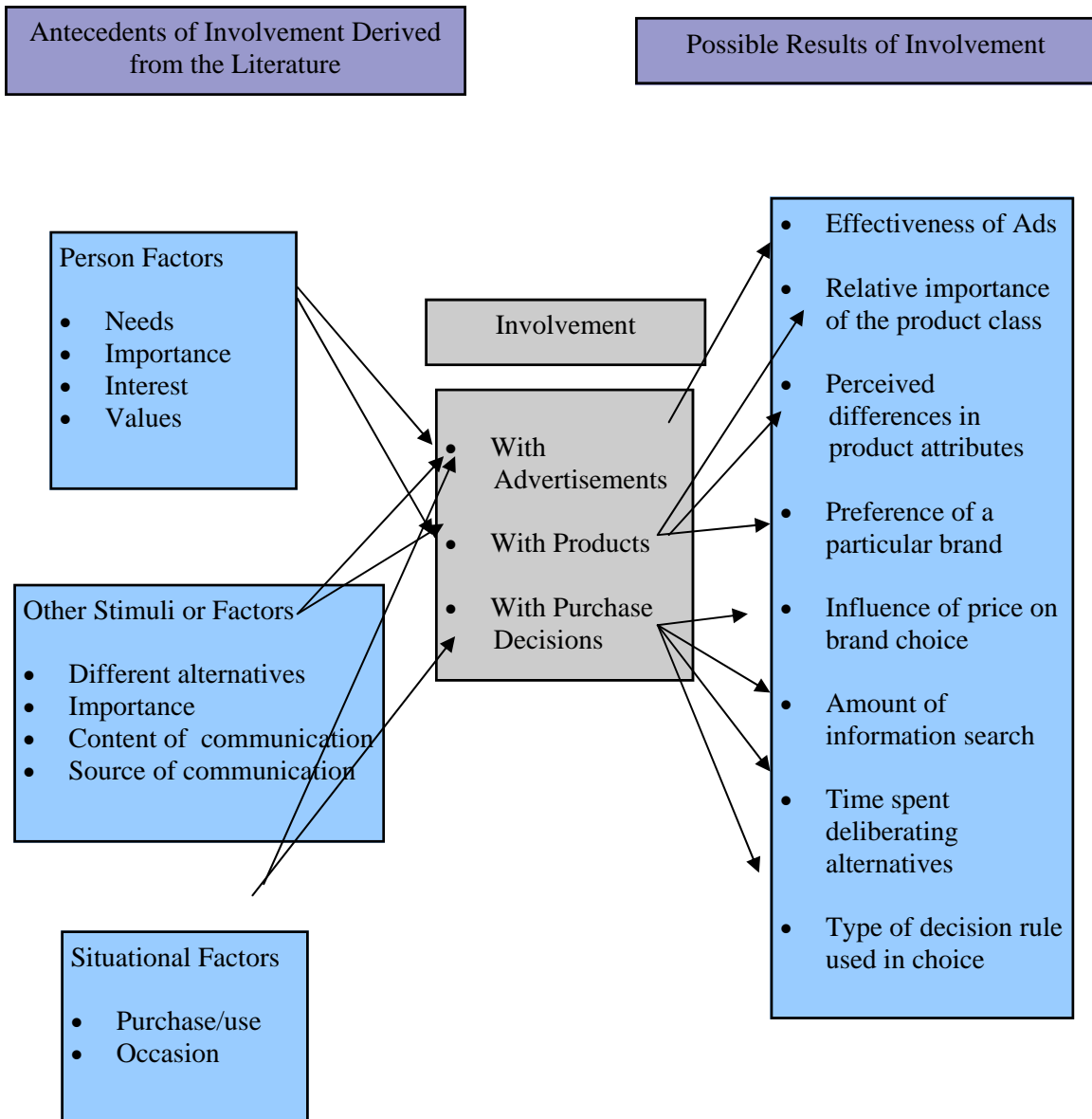


Figure 8 - Concepts of Involvement with Various Influences and Results
 (Source: Zaichkowsky, 1986).

When examining choices among alternatives in the decision-making process, Olshavsky and Granbois (1979) discovered that product selection was aided by a known brand (symbol) with meaning in accordance with societal norms. When purchasing gifts, for

example, consumers tend to look for products that offer a higher quality image and associate the purchase situation with more risk. This is the case when purchasing underwear as a gift, as there is pressure to select a product that has particular symbolic attributes rather than something that is seen as basic or economical.

In situational involvement, it is important to consider whether or not consumers attribute their behavior to the product and its characteristics or to the situation. The *Attribution Theory* supports the claim that “people attribute a cause to their behavior” (Assael, 2004, p. 236). When consumers attribute their behavior to a product rather than situation (and it is positive), they tend to re-purchase the same product, thereby becoming more brand loyal. However, if the attribution is based on the situation, the attitude toward the product itself is not necessarily positive. For example, if a consumer buys a pair of shoes because they are made of leather (a positive product attribute) rather than the fact that they were on sale (a situational influence), then their attitude towards the product will most likely be positive. If the consumer purchased the shoes because of the promotion (situational influence), the attitude towards the product is not as positive (Assael, 2004).

In contrast to situational involvement, enduring involvement is defined as a “continuous, more permanent involvement with a product” (Assael, 2004, p. 91). Enduring involvement generally refers to a high level of product involvement since it represents the consumer’s degree of interest or stimulation for a given product on a daily basis. This type of involvement is independent of a purchase situation and is motivated by the degree to which the product category is significant to the purchaser, as well as the

level of hedonic pleasure that they derive from the product (Richins & Bloch, 1986).

Enduring involvement requires an ongoing interest in the product category, whether or not a purchase is made. Because enduring involvement means more product involvement and is of an ongoing nature, it is often associated with purchases that have to do with a particular product category.

Situational involvement reflects temporary feelings of involvement that are part of a distinct situation. Enduring involvement, on the other hand, represents a long term interest with a product that a consumer brings to a situation. When compared, the two involvement types influence involvement responses differently. Enduring involvement contributes little to the involvement response. Situational (defined as short term) is prompted by environmental factors only for high risk products (Richins & Bloch, 1986).

To put it another way,

The higher the level of enduring involvement, the less likely it is that situational factors determine behavior. If enduring involvement in a product is low, the situation tends to determine behavior. When enduring involvement is high, the situation is not as important (Assael, 2004, p. 132).

It should be noted that situational factors are less important when there are higher levels of brand loyalty. When brand loyalty is weak, the actual situation may be the determining factor in product choice. Situational factors are also less important in determining brand choice when a product has multiple uses. Products with a single use life-span tend to be more situation-influenced while products that display multiple use attributes tend to be more durable goods and thus it is more difficult to determine if the product choice has any relation to brand (Assael, 2004). Johnson (1989), in studying the

importance of product attributes, concluded that consumers will make choices based on prior knowledge of attributes. Among similar brands, it was difficult to determine whether it was the attribute or brand name that prompted the purchase. In a study with underwear consumers and branded products by Quixote (2005), it was found that some consumers purchased a product by the brand name because they associated the brand name with having their preferred attributes, while others chose a product that had their preferred attributes, regardless of brand name. Thus, it is difficult to determine with certainty whether or not the attributes (if similar among brands) were chosen by brand or based solely on product characteristics.

Factors Influencing Involvement

Other factors have been found to influence level of involvement such as marketing tools like sales and promotions or retail factors such as product stock and availability. Bowen and Chaffee (1974) examined levels of involvement with regard to product class and the amount of information listed in advertisements. Petty and Cacioppo (1981) found that communication of product information in advertisements effects level of involvement. Houston and Rothschild (1978) found that involvement levels depend on the situation and personal factors. Seo, Hathcote, and Sweaney (2001) tested consumers' involvement levels and behavior with regard to men's casual wear. Their findings revealed that level of involvement was based on personal characteristics such as gender and other demographics, as well as such factors as price, store location, and purchase frequency. The study revealed that high involvement consumers were experienced buyers while low involvement consumers purchased the product less frequently but

bought more expensive garments. The study concluded that the majority of consumers fell into the medium involvement category, and were prompted to make purchases by sales.

Laurent and Kapferer (1985), in their research on consumer involvement profiles, found that level of involvement was based on the antecedents of product involvement. Antecedents include the product's perceived value, the importance of risk, and the probability of purchase error. Motivation, according to Dholakia (2001) and Salma and Taschian (1985), can link involvement and risk. Enduring involvement for a product category is the result of increased motivation by situational aspects found in the purchase environment. For example, Browne and Kaldenberg (1997) researched the relationship of involvement with regard to self-monitoring (social sensitivity) and personality in apparel consumption behavior. They concluded that consumers who are self-monitors and more materialistic showed higher levels of involvement. For these consumers, clothing purchases were important as a source of pleasure.

Brand name has been found to influence level of involvement. However, involvement level is not always linked to brand loyalty. Product involvement is a necessary precondition to achieve loyalty since loyalty requires a degree of commitment from the consumer, as Quester and Lim (2003) found in their study of sport shoes/sneakers. With regard to the men's underwear consumer, brand will likely have an influence on the consumer's decision-making process due to the personal nature of the underwear purchase situation.

Kassarjian (1981) best describes the notion of consumer involvement and consumer types with regards to the differences in product versus situational involvement. He suggests that consumers' involvement in product purchasing is influenced by their behavior and particular consumer type. The table below (Table 1) shows product and situation effects in comparison with the level of consumer involvement in the purchase situation. It reflects the proposed behaviors of the various consumer types in their different purchasing settings.

Consumer Type	Situation Effect or Product Involvement	
	High	Low
High Involvement	Much of consumer involvement as it exists today.	Typical low involvement research.
Low Involvement	Minimal interest but narrowly and intensely focused	Oblivious to product issues. Other interests.
Low-Low Involvement	Choice determined by availability, packaging, affordability	Don't know. Don't care. No opinion.

Table 1 - Consumer Trait Theory (Source: Kassarjian, 1981).

Generally, the high involvement group tends to be made up of students or middle- and upper-class consumers. There are two low involvement groups, one is made up of those consumers who are removed from the purchasing scenario and are more involved in other activities. The low-low involved consumer is indifferent to most things and has no opinion. Purchasing involvement aids in understanding consumer behavior through product involvement and the consumers' interest in a particular category but also through

situational effects which may be marketing related, such as: store location, sales and promotions, or advertising. Understanding consumer involvement with product and purchase situation is significant to marketers seeking to predict consumer behavior.

Involvement and Brand Loyalty

Many studies focus on brand choice and brand loyalty in order to account for consumer choices and repeat purchases. Brand is defined as a “symbolic embodiment of all the information connected with a company, product, or service” (Wikipedia, 2006). A brand usually has a logo associated with it for recognition. This brand image is the symbolic connection between the product and the expectations linked to it (Wikipedia, 2006). A brand name may be associated with a country of origin. For example, BMW is a recognized brand name for German automobiles and IKEA is known as popular Swedish furniture store. In the United States, some common brands are Levi’s and Ford.

According to Keller (1993), “brand” can be defined as a name, term, symbol or design, or a combination of terms, which helps to identify or distinguish between goods and service sellers. Such identifiers give the brand its unique existence in a sea of competition, but are also important in triggering memory principles which are key to the consumer-decision making process. Such clues assist marketers in branding a product so that it comes to mind when a consumer thinks about a particular product category and choice. Brand strategies link consumer memory with the effectiveness of product influence (Keller, 1993). In other words, Frank (1962) found a high probability of purchase and repeat purchase with relation to brand choices based on past purchases, which ultimately led to habitual purchasing. The habitual purchasers choose the same

brands in future purchases because of the positive association between previous purchases of a particular brand and the probability of its repeat purchase. As Ewing (2000) found with regard to the purchase intentions of car buyers, future purchase intentions are made stronger by positive purchase expectations.

Brand Preference

According to Keller, (1993) brand knowledge is a consumer's awareness of a brand and therefore the strength of the brand is directly related to its trace in a consumer's memory. How strongly consumers recall a brand or how well they can identify it under different conditions can be attributed to brand awareness. Brand awareness is important when comparing choices because it can influence a decision through pre-existing knowledge. Different types of brand associations impact the decision-making process in different ways. Brand association can be *Attitude-*, *Benefit-* or *Attribute-* based (Keller, 1993).

Brand attitude is defined as a consumer's overall evaluation of a brand. These attitudes form the salient beliefs a consumer has about a product and shape the judgment of those beliefs in an evaluative manner (Keller, 1993). Brand attitudes can be related to product attributes and benefits as well as symbolic benefits. Brand attitudes allow a consumer to be more 'value-expressive,' that is, to express themselves through their brand. According to Olsen and Jacoby (1972), brand attitudes may be formed by heuristics, or decision rules. For example, if a consumer lacks the motivation or ability to evaluate a product, they may use extrinsic clues such as packaging or product appearance to infer quality from what they already know about the brand. When consumers develop

brand attitudes that are satisfactory, they can forge these same attitudes and beliefs about other products of the same brand. Brand extension, as found by Forney, Park, and Brandon (2005) is important in fashion products. Their findings show that image, quality, design and lifestyle are all important criteria when purchasing extended brands from apparel to furnishings. For example, designer Issac Mizrahi is well known for his branded products ranging from casualwear to household appliances and furniture.

Benefit-based attributes of a product “are the personal value consumers attach to the product” (Keller, 1993, p. 4) and are used by the consumer to determine what the product does. For Keller, the benefits are: (a) *functional* (have advantages that are basic to motivation and needs; product related), (b) *experimental* (the appeal of the product via cognitive or sensory pleasure), or (c) *symbolic* (relate to non-product related attributes such as social approval or personal expression). Fishbein and Icek (1975) developed a multi-attribute model to test how benefits and attributes are related in the formation of a brand attitude. It was found that consumers evaluate favorable benefits and attributes of a brand in order to judge its value. Considered to be the consumer’s overall evaluation of the brand, brand attitude is used by the consumer to infer ideas about the brand (Keller, 1993).

Attribute-based brand association refers to the specific characteristics that define a particular product and that which is involved with its consumption (Keller, 1993). Attributes, which are distinctive features that characterize the product, are what a consumer sees in the physical product. These attributes can also be non-product related external aspects such as price information or packaging and appearance (Keller, 1993).

Price is an important attribute in this category because, to some consumers, it represents the value of the product. There are *product-related attributes* (those which are necessary and sought by the consumer) and *non-product related attributes* (external aspects of the product that contribute to its consumption). A non-product attribute may be desirable to the consumer such as price, packaging, or imagery of product usage. Price plays a major role in attribute association because it can be used to determine the value of a brand. For some, the more expensive the product, such as a garment, the better the quality in comparison to those less costly brands. Packaging is important to assigning a brand personality because consumers relate it to their own experiences or to other socially meaningful factors such as income, career, race, and gender (Vanderbilt, n.d). Package imagery offers a visual that communicates the personality or character of the product.

Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty is defined as a preference to purchase the same brand in two or more time periods (Moschis & Moore, 1978). Brand loyalty is, therefore, the result of both attitude and behavior. The attitudinal aspect involves the consumer's feelings and purchase intentions while the behavioral component is based on actual purchase. Some behavioral scientists argue that brand loyalty is merely the result of a satisfactory initial purchase called "instrumental conditioning" (Schiffman & Kanuck, 2004). Others argue that the decisions consumers make are based on comparing product attributes, which involves extensive mental processing. Since both contribute to repeat brand purchasing, it is possible that the answer is a combination of both. A consumer's repeat purchase is a

result of product satisfaction, product attributes, and bonding with the company (Schiffman & Kanuck, 2004).

Consumers repeatedly purchase a brand for various reasons. For some consumers, purchasing the same brand repeatedly is done out of pure habit because it requires little effort. For others, repeat purchases are based on a series of positive attitudes associated with the brand. Commitment to the brand can be based on prior purchases and on the age of the brand or the self-image associated with an emotional attachment to the brand (Escalas, 2004). As Escalas (2004) discovered, positive feelings about a brand can be formed through advertising and particularly when the consumer is exposed to the brand during the evaluation of alternatives stage of the decision-making process.

According to Craig-Lees (1998), brand loyal consumers do not typically go through an attribute assessment. Instead, these consumers choose the familiar brand based on past positive feelings. Craig-Lees (1998) states that ultimately the decision-making process can become habitual. It is important to note however, that habitual decision-making does not involve the same degree of attachment to the brand as does brand loyal purchasing. The primary difference between brand loyal consumers and habitual consumers is the emotional association that the brand loyal consumer has with the brand. Habitual shoppers may choose another available brand during the evaluation of alternatives stage if the one they usually purchase is not available. In contrast, brand loyal consumers will react more negatively when their brand is not available or has been altered in some way, because they feel emotionally close to the brand.

Brand Loyal Consumers

With regard to brand, Schiffman and Kanuck (2004) categorize consumers into two types: *brand loyal* and *spuriously loyal*. The *brand loyal* consumer generally has a high attitude factor and high repeat purchase whereas the *spuriously loyal* consumer has a low attitude factor and a high repeat purchase capability (p. 242). Brand loyal consumers go through a detailed search leading to repeated brand exposure and ultimately to loyalty. Spuriously loyal consumers have more awareness of cues such as promotions and packaging. These consumers can be targeted by marketers through such visual cues to aid in decision-making as well as develop brand loyalty.

Brand credibility, choice, and consideration have been found to be the three most critical factors involved in repeat purchasing and brand loyalty. As Frank (1962) revealed, the consumer is more likely to become brand loyal when there is a positive relationship with past historical purchases and the brand itself. Loyalty is therefore determined by satisfaction. However, loyalty and satisfaction are considered to be two different things (Oliver, 1999). Oliver suggests that loyalty is defined by repeat purchase of the same brand with frequency and (sometimes) volume. Consumers are defined as loyal because they purchase the same brand, consider only that brand, and do not comparative shop for other brands in that product category (Oliver, 1999). Satisfaction is defined as pleasurable fulfillment in that the consumer feels that a particular product purchase fulfills a need or desire. Hence, this consumer makes purchases based on pleasure. For satisfaction to affect loyalty, Oliver (1999) asserts, “frequent or cumulative

satisfaction is required so that individual satisfaction episodes become aggregated or blended” (p. 34).

Loyalty is distinctly described not only as the act of consuming but as a deep commitment to re-purchasing something that is preferred in spite of any situational or marketing influences meant to sway buying behavior. Consistent purchasing alone is not an indicator of loyalty because there are other factors involved in cases where consumers are multi-brand loyal, such as purchases made by happenstance or convenience. There is another, more deeply committed behavior called ‘ultimate loyalty’. This consumer takes loyalty one step further with purchasing and will purchase their brand at all costs or ‘against all odds’ (Oliver, 1999).

In order to identify true brand loyalty, Oliver (1999) divided the decision-making process into three phases. The first phase, *Cognitive loyalty*, involves the preference of one brand over the alternatives and is based on the consumer’s overall attribute ratings of the brand. The second phase, *Affective loyalty*, reflects the role of satisfaction in pleasure fulfillment. This phase involves loyalty through the consumer’s liking of a product. In contrast to cognitive loyalty, which is more of a performance-based or routine transaction, affective loyalty goes deeper, touching on the emotional aspects of consuming a brand. In the third phase, *Conative loyalty*, loyalty deepens through behavioral intent. In other words, with Conative loyalty there is stronger intention to buy a particular brand over an alternate choice. A consumer is influenced by past experiences with several purchases of the brand and thus repurchases with a brand-specific commitment. Oliver (1999) describes this as a reflection of a more deeply held

commitment when it comes to loyalty than the other phases. In other words, *cognitive loyalty* focuses on aspects such as brand performance, *affective loyalty* targets the likeability of a particular brand and *conative loyalty* is directly related to the experience of the consumer and their intent to re-buy the brand, or the commitment to the action of re-buying.

Vanderbilt (n.d.) posits that there are four different types of consumers who shop for particular brands out of loyalty: *goal-directed*, *experiential*, *inexperienced*, and *experienced*. *Goal-directed* shoppers are interested in locating what they want quickly in order to expedite the purchase. Consequently, they like the one-on-one relationship with a brand that helps them to do this. This type of consumer is brand loyal since they know the exact product by brand, thus they remain satisfied (Vanderbilt, n.d.). In contrast, *experiential* shoppers are always looking at new products and exploring choices in more detail. Prior to making any buying decisions, they review all brand choices, therefore competitor brands and advertising can potentially influence their choice to purchase an alternate brand. These consumers look at shopping as an enjoyable experience which is the opposite of goal-oriented shoppers. *Inexperienced* shoppers are unfamiliar with products and brand choices. Consequently, these shoppers face more choices since they do not have much experience with a particular brand or product, however, the more information or experience they gather, the less difficult the choice becomes. Lastly, the *experienced* shopper knows about brand attributes and looks for familiarity when shopping. This consumer is less influenced by the shopping environment than the *inexperienced* shopper because they know their surroundings and may actually become

bored if the site remains the same (Vanderbilt, n.d.). *Experienced* shoppers are highly loyal and base their purchases on convenience, selection, quality, price, and reliability. Loyalty is also promoted through salesmanship at the point of purchase, as the service can influence perception of the product and brand, therefore increasing retention rates (Vanderbilt, n.d.).

Jamal and Goode (2001) found that self-image is critical in brand loyalty, and that consumers with a strong self-image were more likely to prefer a particular brand and enjoy higher levels of satisfaction than those with weak a self-image. Oh and Fiorito (2002) further clarify self-image as a dimension or criterion crucial to brand loyalty. Other dimensions include: consumer's decision process, purchasing criteria, demographics, and price or product satisfaction. Both loyal and non-loyal consumers will exhibit varying levels of intensity for each dimension.

There are several perceived risks that consumers face when making an initial brand purchase. Heilman, Bowman, and Wright (2000) argue that in a competitive market, consumers are driven by two different forces: the desire to collect information about alternative products and an aversion to trying risky products (p. 140). Consumers often begin with an information search with brands assumed to carry the least amount of risk, i.e., recognized big brand names. They then move on to collect information about lesser known brands. Finally, they consider their preferences for brands that best meet their needs (p. 140). Thus, the consumer's experience, perceived risk and choice are all factors in brand loyalty. If the consumer's perception of a product is negative (or high risk), this can affect the re-buying of a particular brand (Heilman, Bowman, & Wright, 2000).

Consumers who lack the desire to search for information will more often look for the big name brand products as opposed to the generic brand because they tend to associate the former with better product experience and better quality. Thus, the perceived risks are lower. In summary, consumers who have more experience with a product will seek to lower their purchase risks and in turn increase the likelihood of re-buying a particular brand. When consumers gain experience within a product category, they become aware of features and attributes that make up that product and are more able to analyze differences between product brands in the category. This, in turn, gives them more incentive to search among brands (Heilman, Bowman, & Wright, 2000). When consumers have increased experience within brand attributes, there is little uncertainty and the information search is not a value-added activity. Thus, for marketers, enticing new consumers is the crucial first step in establishing a brand loyal relationship (Heilman, Bowman, & Wright, 2000).

From this overview, it becomes clear that there are different degrees of loyalty related to the brand-associated shopper (Oliver, 1999). In essence, the major differences between consumers are reduced to habit versus loyalty. Habitual influences are based on price, advertising, and situational factors. In contrast, loyalty reflects levels of commitment, passion, and attachment that results in repeat purchasing (Vanderbilt, n.d.). Brand loyalty is valued by marketers because of the repeat purchase factor but also because it becomes an enduring decision made by default. As Cobb-Walgren, Ruble, and Donthu (1995) state: “Factories rust away, packages become obsolete, products lose their relevance. But great brands live forever” (p. 25).

Influences on Brand Loyalty

As Brown (1950) explains, the ultimate decision to purchase is based on factors related to behavior and motivation. Some of these factors include the physical characteristics of the brand or favorable attributes that the product features such as packaging, price, availability, and prestige. Other factors that influence brand choice can include recommendations by friends or experts, convenience of product locale, chance, salesmanship, and display (Brown, 1950). Consumers process purchasing decisions through qualifying and determining factors. Qualifying factors include prestige, advertising, and a satisfactory experience with a product. Determining factors are based on convenience, salesmanship, and chance purchasing. These factors allow consumers to purchase the usual brand with little cognitive work or to analyze differences when needed to make a different purchase (Brown, 1950).

Price is one attribute linked to brand purchasing in that it may serve as a decision tool for some who are more focused on the value of the product rather than the image (Bucklin & Lattin, 1989). Consumers establish a connection with price in making a brand decision insofar as the price references the consumer's expectations of the product and its characteristics. Promotion is another possible influence. Through research on involvement levels of college-aged casual wear consumers, Seo, Hathcote, and Sweeney (2001) found that price promotion led consumers to view the brand as more attractive and to become accustomed to a brand by assuming it is always on promotion or available at a discounted price. As Solomon (1999) suggests, people often purchase the same brand when they are at a store. Moreover, the consumer may be locked into a consistent pattern

of buying out of habit. However, promotions and product availability can direct consumers to a different brand. For example, if their particular brand is not available or is more expensive than another brand in the same product category, the consumer can be swayed to purchase the other brand, thus eroding their continued loyalty. The shopping experience itself has also been found to have an effect on brand loyalty. Carpenter and Fairhurst (2005) reveal that utilitarian and hedonic shopping benefits have a positive effect on customer satisfaction and loyalty with regard to specialty stores.

Barki and Hartwick (1989) found that the level of involvement with a product (even through sample or trial) can increase motivation and positively influence attitude and behavior towards a product and ultimately its purchase. Fournier (1998) suggests that because consumer loyalty is cognitive, there is a brand relationship. She legitimizes the idea of a brand as a partner by citing examples of those brands which are personalized or humanized. Oftentimes in advertising, marketers use animation or celebrities to sell particular products because the consumer can relate to such images. It is argued that the spokesperson is then reflected through usage of the product (Fournier, 1998, p. 348). The brand-person association is common because consumers can tie a particular product to an image that draws upon the consumer's memories of the past, allowing him or her to personalize the product and, in turn, feel comfortable with it. As Fournier (1998) found, these images are evidence of the psychological forces behind brand loyalty. Discovering the reasons for brand loyalty among men's underwear consumers will aid designers and merchandisers in understanding the needs of this consumer and provide critical information for marketers to foster brand loyalty among their consumers.

Gender and Consumption

Fashionable intimate apparel is no longer exclusive to women but is now a men's market as well (Dholakia et al. 1995). Dholakia et al. (1995) found that gender is an important factor influencing the purchase of men's underwear, in that both genders purchase it, though male consumers generally buy underwear for themselves and females generally buy it for others.

Purchase of men's underwear by a female may be influenced by repeated use of the brand by the male they are purchasing for or simply by price and/or packaging. Purchases of branded underwear by male consumers can be influenced by similar attributes but can also vary within a specific decision-making scenario (Quixote, 2005). For example, imagery used on packaging may attract a female consumer, whereas the males use of the same imagery may negate a purchase. According to a focus group study with male and female consumers of men's underwear, the model on the packaging (as shown in figure 9) was found to discourage some males who considered the image either too revealing or out of their perceived age range (Quixote, 2005). In contrast, the women responded favorably to the image, and thought their significant other would look good in the product based on the image. Focus groups comprising the Quixote study (2005) also revealed that males and females tended to make brand purchases based on what the wearer was already using. Deviating from the preferred product silhouette or brand typically occurred only when it was out of stock or another one was on sale.



Figure 9 - Product Packaging for Polo Brand

Female responses indicated a tendency to be drawn to color and fabric of a product, and equally drawn to hanging and folded garments, since this is how they shop for their own lingerie. Men were attracted to the silhouette and more often considered specific product-based criteria, such as trunk style or moisture-wicking properties.

Gender differences in shopping behavior have roots in the different social roles that are occupied by men and women. Laroche (2003) observed that early childhood consumer training from parents varies for men and women because of different social pressures placed on the two genders. Women generally receive more purposive training and have more developed shopping skills than males. As such, women have a wider variety of product-related experiences (pp. 3-5). Hogg and Garrow (2003) report findings about gender and consumption in relation to advertising and found that men and women differ in their psychological response to advertisements. Females were found to be more imagery-based and to have an increased capacity for comprehensive processing of a wide array of cues. Male processing on the other hand was characterized by use of more

‘efficiency striving heuristics’ and a more linear path towards resolution (Hogg & Garrow, 2003).

Based on a number of studies, Laroche (2003) found that male consumers proved to be more heuristic information processors and were more inclined to miss subtle clues in advertising than were women (p. 3). Women were generally more sensitive to the needs of both self and others, while men tended to be more self-focused. Women experience a greater burden during information processing than men since they are perceived to be more involved consumers. The indirect relationship between experience and evaluation of a product choice comes more easily for women since they were found to be more intuitive and subjective in their decision-making processes (Laroche, 2003). For men, experience appears to boost confidence or certainty in the decision-making process, which aids in the task of evaluation of product choice or more specifically, brand selection. Laroche’s research also concluded that product evaluation is more difficult for women since they are more likely to include additional information for decision-making purposes. Thus, decision-making is experienced differently by men and women.

Purchase decisions made by the different genders may stem from various influences. For example, gender has been linked to political persuasion and income within the decision-making process (Slama & Tashchian, 1985). One study on family purchase decisions in the high-income category found that upper income families with a liberal perspective had more female than male influence (Slama & Tashchian, 1985). The middle-income liberal families also saw more female influence. In contrast, in lower income families, it was found that many of the decisions were reached jointly and did not

lean towards any particular gender (Slama & Tashchian, 1985). Slama and Tashchian (1985) also found that age categories reflect gender differences in decision-making. For example, younger age groups (under 35) indicated more liberal beliefs. In contrast, the over 50 category reflected a balance or blend of liberal and conservative buyers. Purchase decisions based on price or promotion have also been found to be gender related, with female earners being more price-conscious than males (Mohamadou, Sukant, & Octavio, 2005).

Alongside changes in gender roles, lifestyles have also changed. Several issues currently affecting consumer purchasing include: greater time pressures, increased consumer self awareness, core value-orientation, an increase in home-oriented lifestyles and internet shopping (Harmon & Hill, 2003; Laroche, 2003). Wolin and Korgaonkar (2003) found differences based on gender in regards to internet use. Males are more likely to be influenced by and purchase from the web for functional and entertainment purposes, whereas women are more likely to utilize the web for shopping. In the case of men's underwear garments, it may therefore be that when female consumers do not find men's underwear garments in stock at a retail location, they are more likely than males to resort to the web to purchase them. Pullins, Reid, and Plank (2004) researched consumer perception of salesperson credibility based on gender and found the results insignificant. Thus, it could be that in the case of men's underwear, females and males are comfortable purchasing garments regardless of the salesperson's gender. However, it is important to note that since underwear is now frequently purchased on the internet, gender of the salesperson becomes even less of an issue.

Recent growth in the underwear market suggests that women are more involved in new product categories than their male counterparts (Solution Partners, 2006). In the men's underwear category, level of involvement varies between men and women for different reasons. Men who purchase their own products are aware of their needs and search for garments that satisfy those needs. A study on underwear consumer attitude and usage (Solution Partners, 2006) shows that in 2000, 60% of men purchased their own garments, but by 2005 this number had increased to 80% (Figure 10). Women involved in purchasing men's garments are looking for several features they tend to search for when shopping for their own products. For example, because women's underwear garments are generally sold hanging, this allows for more visual and tactile appeal than packaged products. Thus, color and softness (hand) have been found to be significant selling features when purchasing underwear for their male counterparts (Quixote, 2006).

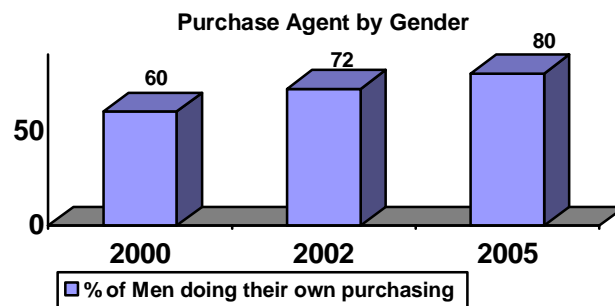


Figure 10 – Percentage of Men Purchasing their own Underwear

(Source: Solution Partners, 2006).

In the past, consumption was viewed as a predominately feminine activity (Kacen, 2000). Today, products once considered feminine are being sold to men such as

cleansers, toners, and moisturizers. More advertisements position the male body as a sexual object, much like women's bodies have been for decades. For example, the 'I Can't Believe it's Not Butter' commercial shows Fabio, an Italian model, wearing his shirt open to reveal a sculpted chest, and other ads for cologne show men in athletic gear, half-dressed and subliminally state how important it is to have the ideal body of the 'Cosmo Guy' (See Figure 11) (Kacen, 2000). Lowry (1997) states "the obsession arises because, just like women, men now want to look like the models in the underwear ads...Men are the new babes" (p. 8). In terms of men's underwear, the products now cross gender lines with women in 'boy briefs' made by Hanes and men in 'g-strings' or 'feminine' colored/patterned underwear such as pink floral Hawaiian prints made by Ginch Gonch (see Figure 12). Features once only important to women's underwear have crossed over to become important to men's underwear. How such features impact the decision-making process of men's underwear consumers remains to be fully examined.

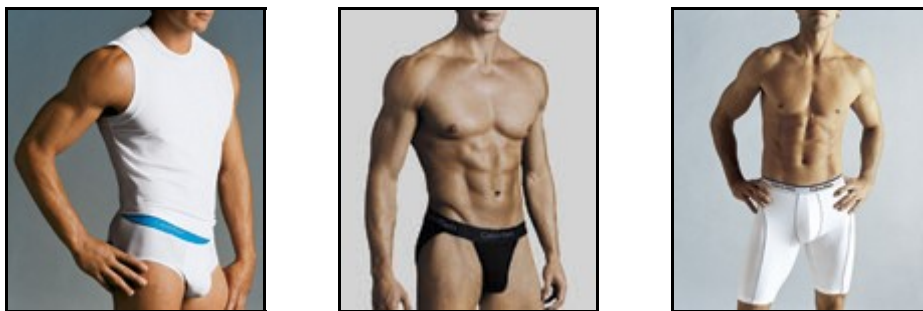


Figure 11 – Underwear Models in Advertisements or on Product Packaging

(Source: Freshpair.com, 2006).



Figure 12 – Trends in Men’s Underwear Silhouettes and Patterns.

Featuring brands Ginch Gonch and Papi (Source: Freshpair.com, 2006).

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the basic concepts of the decision-making process, with specific attention paid to the evaluation of alternatives and product choice stages. The concepts of involvement, brand loyalty, and gender were considered and relevant literature was reviewed. The next chapter will outline the methodology and data collection and analysis procedures used in the study.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter includes a description of the methodology that was used to conduct the study. Details of the interview method, sample selection, and data analysis procedures are included.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore the decision-making process of men's underwear consumers. Significant motivations were identified and differences in levels of involvement between male and female consumers were explored. Factors important to product choice in the purchase of men's underwear were investigated in order to examine the role of gender and brand name in the decision-making process.

Objectives

To explore the decision-making process of men's branded underwear consumers, specific research objectives include:

1. To identify motivations for men's branded underwear consumers.
2. To determine if these motivations differ for female versus male consumers.
3. To examine the role of brand name within the decision-making process and specifically during the evaluation of alternatives and product choice stages.

4. To explore the concept of involvement and its connection to gender and brand name within the decision-making process.
5. To consider this connection for the marketing of men's branded underwear.

Research Design

The design of the study is qualitative, with the in-depth interview used as the primary data collection method. Because little is known about the men's underwear consumer, this research is exploratory in nature. It was anticipated that the results of this study would provide necessary further information about the experiences and perspectives of this particular consumer.

The interview method is used in this study since it is the most direct way to obtain specific information from the consumers' perspective and in their own words. According to Merriam (1998), the interview method is best conducted using a small number of participants in order to fully interpret the meaning of a particular phenomenon. A semi-structured interview schedule was followed (see Appendix B) which poses open-ended questions allowing the participant to respond based on their own experiences. The interview method should allow for "a conversation with a purpose" (Merriam, 1998, p. 71), which is to obtain a certain type of information. The researcher needs to find out what is on or in someone's mind. The reason for interviewing is mainly to discover things we cannot directly observe. As Patton (1990) explains:

We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe....We cannot observe feelings, thoughts and intentions. We

cannot observe behaviors that took place at some previous point in time. We cannot observe situations that preclude the presence of an observer. We cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people questions about those things. The purpose of interviewing then is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective. (p. 196)

Participants were selected via use of a recruitment script (see Appendix C). The script inquired about shopping habits to determine that the participant was a department store consumer. Other questions were more demographic in nature and used to explore participant consumption roles, such as whether he or she is the primary purchaser of men's underwear for their household, what the annual household income is, age, occupation and how often he or she purchased men's underwear.

Data collection was conducted in New York in December, 2006. Interviews lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes each, and were audio-taped with the consent of the participant (see Appendix D). Each participant was given \$50 to make a purchase of men's underwear at a designated department store. To encourage participants to shop in manner and environment that would provide a close approximation of their normal decision-making process, each was asked to purchase men's underwear as they normally would. A week after the purchase, the researcher and participant met at a research facility in New York City where the interview was then conducted. Upon completion of data collection, interviews were transcribed verbatim.

Sample Selection

Participants were selected from the database of a prominent market research company. The sample was comprised of consumers in the New York market who buy men's underwear at department stores. This type of consumer was the focus of the sample because it was considered likely that they had therefore encountered branded men's underwear in past shopping experiences.

Data Analysis

A thematic analysis of the interview data was conducted in order to explore the branded underwear consumer decision-making process. Thematic analysis is used to explore the results of qualitative data, such as that collected via interview method (Kvale, 1996). Thematic interpretation is often used to decipher meanings that individuals attach to their experiences and how those meanings connect and form patterns (Spiggle, 1994). Types of devices commonly used to aid in interpretation are metaphors or the use of tropes, which help correspondence by making parallels across domains. To better relate to meanings, the investigator metaphorically translates experiences to grasp meanings and patterns or commonalities (Spiggle, 1994). Thus, interpretation is imaginative, subjective, and intuitive. In an effort to understand meaning, the researcher takes the data and sorts it into categories where the themes and patterns can be more intently explored (Spiggle, 1994). To decipher the meanings that surface in the data Spiggle (1994) suggests a division between *operations* and *interpretation*. Operations include: *categorization, abstraction, comparison* and *dimensionalization*. Interpretation for

Spiggle, is based on the results of operations, and is used to identify and fully explore meanings that surface in the data.

In this study, organization of the interview data began with *categorization*, in which participant experiences were separated into units of data for the purpose of coding. *Abstraction* was then employed in order to group those categories into more general conceptual ideas. Then, *comparison* among and across categories was used to explore differences and similarities in the data collected. Once a category was defined, its attributes, characteristics, and concepts were explored for different dimensions within the category to identify the properties of categories and constructs. An iterative back and forth interpretation process was then used to reveal and explain significant meanings within and across categories. These meanings were then used as the basis of themes developed to structure the interpretation. As will be discussed in the next chapter, a second level of abstraction was developed to further structure and organize the themes based on common meanings.

Summary

This chapter presented the methodology used in the study. Research design, including the use of the interview method, and data analysis procedures were discussed. The next chapter provides an interpretation of the interview data.

CHAPTER IV

INTERPRETATION

The purpose of this study is to explore the decision-making process of men's branded underwear consumers. Based on existing literature and research findings on this topic, the research purpose and objectives focus on the evaluation of alternatives and product choice stages of the decision-making process, as well as three constructs deemed important for understanding this process: gender, brand loyalty, and involvement. This chapter includes two parts: (a) a description of participant demographics, and (b) a thematic interpretation of interview data.

Participant Demographics

All participants in this study are the primary purchasers of male undergarments, whether for a spouse, boyfriend, son, fiancé, or for themselves. A total of 15 participants were interviewed, 8 males and 7 females, aged 23 to 55. All are residents of New York City (see Table 2). Participant careers ranged from Child Life Specialist to Building Manager and all have annual household incomes of \$75,000+. With the aid of the recruitment script (see Appendix C), it was determined that participants purchased branded men's underwear from a department store sometime within the past 12 months. Prior to conducting the interviews, participants were given a \$50 voucher to purchase men's branded underwear at a New York department store. Table 2 illustrates the

purchases made by each participant. Names have been changed for the purposes of confidentiality.

Name	Age	Occupation	Brands Purchased	Silhouette
Kevin	34	Project Manager	DKNY, Jockey	Boxer Briefs, Crew
Daniel	50	Chief Info Officer	Tommy Hilfiger, Jockey, Calvin Klein	Woven Boxers, Boxer Briefs, Trunk, Crew, Muscle
Jess	32	Child Life Specialist	Calvin Klein, Polo	Woven Boxers, Boxer Briefs
Jade	23	Education Coordinator	Polo, Tommy Hilfiger, Calvin Klein	Woven Boxers, Knit Boxers
Frank	26	Operations Manager	Tommy Hilfiger, Alfani, 2xist	Woven Boxer, Knit Boxers, Sport Briefs, A-Shirt
Jeff	46	Lieutenant	Tommy Hilfiger, Hugo Boss, Jockey	Briefs, Bikini, Boxer Briefs
Nellie	48	Accountant	Jockey	Midway Boxer Briefs
Dora	49	Executive Assistant	Jockey	Briefs, Boxer Briefs, Crew
Cara	52	Project Manager	Alfani, Jockey	Boxer Briefs, Briefs
Craig	23	Senior Financial Consultant	Calvin Klein	Trunks
Nick	41	Building Manager	Jockey, Calvin Klein	Briefs, Woven Boxers
Mary	55	Secretary	Jockey	Briefs
Lori	23	Associate Asset Manager	Polo	Woven Boxers
Ron	33	President/Entrepreneur	Calvin Klein, 2xist	Woven Boxers, Boxer Briefs
James	50	Senior Accounting Officer	Polo, Tommy Hilfiger	Woven Boxers, Knit Boxers

Table 2 - Participant Demographics and Purchase Decisions.

Thematic Interpretation

As a result of the exploration of the interview responses, several themes emerged which were then organized around three conceptual areas: *Identity*, *Form vs. Function* and *Value*. Each conceptual area and its respective themes form a part of the complete

interpretation of participants' experiences with the decision-making process. Within each conceptual area, evaluative criteria that surfaced as important to the decision-making process and to product choice are discussed.

Identity

The notion of identity and its link to underwear surfaced repeatedly as an important consideration within participants' decision-making. Identity was a particularly critical component of brand selection, in that participants considered the image conveyed by the brand and what this image reflected of their own identities. Within this conceptual area, two common themes – aspects of personal identity and social identity - surfaced to in part explain participants' underwear choices.

“Because I like them”: Aspects of Personal Identity

Underwear, though an intensely personal item of dress, was seen by many respondents as a utilitarian type of purchase. That is, respondents initially indicated that they put little thought into the purchase. For some, underwear is essentially a low-interest, low involvement purchase, meaning that they buy what they always buy and do not deviate. In general, these responses tended to come from males:

Because I'm the only one that sees it...I'm not trying to impress anyone. (Kevin)

Because the Jockeys are there, I like the way they fit, they're a good price. (Nick)
Because technically when you go to work nobody's going to see it. (Frank)

However, some of the females responded similarly:

Instead of going back and returning it, I buy what he wants ...I'd create double work for myself... I would have to go back to the store. (Dora)

I figured let me stick with what he really likes. (Mary)

In contrast, some of the women were inclined to select items first based on what they personally liked, and second on what they think he might like:

Like for just hanging around the house sometimes, like he'll wear these [Woven Boxers] he mostly wears these [Boxer Briefs], like some of these are like his backups. But I like to borrow them, so I was a little selfish... I [like] the style of them. (Jess)

I really liked this kind of waistband more...and I think he does too, but I liked this pattern that, I liked the blue. So, I just went with it. I guess I'm more interested in the way the underwear actually looked, so what I like... if I think he'll like it... I like the light blue; it's something I would wear. (Lori)

I started to notice the ads and then I was like, well, they do have really nice underwear. And then I would go shopping and I would touch them, and I'm like, they're soft, whatever. So, I bought my boyfriend a bunch of underwear from Calvin Klein on this one shopping spree, and so I guess, yeah, that works. (Jade)

When asked about why they are the primary purchaser of men's underwear for their household, male and female responses differed. Some of the male participants were adamant about the underwear they wear, reflected in the idea that buying underwear is a personal decision based on what they like, and that just like women, men sometimes want to purchase high end underwear for themselves.

I'm somewhat particular about what I choose to wear and it would almost be the same as if my wife would ask me to go out and buy her underwear. So, really, you know, that's a personal type of item and it's not like asking someone to let's say, go out and buy a shirt or a tie or a pair of slacks. (Jeff)

I don't want to be a label or a social climber, but when it comes to underwear...the most expensive pair of boxers you could probably find is \$35.00, \$40.00. Sometimes you want to splurge and find something that's couture or something a little more exclusive. ... [Sometimes] I want to go out and treat myself...get something really nice. (Ron)

The importance of image and how this relates to brand as a symbol of personal status became very clear when participants were asked to rank common product attributes, such

as color, brand, silhouette, fabric, and packaging. Brand was an important attribute for all of the participants, and was consistently ranked among the top three most important.

When asked if brand name influenced their purchase, participants replied:

Yes because certain brands make the color or look that I like...like Polo. I like Polo and my boyfriend likes Polo. (Lori)

I want to buy the certain brands ... I needed Jockeys, so that was the brand, the brand I mostly would buy. (Nick)

For some participants, brand-name was linked to product aesthetics or “look”. As a result, participants’ responses reflected an awareness of image conveyed by brand name and attracted either a positive or negative evaluation of the product “look” based on brand.

Mixing Hilfiger and a Calvin Klein is like mixing brown shoes and black socks... I buy matching sets by brand. If I were going out socially, I would want matching tops and bottoms... I thought it was a good brand name. The name caught me, let’s say Calvin Klein and the 2xist brands, they’re more trendy and you know, they’re approaching this sex appeal or whatever... (Daniel)

... I don't know why it is, maybe it's just because I associate certain brands with having ugly products and I mean, I guess I don't like buying things that are ugly, but I guess, but then if something sticks out of the pant like Joe Boxer [logo on waistband] that is cool...(Jade)

So, I wouldn't buy something that I think is really ugly or I think he would think it's ugly. (Lori)

When brand played a key role in the decision, the involvement levels in decisions that were based on habit were relatively low. For example, underwear for Mary was a low involvement purchase because the brand makes it easy: “I buy Jockey...all white briefs... I know what he likes”. She never looks for anything other than the Jockey brand name. She goes into the department, selects the exact item she needs and leaves. Mary’s

purchase decision reflects her spouse's needs. Brand is important in this case because it offers a silhouette he likes, and therefore the image conveyed by the brand was outweighed by the silhouette preferred. Similarly, others selected brands they preferred because they knew they could find not just the silhouette they wanted, but the right colors and patterns as well.

I usually go for Calvin Klein, I guess partially because I know they make the colors and sort of like the style he likes. I also sometimes get Calvin Klein so it's like I'm familiar probably, with the brand -- for myself. (Jess)

The brand -- because I feel like certain brands generally make the patterns that I like more... [I] stick with those. (Lori)

It's like I know what it is that I want so this is what I'm going in for. I go in, I know where it is, I go down there, I pick it up and in the meantime, it's like I made my way to the register, I have it in my bag, and then I'm like browsing and then if I see something that catches my eye. (Craig)

Other participants expressed how important it was to get the particular underwear item. They know what they need, they go to the store and buy it and if it is not available, they are determined to find it elsewhere:

[On not having stock availability] I think he'll just lay down and die. Well, actually last year we weren't able to find them in the store, but there's a Jockey outlet in Flemington so he drove to Flemington...bought ten pairs. (Nellie)

I would either go find them at another location, like I've done this before, where it's like I've gone to Macy's...one particular location doesn't have the style that I want or they already -- you know, they have what I already have, so I'm not going to go buy it again -- cause I'm looking for something different that I don't have. So, if they don't have that, then I'd go to another location to find it. What's predetermined already is that I'm going to get trunks; they're going to be Calvin Klein. (Craig)

Many participants agreed that the brand and silhouette were non-negotiable criteria that had been decided upon even before entering the store. These respondents could be

considered brand loyal, and since the decision is made prior to purchase, low involvement.

You're used to it, you feel comfortable, and you don't want to switch -- as far as something as intimate as underwear...the thing that's closest to you everyday.
(Ron)

Brand, silhouette, and color ranked as the top three product attributes for the participants. These three attributes aid in understanding the importance of personal image and preference with regard to underwear selection. Color, one of the more commonly cited attributes, was crucial in linking silhouette with brand preference. When participants were asked to indicate which of these product attributes that was most important, color was at the top:

Color and pattern...Guess I'm more interested in the way the underwear looked.
(Lori)

Color caught my attention [Tommy Hilfiger] the different colors, I'd never seen something like that...the color blocking...I just saw the red, white and blue...that's why I bought it...I bought it because of the colors...it's different and unique...caught my attention just because how it was hanging out there and the multi-tone color. (Daniel)

Some males responded that they deliberately looked for colors that were both out of the ordinary and were attractive to them:

Some funky colors, you'll definitely see a couple with unique materials like this stuff...It's catchy and if it's catchy -- well, I'll go back. What causes me to buy the tightie whities is too many of my underwear have holes in them or something or you know, changing colors or whatever and I remember and so I'll go to the store and I'll buy some underwear. (Kevin)

I have like a thing with my briefs and underwear so, it's like I collect them, I just get the most weird ones -- every single one of Calvin Klein that I've seen here and -- seen them when I travel. I normally would go buy them so I have something new and different. (Craig)

Some participants indicated a higher level of involvement during the decision-making process when their purchases were based more on color versus brand considerations. In such instances, these participants indicated that they took their time to walk around the underwear department to search out the best-looking garments first, with the thought – “What will look good on me?” being the core evaluative criterion. Product choice was based on whether they felt the product appearance coincided with their personal identity. In some cases, participants sought out other alternatives, even though they had a preferred brand, some looked around at other products and actually wound up trying something new, like Jeff:

I was looking for something different, and the symbol jumped out at me...I kind of liked the look...products I do wear anyway, so I was naturally drawn to it [brands Tommy Hillfiger, Armani]. (Jeff)

The role of brand in communicating status was important to some, while for others, the brand was merely the one product attribute that best suited them: “They're more classic [2xist] and Calvin Klein [are] a little too trendy -- I don't want to say metrosexual or ostentatious; they're just too showy” (Ron). These participants did not think there was much of a need for purchasing brand name underwear:

Underwear for the sake of underwear...how many people are going to know what you're wearing, I mean, only you know...A jacket obviously there is recognition from the trademark and their logo, is just, everybody knows what that stands for...underwear is so personal so in nature, you wear it for you. (Jeff)

“Because someone might see them”: Aspects of Social Identity

Alongside personal identity, participants also indicated, to varying degrees, consideration of the social component of underwear as a type of apparel product. To some, underwear, like other types of apparel, is a product that necessitates consideration

of others. In such cases, the decision-making becomes more complex, as participants are not necessarily choosing what they like, but rather are selecting garments based on what they think others will like or deem appropriate for the situation. Participant responses such as the following from Daniel indicate consideration of the social approval component of branded underwear:

If I were going out dressed socially, I would want matching tops and bottoms by brand...If I am buying an underwear outfit...I would want to buy matching tops and bottoms if I wanted to wear it out or something like that...matching by brand...top or the bottom... The branding...it's associated with trendy...image of sexiness or sex appeal that's associated with Calvin Klein...I would mix brands that have the same connotation of the same trendiness. (Daniel)

Although some of the male participants considered what others would think, female participants in general talked about selecting garments that they liked and wanted to see on their significant other. In these instances, the participant appears to be considering how to merge personal preference with social expectations in the purchase of men's underwear. Some female participants, such as Jess, indicated that the social meanings conveyed by brand image were important to their selection as well:

I'm buying it for him, like I want him to have the fun colors or the fun...you know, make him feel a little bit cooler or whatever. (Jess)

According to participants, different types of underwear mean different things:

Date night underwear...in the splurge section, choices are definitely for the frisky mood, [whereas] tightie whities say I'm serious; these [holds up colored trunks] say I'm fun. (Daniel)

Similarly, Cara chose different styles for her significant other to wear accordingly:

I buy different types and expect him to choose what he needs to put on under his jeans, what he needs to put on under his tuxedo, whatever...(Cara)

The image that participants thought the brand represented in a social setting was common in discussions of brand. Some participants mentioned purchasing underwear for two types of occasions: the 'everyday no-one-will-see' style and the 'going-out' style.

Underwear day to day that I wear to work...versus underwear I would wear if I'm going out socializing...There's a greater chance that other people are going to see your underwear when you're out socializing than when you're going to work It's part of a fashion statement...as important as your casual wear. (Daniel)

You have two [types]-- one to impress others and one to keep for yourself, so, you know, [if] you feel you have something going on, you would wear the other style and if you have [to] just work or something... [You wear it for yourself]. (Frank)

Indeed, for some participants, the idea of being 'caught' with ordinary underwear is unacceptable, in that one should always be prepared for unexpected social circumstances.

As Daniel points out, image conscious underwear is important for such unforeseen situations:

What's this saying that your mother said, never go out with dirty underwear because you never know what's going to happen...you know...you don't want to be in the hospital emergency room and cutting dirty underwear off you ... you're going out casually or working out at the gym or something...if the name brand of something sticks out, you know, or you can see that somebody is wearing fancier underwear. (Daniel)

Form versus Function

Underwear is a necessity and often considered a basic apparel item that serves a specific function. In today's market, however, there are a myriad of options available to the consumer. An interplay between considerations of form versus expectations of function clearly surfaced in participant responses. Function was linked to purpose of the underwear, that is, does it serve its purpose in terms of fit and comfort? Form was tied to personal preference and social considerations. In differentiating between form and

function, function surfaces with regard to the participants 'needs' while form is linked more to their 'wants'.

"The Importance of Comfort"

Participants who usually purchase certain underwear silhouettes mentioned being distracted by the overwhelming number of choices now available in men's underwear. Many cited using shortcuts (heuristics) to avoid a lengthy decision-making process. Some of these shortcuts included selecting garments with characteristics the participant was familiar and therefore comfortable with, such as the color white, the brief silhouette, or 100% cotton fabric.

Too many [choices] now, for me this is overwhelming to have too many choices. Makes me want to keep doing what I'm doing usually... [So] I stick to what I am used to. (Jeff)

For many, fabric was an important part of the decision-making process. Fabric was seen as a reliable indication of function in this product category. For Nick, "They've got to be cotton", but for others, new fabrics added appeal and enhanced perceived function:

The material on these are what caught my attention because they weren't standard cotton and they're like a microfiber kind of material and I think, I have a couple in my drawer. (Kevin)

Interestingly, participants indicated a greater concern with the fabrication of everyday underwear, because as Frank points out "you spend what, ten hours [wearing them] -- probably more".

I won't sacrifice the fabric type because I know it -- to me, that's a comfort issue - - as somewhat silhouette is too, but the fabric it's a comfort issue and if I'm not really going to be wearing them that long, I'll sacrifice being a little uncomfortable for the sake of the fabric. You know, some of them are more -- the cotton blends are more comfortable. (Jeff)

Given the greater emphasis on function for everyday underwear, participants saw fabric type as critical to ensuring comfort. Fabric also played a role in product choices for underwear to be worn during certain activities, such as working out:

These are stretch, these have like 92 cotton, 8 percent lycra and these are good for working out -- they're -- there's no fly, it's just basically to support you. (Ron)

“They have to fit well”

When participants were asked which product attributes were non-negotiable and could not be sacrificed or replaced, silhouette was one of the top choices. Silhouette was seen as an important part of function, especially for daily use, and thus was an attribute they were not willing to compromise. Participants indicated a willingness to go through an extended search for a product that achieves this goal. For example, one female participant brought several packages of the same product - Jockey mid-way boxer briefs in white – to the interview. When asked why she used the voucher to purchase several of the same product, her response was: “He’s particular... he likes the long leg boxer briefs...” Thus, Nellie clearly illustrates the role of silhouette in the decision-making process. Another participant, Mary, mentioned that her spouse was particular about the fit of his underwear and that comfort was the most important attribute for him: “Really the only thing he's concerned about-- he's concerned about the size of them, if they feel comfortable on him”. For Kevin, fit made for a speedy purchase with very low involvement:

Tightie whities, regular briefs and you know, maybe some gray, maybe some black, maybe some white and that's it and now I'm going to the register and I'm out of there. (Kevin)

Fit was seen as related to the purpose/occasion for which the underwear would be worn, in that participants related different types of underwear fit with different outfits.

That's what he wears, most definitely -- he'll wear these sometimes when he's playing sports and going to the gym or something like that, but he doesn't really wear these on a day to day basis, like to work and everything he wears boxers. (Jade)

Depending on what you're wearing. If I wear a nice pair of fitted jeans...or if I'm working out, I want support. You don't want these [boxer briefs] to bunch up under a pair of jeans they'll look funny. So, I tend to go for the tightie whites, as they call it ...boxers when I'm a little more relaxed, if I want to wear a pair of sweatpants, I can just wear these around the house, it's fine. (Ron)

Fit was clearly a very important part of underwear function, and to sacrifice function for form sometimes resulted in the need to differentiate between activity-specific silhouettes:

There's not one [silhouette] that's versatile for everything. You need to have one for every specific occasion -- like I'm going to go out -- if I go out biking, I'm not going to wear these for sure [boxer briefs]...They bunch up; give you a wedge, that's when you need something like this [trunks]. (Ron)

Brand as Function

For some participants, fit superseded brand as the important evaluative criterion.

He's very much about the fit, so like he doesn't care what brand it is, it just has to fit right. (Jess)

It had a pouch, which I'm interested in that, I don't like the ones that don't have a pouch so I liked that and the cut, the actual cut of the underwear itself, I liked that...This is the silhouette I feel more comfortable wearing. (James)

The thing about men's underwear is sometimes if things aren't situated right, they can be very uncomfortable...that caught my attention... (Daniel)

Mostly just the fit and comfort and again, riding up. I find boxer briefs ride up and don't fall down. And so I've kind of avoided buying those at least the ones that I have tried. You know, just when you sit down, they bunch at your hip... Yeah, boxer brief will bunch at your hip and then with -- if they're tight around your thigh already, they ain't going nowhere, you just -- and all of a sudden you're walking around with just a bunch of material at your waist. (Kevin)

In contrast, for other participants brand is closely linked with fit and therefore function.

These participants indicate a high degree of trust in particular brands which has led them

to adopt the brand as their favorite. They also indicate a level of association with the brand, knowing that this is the underwear that best fits them. Nick says, “I think it's more of a fit thing... I think I'm more comfortable with the Jockey than I am with anything else”. This level of brand loyalty can ultimately become enduring, because through trial and error he has come to know what he likes and dislikes and therefore he looks for this particular product out of habit. Similarly, Craig who has multiple pairs of Calvin Klein, says:

You know, it's like when you buy these, like how it's actually on here. It fits your body, so it really holds everything the way that it should be [Calvin Klein].
(Craig)

According to participants, satisfaction with function often leads to repeat brand purchases. This is a positive thing for marketers because individual consumers keep coming back for the brand and they, in turn, tell others about it. Craig, for example, is a marketer's dream:

I've bought some of these actually for my cousin and made him actually wear them and he's like - yeah, they're really comfortable. So, it's like now he has some of those in his collection too -- so, this, what I guess it was like earlier on this year when he came for vacation and we went shopping and I went to get these, he's like, 'oh, these are what you wear', and I'm like, 'yeah, you should try them'. I bought him two and then when he came back again, he was like, 'You know, those are like really really comfortable like you said'. He bought some more again. (Craig)

Value

Value as a conceptual area reflects participant considerations of: (a) perceived quality of underwear given the price, and/or (b) availability of packaging options and promotions for a given brand. For the participants, value meant one of the two things – either they got

a good product for their money or they achieved their purchase goal with as few challenges as possible.

Quality versus Cost: Product- based value

Some participants made it clear that even though they only shop for men's underwear in department stores because of the perceived quality of offerings, they nonetheless still search for the best price value. Many mentioned that they knew they were going to get good quality garments, and in turn, felt like they received the best value for their money just by shopping in a department store. Shopping in the department store itself provided comfort, in that they know that the store carries brands that, while perhaps more costly, are of good quality. For the participants, this exemplifies value, in that good products are worth the money: "You know, it's established, you just know" (Frank). Some participants believed that in the long run, buying department store products was actually more of a cost savings, since the higher priced, higher quality garments did not wear out as fast as their less expensive counterparts sold in other types of stores.

[You] Get your money's worth in the long run. [Considering] how many times you have to pay to replace them... (Ron)

Well, I'm going to be honest with you, if it's a good fit and I like it a lot because even if these were a little higher in price, since I'm comfortable and I know about these already, I would pay more, because I know it's a good fit, it's a good quality. (James)

Some of the participants also mentioned that because department stores have name brands and greater product availability this makes their shopping experience easier and therefore worth the time and money.

Availability...they have the newest stuff and I mean, sometimes once in a blue moon, I'll go to like Loehmann's or Marshall's and sometimes they have irregular

stuff, and you don't want that, you want, you want good stuff and it's not a big investment. I mean, you're paying \$20.00 and you're getting your money's worth. (Ron)

Participants also associated available brands at the department store with quality they could trust. As Cara puts it, "I always trust their quality [Calvin Klein]". Other participants concur with the idea that brand and quality are related:

It's Ralph Lauren, there's some quality behind it. (Jeff)

Well, actually brand is quality. I mean, I think it's quality because most brand companies won't put their name on something cheap or something stupid. Same thing with cologne, I remember going buying cologne and there was Jordan, and somebody told me Jordan does not put his name on stupid cologne, so it has to smell really good. So, it's the same thing...Well, value is quality in the name brand; name brand is usually more expensive...definitely...there is quality, anything that's overpriced, you know, I would think...I mean, some of it, yes, a little overpriced, but nobody's going to overprice something unless there's something behind it, so I know there's quality behind it...(Frank)

When asked about underwear available through other retail channels, such as mass merchandisers like Wal-Mart and Kmart, participants' responses suggest negative perceptions of fabric quality and brand names.

My obvious assumption is that the department store will have a better quality than Wal-Mart. (Cara)

Because of the material, those are rough cotton, and so I don't, it's not my favorite to buy, I will buy it, it's not my favorite to buy...even the cotton in these type brands [department stores] are more comfortable than Fruit of the Loom. (Kevin)

It's just what's -- it's just what's associated with the brand, okay, Fruit of the Loom, you think of that horrible commercial with those fruits coming out, you know, it's just Fruit of the Loom is a cheap brand. (Daniel)

At the core of these responses regarding channel type and product value is the belief in the price/quality relationship. Moreover, participant responses also indicated a belief that

the manufacturing of such garments was less expensive, making the product of lesser quality overall:

I mean, I think you put some of those through the washing machine a few times and they're already sort of like worn out and, you know, they're not, but...their [Mass stores] underwear, is replaceable. So, it's not that big of a deal, but I feel like you're getting a little more for your money when you buy a better brand. (Jade)

I guess depending on the store...like maybe sometimes the fabric is a little thinner, isn't as soft...you know, sometimes the fabric just like feels a little bit different, maybe the idea of it's too cheap, you know, it will fall apart after wearing it three times. (Jess)

It seems to me to be thinner material, inferior quality, I mean; they tend not to last as long. (Jeff)

One participant even suggested that buying underwear somewhere other than a department store was akin to purchasing the product in a grocery store "...and to me, it's like I can't see myself seeing buying briefs in a supermarket" (Craig).

Many participants believe that mass merchandisers sell branded underwear at low prices because these garments are either seconds or irregulars.

You have to be careful about purchasing them there because sometimes they're irregulars and I don't see the Calvin's and the Polo's and Nautica's around in the discount places. You know and feel, that, you know, oh, they're selling their irregulars; they don't do that type of thing. So, any time you pick up a package, it's always going to be a quality item and whatever they do with their irregulars, they don't put them out for sale. (Cara)

Many responded that if the garments are too inexpensive, there must be something wrong with them, since good quality garments do not come cheap. Participants were also aware that the type of cotton or other fabric used to make the garments, or the packaging itself, can undermine product quality.

I don't know, sometimes I think they're seconds -- irregulars. Sometimes I don't think... I am paying the cheaper price or I'm getting a great bargain, but...when they wash, they don't seem to be the same as Macy's, that's why I stick with the department stores. It's worth it because they hold up. (Mary)

I think there's a value to place on a name brand because of the material, the silhouette, the variety. I'm not convinced necessarily about the manufacturing quality. I'm talking about the quality of their fabric, the number of threads, perhaps that kind of thing...value, I'm not placing necessarily value as to how many like in quantity. You know, as far as price, it's more of a value for me as to – quality. (Jeff)

I'd rather get something that's a little more expensive-- just for the quality... The really cheap brands -- what I've noticed is sometimes the fabric's really thin. (Lori)

With regards to men's underwear, the price/quality relationship means value for the participants, and they believe that department stores carry the best offering of quality products.

You do tend to think that the higher priced the higher the quality - and I do. I kind of have some trust of stores especially the major department stores -- that they're not intentionally pricing lower quality merchandise higher. So, I don't really second guess that. So, I assume that this \$30.00 undershirt is a nice one even though I haven't actually put it on and that it's better than the 2xist version of this which was \$23.00... I do though; I do think that the brands sold in department stores are a higher quality than the ones sold elsewhere in the mass market stores. So, I make that assumption as well. So, if I find a good priced brief on just a normal day in department stores, I think I got a good quality product. (Kevin)

I'm just brain washed. You go to Macy's, you go to Lord and Taylor; you're getting good quality for the same price...cause you figure by the time they hit the percentage, and you may have a coupon and you use your coupon, it's coming down to the same price. (Nellie)

Packaging and Promotion: Purchase-based value

For some participants, value was linked to the idea of “getting more” for their money. Packaging and promotion of men's underwear differs depending on brand and channel type. In response to questions about cost-related product attributes -- such as product

promotions, display, signage, and product variety -- some noted that the cost was better on some packages than others.

When I go to the store...I'm comfortable with Jockey and Jockey's only \$17.00 or whatever...I steer myself toward them. I noticed actually... Calvin's were more, and you only get two in a pack...more money and there were only two in the pack. (Nick)

For some, taking the time to look around for the best deal among available brands was worth it, since they believe that all products available in a department store are good quality.

I would be looking for a package of three. Because to me, it's worth it to buy the three, because first of all, you usually save money on it... the package of a single are more money...and you know - you go through T-shirts... I don't want to spend \$25.00 for two pair of underwear. (Cara)

I guess getting a three pack for the price...what I'm saying is I'm getting more, getting more than say with Calvin Klein you get two in a pack, versus Jockey you get three in a pack. And Calvin Klein...I guess the value would be is that I'd want to get more for my dollar, basically. (Nick)

For those participants who like to shop, promotional items and sales were particularly appealing. For example, both Daniel and Nellie see the value of buying a good brand at a promotional price:

Went over my budget but it was on sale...Obviously since I bought so much Jockey at 25 plus [additional] 15 percent off [with Macy's card] ...value -- you know, it plays into it. Price plays into value. (Daniel)

They were 20% off and there were four of them...so I went back to get another one... (Nellie)

Some of the participants even used sales or promotions of branded underwear as their primary evaluative criterion. Promotions often include the offer of a new product free with a purchase, which is a good way to try a new garment without any cost risk. Some

items might have an additional cost savings off of the regular price. This savings coupled with the use of the department store's extra discount is what led some participants to purchase certain products:

I was first drawn to Nautica because I saw percent off... There was a promotion going on, so I said, okay, fine, since I haven't tried it...so I thought this would be a good time. (Cara)

I do look around though for sales, or if anyone's come out with something new... they're always kind of changing things...a brand that I didn't used to buy maybe makes something new...style or color... if it was the same price and had two pairs in them...it seems like you're getting a deal. (Jess)

For these participants, more effort was required in order to look for promotional or sales items, but they seemed to be able to make quick decisions based on going straight to a sale sign and then finding something that, in turn, satisfied their other important evaluative criteria.

I'm buying briefs and I'm looking for a sale...it does take longer than 15 minutes...cause I did look at all the different types of briefs in there. (Kevin)
Because I remember if I see a display or something that looks nice and then I see the word sale next to it, maybe this is the value shopper in me, it's going to catch my attention more so than [if] I see a nice display and I don't see the word sale. I might check it out first because I feel I'm going to get a better value. (Daniel)

Only one participant, Jade, mentioned that sale price and/or promotions did not influence her decision-making when purchasing men's branded underwear: "I don't think I've ever bought underwear because of a promotion". At the same time, some participants considered value alone both in terms of quantity in the package and sale price.

I usually buy three packs, sometimes two. So, it was... in fact, it was three...I guess it was twenty percent off... (Mary)

Cost played a key role in decision-making for those participants who are brand loyal in that they explained that they generally buy more when their brand is on sale. For those

participants who are not necessarily loyal to just one brand, many still indicated feelings of trust for those specific brand names within their consideration set. Other participants considered cost alone. To these participants, underwear is replaceable so they do not want to spend more money than necessary. Even though they go to department stores to purchase men's underwear, they will purchase any garment that is the most discounted, regardless of brand:

Brand-wise, what I'll do is, for instance, let's take a T-shirt, if I go in and I'll see a crew neck T-shirt, then I'll see the package of three over here, say they're \$20.00... packages over there they're \$15.00. I will buy the cheaper one...I definitely know I will buy the cheaper one because to me, they last just as long, whether you buy Calvin Klein... [It] starts to get disheveled and discolored and I throw it out. (Dora)

Decision-making driven by packaging, promotion, and price generally required a high level of involvement, in that for each purchase decision, participants must evaluate and compare a wide range of available products. If they were constrained by brand preference, then they were able to narrow their search somewhat based on package size or sale and therefore engage in a process requiring lower involvement levels. If the participant was also focused on finding a certain color or fabric then decision-making became more involved, and especially when he or she considered sale items or promotional packages. In summary, regardless of gender, the more criteria to be evaluated, the longer the time spent making the purchase decision.

Summary

To understand the decision-making process of men's branded underwear consumers, this chapter presented a thematic interpretation of participant responses. Three conceptual

areas and their respective themes connected participant experiences together in order to highlight similarities and differences across responses. Chapter Five presents the overall findings of the interpretation in light of the research purpose and objectives.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This chapter includes the following areas: (a) a discussion of findings relative to study objectives; (b) the development of consumer profiles based on findings, and, (c) limitations and suggestions for further research.

Research Objectives

1. To identify motivations for men's branded underwear consumers.
2. To determine if these motivations differ for female versus male consumers.
3. To examine the role of brand name within the decision-making process and specifically during the evaluation of alternatives and product choice stages.
4. To explore the concept of involvement and its connection to gender and brand name within the decision-making process.
5. To consider this connection for the marketing of men's branded underwear.

Motivations

The basic need for underwear as a replenishment item was the primary reason that participants cited for purchasing men's underwear. Although underwear is not necessarily a product that wears out quickly, it is still a staple item that requires re-purchase. Some participants, however, were also motivated to purchase new underwear garments just by

being immersed in the men's underwear department. For them, sales and/or promotions were found to trigger an otherwise unnecessary purchase.

It was found that basic motivations for purchase varied slightly by gender. Men's primary motivations for purchasing underwear included: (a) need for a replacement, (b) items were on sale, or (c) an impulse purchase. For women, motivations included: (a) routine shopping for spouse, partner or son, (b) purchases as a gift, (c) items were on sale, or, (d) purchase was on impulse based on like/aesthetic appeal.

In comparing participant motivations and the differences in the decision-making process for males versus females, a great deal of similarity was found, in that a balance between what the wearer needs and what the purchaser wants was sought. Specific wants and needs varied. Men were found to purchase underwear that appealed to them and that met preferred criteria such as fabric, silhouette, and brand, such as when Nick states, "They've got to be cotton". Women generally selected underwear that either appealed to their own aesthetic criteria or fit the previously-established criteria held by the wearer for whom they were making the purchase, as when Jade comments, "I liked the emblem and the [waist] band..."

Role of Brand

Evaluation of Alternatives Stage

All of the participants had specific prerequisites for any underwear purchase. These prerequisites differed widely among participants. Some sought out specific colors or silhouettes, while others first looked for sale signs. However, one evaluative criterion

consistent among the majority of participants was brand name, whether the participant was image-conscious or value-conscious. Brand, for the value-conscious participant, meant a product with good fabrication and specific silhouette manufactured by a reliable name. For the image-conscious, brand carried the requisite social meaning and meshed with the individual's identity. As Chris points out, "What's predetermined already is that I'm going to get trunks, they're going to be Calvin Klein". For both, branded underwear meant purchase of a quality, long-lasting garment: "I want to buy certain brands...so Jockey is what I buy" (Nick). In some cases, brand preference made the decision-making process simpler and thus required less involvement. In keeping with previous research on brand (Frank, 1962; Oliver, 1999) the brand name functioned as an anchor when the participant was unable to select among similar alternatives, or was unfamiliar with a new product. Essentially, brand was the primary criterion many participants relied upon to ultimately make their purchase decision.

Product Choice Stage

When discussing product choice, it was found that most participants selected a brand that they were familiar with and therefore used their voucher as a means to buy more of that brand: "He prefers to wear jockey [mid-rise briefs] so I bought more of those..." (Norma). A few used the voucher as a means to try a new product of a different brand, provided it met some of the same criteria (e.g. silhouette, color, fabric) they normally consider when purchasing underwear: "I have never tried Alfani...so I thought this would be a good time" (Cara) . It is important to note that when participants used their voucher to purchase a product of a brand they had not tried before, it was because they were

utilizing the voucher to do so, thereby making the purchase low-risk. That is, they were not sacrificing their own money to trial and error.

Involvement Levels

Role of Involvement

Involvement with a product category is best expressed through the level of interest in and time spent in decision-making for a particular item (Assael, 2004). Participants in this study reflected both high and low levels of involvement in their decision-making processes. Those who selected underwear that they were familiar with and had established a level of comfort with engaged in a low-involvement process. They selected the product based on experiences with past trial and error, and therefore it was now a ‘no-thought’ purchase: “I know what it is that I want, so that is what I’m going in for... I pick it up and then I am on my way to the register...the whole thing takes me about ten minutes...” (Craig). Time spent in the decision-making process was minimal, and the purchase had become habitual (Solomon, 1999).

High levels of involvement occurred when participants considered more than one choice within each evaluative criterion. For example, participants who were open to multiple brands, colors, or silhouettes, like Daniel, were found to experience a more complex decision-making process, “I walk around a lot [browsing]...maybe an hour [spent in the department]...”(Daniel). These participants had a much broader set of evaluative criteria, requiring more time and effort to narrow down choices and select among product alternatives. These participants appear to be highly involved in the product category and consider multiple options, such as new products by their preferred

brand, as well as those by comparable brands. However, it is interesting to note that even in these cases, the participant still purchased underwear they were previously familiar with, whether because of brand name or silhouette type.

Gender

Female participants reflected different levels of involvement based on their motivations for purchasing men's underwear. Low levels of involvement were seen in purchases of a basic replenishment garment wherein silhouette, color, and brand were already pre-selected and known by the purchaser to be the wearer's preferred choice. Higher levels of involvement were necessary when the preferred item was not available and an alternative choice had to be made, or when the participant was making a purchase based on her own evaluative criteria instead of the wearer's: "I like the light blue, it's something I would wear" (Lori).

Males whose purchases reflected high levels of involvement typically spent a lot of time searching for products that fit their needs and met their evaluative criteria, much like women did. One difference was that because they were also the intended wearer, they were able to determine preference based on fit and comfort: "I like the way they're cut [boxer briefs] more slimming..." (Ron). All participants narrowed their selection through a process of elimination. Males who purchased items based on standard choices experienced low levels of involvement, often purchasing out of habit mainly because they had selected an item that met their needs. Similarly, females whose selection reflected a low level of involvement purchased the items that the wearer was already comfortable

with. This was the same among both genders - the decision was already pre-determined and therefore the decision-making was quicker.

Gender surfaced as important in distinguishing between needs and wants. Participants who shopped for function only (needs) looked for garments that were comfortable, fit well and served a purpose, were primarily the male participants. These participants tended to shop more often out of necessity, in that they were motivated by a need to replenish their underwear, rather than because they were 'just be shopping around'. Participants focused on image alone were not necessarily motivated by a need for underwear; instead they made an impromptu purchase while they were already out shopping. Female participants were primarily the ones who mentioned being drawn-in by new products and brand advertisements. The type of underwear needed and the occasion it was needed for were common considerations for both genders. Similarly, both male and female participants reflected either value-conscious or image-conscious consumer tendencies when purchasing men's underwear.

Brand

It was found that purchases based on brand required low levels of involvement for the participants. Participants who were more value-conscious than image-conscious experienced higher levels of involvement in the search for products, since they typically considered more than one brand or sought promotions first and brand name second: "I bought Jockey...it was 25 plus 15 percent off...price plays into value" (Daniel). Those participants who were receptive to advertisements for brands also experienced higher levels of involvement as they sought out new product options more actively than others.

For all participants, brand was important to the decision-making process though the level of its importance within the participant's evaluative criteria differed.

Brand loyalty meant that the decision-making process did not require much thought – they started at the brand and went from there. The selection of silhouettes or colors are so vast that reducing the number of choices would take longer and require more effort than starting with brand. Females who were more brand loyal, like Jade, purchased names they were familiar with through advertisements and celebrity endorsements or in connection to names they have seen in other clothing lines: “I always liked him [Freddy Lumburg-- soccer player] and I started to notice the ads and then I was like, well, they do have really nice underwear...so I bought some [Calvin Klein] for my boyfriend” (Jade). Males, by the same token, exhibited brand preference based on the image and perception that their preferred brands offered, whether that of trendy, sexy, young, etc.: “Calvin Klein and the 2xist brands, they're more trendy and you know, they're sex appeal” (Daniel). Many of these male consumers mentioned purchasing brands with attributes in mind for both garment and occasion use. Some brands were for everyday, while others were for occasions when someone else may see their underwear.

Consumer Profiles

Based on the findings, four ‘profiles’ emerged out of the participants’ experiences with underwear purchases. These ‘profiles’ focus participant types in terms of their level of involvement with the product category and their level of brand loyalty. The four profiles are: High involvement and brand loyal; high involvement and not brand loyal; low involvement and brand loyal; and low involvement and not brand loyal.

NAME	BRAND LOYAL	INVOLVEMENT
Kevin	No	Low
Daniel	Yes	High
Jess	No	Low
Jade	No	Low
Frank	No	Low
Jeff	Yes	High
Nellie	Yes	Low
Dora	No	Low
Cara	No	High
Craig	Yes	Low
Nick	Yes	High
Mary	No	Low
Lori	No	High
Ron	Yes	High
James	Yes	High

Table 3 - Brand Loyalty and Involvement Level by Participant.

High Involvement/Brand Loyal

High involvement, brand loyal participants spent time in the men's underwear department searching for new products manufactured by a particular brand. Many male participants fit into this profile which usually reflected the participant's level of contact with a brand and familiarity with their products. Participants in this category are: Daniel, Nick, Ron, James, and Jeff. High involvement meant having more enduring involvement in the product category and an on-going product interest. This explains why males were the majority of this profile, as they are both the wearer and purchaser. Higher involvement levels are necessary for this profile in order to provide the motivation for evaluation and comparison of similar products.

High Involvement/Not Brand Loyal

Some female participants fit the second profile: high involvement with no brand loyalty. These participants spent time in the men's underwear department in search of a product with specific attributes, such as a silhouette or fabric type, but not necessarily a particular brand. For them, brand was of lesser importance and other product characteristics were more crucial to their decision-making process. Since their evaluative criteria were driven by product attributes like silhouette or price, they had to search among multiple brands. This necessitated that they browse the entire underwear department to assess all available products in that specific silhouette or fabric. Participants in this profile were Cara and Lori.

High levels of involvement were present when these participants browsed the men's underwear department for garments they themselves liked. Higher levels of involvement were required when price was the primary purchase criterion. Although the decision to go directly to products that were on sale was easy, evaluating packaging and value across brands and silhouettes resulted in a more lengthy decision-making process and thus a higher involvement level.

Low Involvement/ Brand Loyal

Low involvement and brand loyal participants tended to shop out of necessity and selected garments based on brand preference. Thus, if the participant thought Jockey made the most comfortable trunk silhouette, then the low involvement brand loyal participant purchased this item when a replacement was needed. There is little decision-making involved so involvement level is low; through trial and error the decision was

made prior to entering the store and brand was the common denominator. The two participants in this profile were Craig and Nellie.

Craig is the best example of this profile type. Craig knew exactly what he wanted based on silhouette and brand. He did not indicate interest in sales or promotions or in purchasing another brand if it was on sale. In fact, Craig walks into the underwear department, goes straight to his desired product and then immediately proceeds to the cash register. In the past he perhaps had spent more time deciding among choices but over time he has become a brand loyal, low-involved shopper. Nellie, an older female participant was similar, in that she purchased exactly what the wearer wanted, thereby exhibiting low involvement and brand loyalty. For her, the purchase is based on what 'he' wants or what he is willing to wear; to try something new means she has either wasted money or has to make another trip to the store for a refund.

Low Involvement/ Not Brand Loyal

Most of the female participants fit the fourth profile: low involvement with no brand loyalty. Many were low-involved and not brand loyal, out of having a specific shopping objective: searching for a product that suited the wearer's needs. Males who had low levels of involvement were the ones more focused on the selection of a garment based on occasion and use. Six of the fifteen participants fit this profile: Mary, Dora, Frank, Jade, Jess, and Kevin. These participants displayed very little overall interest in the product category. Instead, their involvement was primarily situational, as for them underwear is a required purchase based on a specific need. The participants did not want to spend time browsing around the department and were not interested in comparing brands, but rather

shopped based on product-based attributes that quickly fulfilled a need, therefore looking for the fastest means of decision-making (Assael, 2004). Participants mentioned entering the department almost oblivious to name brands and signage and simply purchased the standard silhouette and/or color necessary. Oftentimes, they did not even notice what brand they had purchased. Participants in this profile may have exhibited a brand preference tied to a specific product by attribute, but cannot be considered loyal since they lack a commitment to a particular brand that leads them to re-purchase.

As shown in Figure 13, the majority of participants fit two of the four profiles: the highly involved brand loyal consumer and the low involved consumer with no brand loyalty. High levels of involvement require an interest in the product category and a desire to shop around and research available products. Brand loyalty is achieved through satisfaction with the product, which then creates positive attitudes and beliefs about the brand (Olsen & Jacoby, 1972).

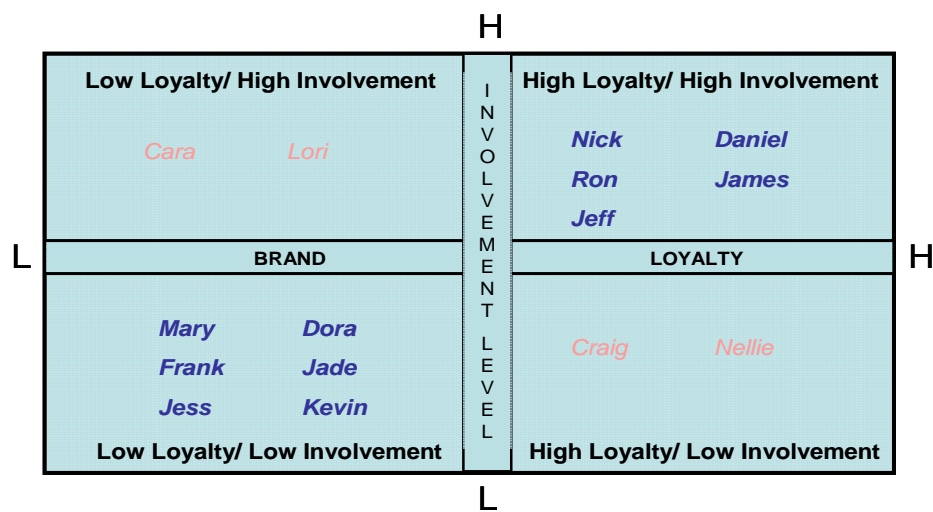


Figure 13 – Participant Categorization by Involvement Level and Brand Loyalty.

Participants who lacked brand loyalty, relied on product-based heuristics in an effort to make swift decisions in a low-interest category. This type of consumer lacks the motivation or involvement to put a great deal of effort into a lengthy decision-making process. Decisions do not reflect any preferences in terms of brand, instead purchasing begins with a search for a silhouette, color, or price. These participants were not particularly interested in this product category and purchased out of pure need, similar to purchasing something as basic as toothpaste. For them, the goal is to find something that is ‘decent’ and does the job. The four consumer profiles are further summarized by involvement level, brand loyalty, gender, evaluative criteria, and silhouette preference as in Figure 14.

Although the results of this study shed light on the various types of underwear consumers, more research on these profiles is needed. Menswear has changed significantly in the past decade. Changes can be attributed in part to an increased interest in fashion among male consumers, a trend that has partially been propelled by the development of the ‘metrosexual male’ and such television programs as “Queer Eye for the Straight Guy”, which encourage men to take an active interest in their wardrobes. Men have recently become more involved in purchasing apparel products for themselves, including their own underwear (Solution Partners, 2006). Alongside this evolution is the proliferation of product offerings. No longer is the basic white brief the only viable option for men. Silhouette choices range from longer leg boxer briefs to more engineered styles with a built in pouch or jock sling. Fabrics have also become more innovative, as

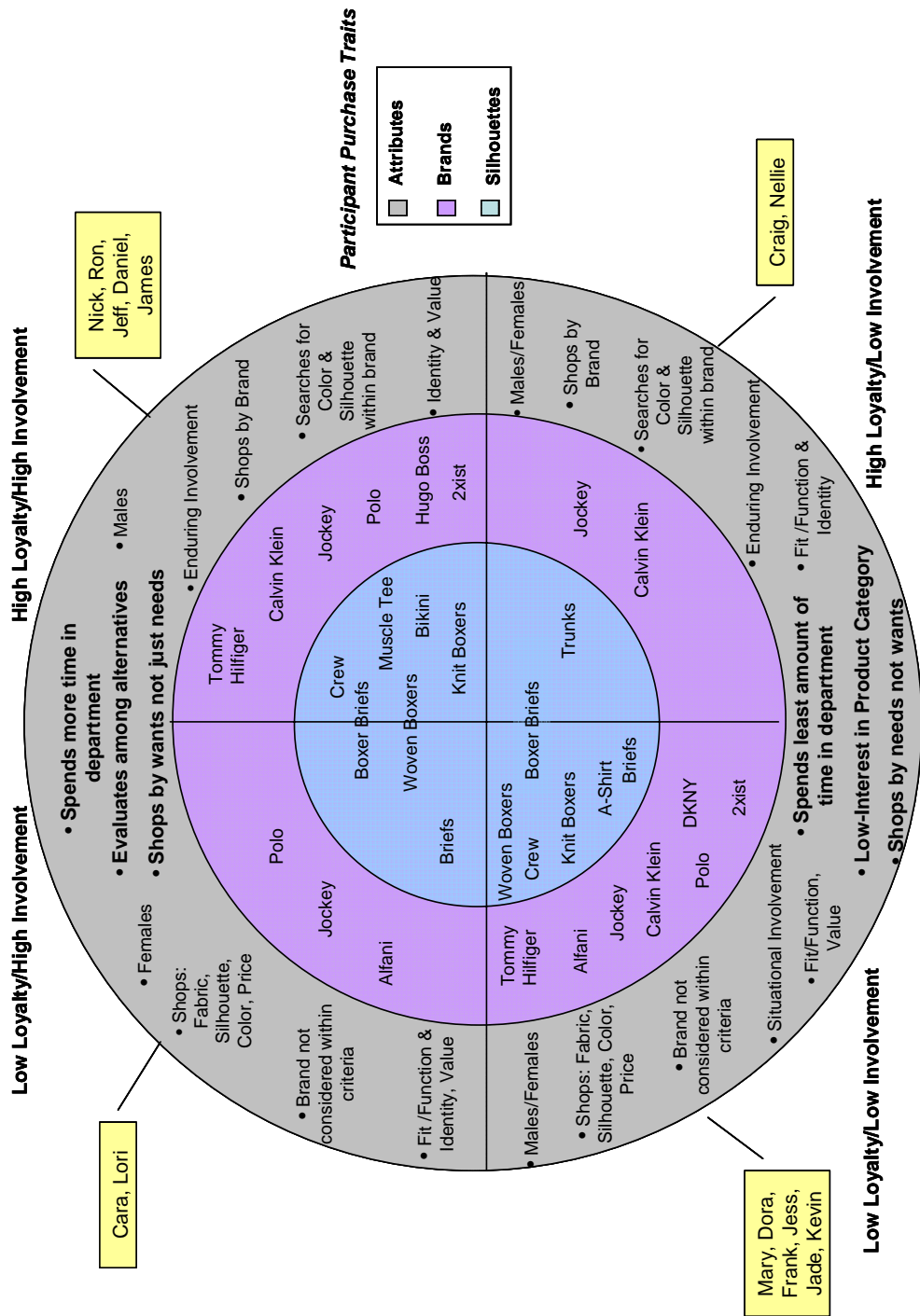


Figure 14 - Typology of Consumer Profiles: Involvement, Loyalty, Gender Evaluative Criteria and Preferred Silhouette

more products available made from luxe fabrics or high quality technical fibers such as soy, bamboo, modal, and microfiber (The Shape of Things..., 2006). Many products incorporate bright colors and novelty prints, going beyond basic white, black or grey.

It is interesting to note that the majority of participants in this study were low involvement, not brand loyal consumers yet the options available in men's underwear have exploded in recent years, reflecting a more high involvement driven consumer market. Who are these products meant for? It is possible that manufacturers developing new products for the minority of the underwear consumer population are also hoping to attract the low involvement majority. Perhaps manufacturers hope that an overabundance of new products coupled with the extinction of some 'out-dated' garment styles will compel low involved consumers to try new items, thereby sparking more of an interest in the product category. This in turn, may help to create more brand loyal consumers. Eventually, underwear products are going to serve many of the same, if not more, occasions and functions as casualwear. For example, underwear designed for a specific function such as for exercise or sports, forms an important part of the underwear market today (The Shape of Things..., 2006). This further diversification of the market makes it even more important to understand the connection between interest in product category, involvement, and brand loyalty.

Limitations and Further Research

This study has several limitations that could be addressed in further research on men's branded underwear consumers:

- Participants were purchasing underwear as part of a study so motivations may be somewhat skewed.
- Participants used a voucher, not their own money, therefore there was less purchase risk.
- Participants for this study were committed department store shoppers, therefore other channel types were not considered.

With many new and innovative men's underwear products rapidly becoming available in the marketplace, further research on consumer decision-making would benefit both designers and marketers alike.

Discovering what consumers think about silhouettes, fabrics and colors can impact the future of men's underwear as a product category. Specifically, research is needed on the perceived benefit and value of new technical fabrics. Some manufacturers are capitalizing on the popularity of these items and are even going as far as to add aromatherapy, copper, or micro-encapsulated fragrances to underwear which are meant to be absorbed into the wearer's skin. Much of this new technology is being provided with the assumption that the wearer does not need to be convinced of the benefit. But will consumers deem these new fabrications a necessity or value their functions/benefits? Will they be willing to spend the money on these 'enhanced' garments?

Further understanding of the role of promotions, especially in the case of new products, is also needed. As was found in this study, consumers are not always willing to spend money on a new product if there is a perceived risk of dissatisfaction, but conversely were happy to do so if it was little to no risk. Findings of this study

suggest trial offers should be created with caution, however, as new or promotional garments should be paired with similar products. For example, a consumer who buys white cotton briefs would be unlikely to wear red, low-rise bikinis, even for free. Manufacturers would benefit by understanding the limits of consumer interest in product innovation, whether in terms of silhouette, color, or fabric.

Because this study looked only at consumers who buy men's underwear at department stores, research on men's underwear via other retail channels is needed. An understanding of the decision-making process involved in purchasing underwear on the internet or at mass merchandisers is needed. Moreover, little research exists which examines men's underwear consumers of various demographic groups based on age, ethnicity, or income.

Today's consumer tends to shop on their own without the aid of sales staff. However, intimate apparel product packaging often makes it difficult to fully evaluate a product. Since trying on underwear is not generally done, marketers need to examine the use of advertisements to provide necessary product information. Response to such advertisements may depend on consumer type, in that for highly involved consumers, packaging text may be more useful, while for low involved consumers a visual image may be what is needed. Research is needed to determine what type of communication, text or image-based, works best for different consumers given the product category, including how to optimize in-store visual merchandising aids. Resources for product information and education, especially considering the rapid advances in technical fabrics now available in the marketplace, may benefit those consumers looking for new and

innovative underwear products. With the proliferation of fabric choices now available in the men's underwear market, research on consumer knowledge is important to aid in the development of technically shaped or fabricated garments. As this study found, consumers can become easily overwhelmed by all the available choices, but when provided with specific product information it is possible that they might be willing to try something new.

Similarly, further research in the area of silhouette choice is needed. As this study found, many consumers purchase underwear based on silhouette. Underwear manufacturers are providing multiple silhouettes for different occasions. But is this necessary, or are there already too many choices?

Lastly, the connection between innerwear and outerwear via brand name needs further investigation. How brand influences decision-making across apparel product categories, such as innerwear, and casualwear, is an important factor in need of investigation. Is a brand loyal consumer who purchases Polo boxer briefs only going to purchase Polo brand jeans or luggage? Would lifestyle marketing, such as tying in Polo casualwear with Polo innerwear, necessarily resonate with the men's underwear consumer? Further research could address such questions and provide a firm foundation for addressing the needs of the men's branded underwear consumer.

Summary

This chapter discussed the findings of the interpretation relative to the purpose and objectives of the study. Brand, levels of involvement, and gender were discussed as

concepts important to the underwear consumer's decision-making process. In light of study limitations, areas in need of further exploration and research were presented.

REFERENCES

- Askin, E. (2004, May 10). A Brief Message; Just Four Words: Performance. Comfort. Sexy Silhouettes. *Daily News and Record*, 13.
- Assael, H. (2004). *Consumer Behavior*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Assael, H. (n.d.). *Consumer Behavior*. Retrieved September 06, 2006 from. <http://college.hmco.com/business/assael/consumer/1e/students/glossary/index.html>
- Bailey, E. (2005, May 30). The New Underworld. *Daily News and Record*, 21.
- Barki, H., & Hartwick, J. (1989). Rethinking the Concept of User Involvement. *MIS Quarterly*, 3(1), 53-63.
- Bridges E., & Briesch, R. (2006). The 'Nag Factor' and Children's Product Categories. *International Journal of Advertising*, 25(2), 157-187.
- Bowen, L., & Chaffee, S. (1974). Product Involvement and Pertinent Advertising Appeals. *Journalism Quarterly*, 51, 613-621.
- Brown, W. (1950). The Determination of Factors Influencing Brand Choice. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 14(5), 699-706.
- Browne, B., & Kaldenberg, D. (1997). Conceptualizing Self-Monitoring: Links to Materialism and Product Involvement. *Journal of Marketing*, 14(1), 31-44.

- Capelaci, S. (2006, January 31). Where the Boys Are; Men's Underwear Goes Beyond A Brief Rebellion. *The Toronto Sun*, 40.
- Carpenter, J., & Fairhurst, A. (2005). Consumer Shopping Value, Satisfaction, and Loyalty for Retail Apparel Brands. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management*, 9(3), 256-269.
- Chao, P., & Gupta, P. (1995). Information Search and Efficiency of Consumer Choices of New Cars: Country-of-Origin-Effects. *International Marketing Review*, 12(6), 47-59
- Chen-Yu, H., & Kincade, D. (2001). Effects of the Product Image at Three Stages of the Consumer Decision Process for Apparel Products: Alternative Evaluation, Purchase and Post- Purchase. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management*, 5(1), 29-43.
- Chernev, A. (2006). Decision Focus and Consumer Choice Among Assortments. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 33, 50-58.
- Cobb-Walgren, C., Ruble, C., & Donthu, N. (1995). Brand equity, Brand Preference, and Purchase Intent. *Journal of Advertising*, 24(3), 25-40.
- Craig-Lees, M. (1998). The Brand Concept and Australian Consumer Behavior Texts: A Review. *Journal of Product and Brand Management*, 7(6), 568-570.
- Dhar, R. (1997). Consumer Preference for a No-Choice Option. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 24(2), 215-231.

- Dholakia, R., Pedersen, B., & Hikmet, N. (1995). Married Males and Shopping: Are They Sleeping Partners? *Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, 23(3), 27-33.
- Escalas, J (2004). Imagine Yourself in the Product: Mental Stimulation, Narrative Transportation and Persuasion. *Journal of Advertising*, 33(2), 37-49.
- Ewing, M. (2000). Brand and Retailer Loyalty: Past Behavior and Future Intentions. *Journal of Product and Brand Management*, 9(2), 120-127.
- Fader, P.S., & Mc Alister, L. (1990). An Elimination by Aspects Model of Consumer Response to Promotion Calibrated on UPC Scanner Data. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 27(3), 322-332.
- Fishbein, M. & Icek, A. (1975). *Belief, Attitude, Intention, and Behavior: An Introduction to Theory and Research*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.
- Forney, J.C., Park, E.J., & Brandon, L. (2005). Effects of Evaluative Criteria on Fashion Brand Extension. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management*, 9(2), 156-165.
- Fournier, S. (1998). Consumers and Their Brands: Developing Relationship Theory in Consumer Research. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 24(4), 343.
- Frank, R. (1962). Brand Choice as a Probability Process. *Journal of Business*, 35(1), 43-56.
- Freshpair.com. *National Underwear Day*. Retrieved June 15, 2005 from http://freshpair.com/underwear_day.html

- Hajewski, D. (2005, April). Chaps Helps Boost Kohl's Men's Results. *Daily News and Record*.
- Harmon, S., & Hill, J. (2003). Gender and Coupon Use. *The Journal of Product and Brand Management*, 12(2), 166-180.
- Hart, E. (1994, February 11). Designers Going Undercover. *Daily News and Record*, 32.
- Hart, C., & Dewsnap, B. (2001). An Exploratory Study of the Consumer Decision Process for Intimate Apparel. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management*, 5(2), 110-119
- Heilman, C., Bowman, D., & Wright, G. (2000). The Evolution of Brand Preferences and Choice Behaviors of Consumers New to a Market. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 37, 139-150.
- His Room. (2006). Retrieved July 10 2006, from <http://www.hisroom.com/about-mens-underwear-glossary.aspx>
- Hogg, M., & Garrow, J. (2003). Gender, Identity and the Consumption of Advertising. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, 6, 160-174.
- Houston, M., & Rothschild, M. (1978). Conceptual and Methodological Perspectives on Involvement. Chicago: *American Marketing Association*, 184-187.
- Jamal, A. & Goode, M. (2001). Consumers and Brands: A Study of the Impact of Self-Image Congruence on Brand Preference and Satisfaction. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 19(7), 482-492.

- Johnson, M. (1989). The Differential Processing of Product Category and Noncomparable Choice Alternatives. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 16(3), 300-309.
- Kacen, J. (2000). Girl Power and Boy Nature: The Past, Present, and Paradisal Future of Consumer Gender Identity. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 18(6), 345-355.
- Kassarjian, H. (1981). Low Involvement- A Second Look. *Advances in Consumer Research*, 8, 31-34.
- Keller, L. (1993). Conceptualizing, Measuring, and Managing Customer-Based Brand Equity. *Journal of Marketing*, 57(1), 1-22.
- Kvale, S. (1996). *Interviews: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing*. Sage Publications Inc.
- Laroche, M. (2003). The Knowledge-Experience-Evaluation Relationship: A Structural Equations Modeling Test of Gender Differences. *Canadian Journal of Administrative Sciences*, 20(3), 246.
- Latest Underwear Marries Fit with Fashion. (2005, November 30). *Daily News and Record*, 39.
- Lattin, J., & Bucklin, R. (1989). Reference Effects of Price and Promotion on Brand Choice Behavior. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 26, 299-310.
- Laurent, G., & Kapferer, J. (1985). Measuring Consumer Involvement Profiles. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 22(1), 41-53.

- Lowry, R. (1997). Ab Nauseam. *National Review*.
- Merriam, S. (1998). *Qualitative Research: Case Study Applications*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Moschis, G.P., & Moore, R.L. (1978). An Analysis of the Acquisition of Some Consumer Competences among Adolescents. *Journal of Consumer Affairs*, 12, 277-292.
- Mohamadou, F., Sukant, K., & Octavio, R. (2005). US Consumer Purchasing Decisions and Demand for Apparel. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management*, 9(4), 367-379.
- National Panel Diary Inc. (NPD). (2004). *Market Insights: Panties and Underwear Bottoms*.
- _____. (2005). *Market Insights: Panties and Underwear Bottoms*.
- _____. (2006). *Market Insights: Panties and Underwear Bottoms*.
- Oh, J., & Fiorito, S. (2002). Korean Women's Clothing Brand Loyalty. *Journal of Fashion Marketing*, 6(3), 206-222.
- Olshavsky, R., & Granbois, D. (1979). Consumer Decision-Making-Fact or Fiction? *Journal of Consumer Research*, 6(2), 93-100.
- Oliver, R. (1999). Whence Consumer Loyalty. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 36, 33-44.

- Olsen, J., & Jacoby, J. (1972). Cue Utilization in the Quality Perception Process. *Association for Consumer Research*, 167-179.
- Papatla, P., & Krishnamurthi, L. (1996). Measuring the Dynamic Effects of Promotions on Brand Choice. *Journal of Marketing Resesearch*, 33(2), 20-35.
- Patton, M. (1990). *Qualitative Evaluations and Research Methods*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Petty, R., & Cacioppo, J. (1981). Issue Involvement as a Moderator of the Effects of Attitude on Advertising Content and Context. *Advances in Consumer Research*, 8, 20-24.
- Petty, R, Cacioppo, J., & Schumann, D. (1983). Central and Peripheral Routes to Advertising Effectiveness: The Moderating Role of Involvement. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 10(2), 135-146.
- Pullins, E., Reid, D., & Plank, R. (2004). Gender issues in Buyer-Seller Relationships: Does Gender Matter in Purchasing. *Journal of Supply Chain Management*, 40-48.
- Quester, P., & Lim, A.L. (2003). Product Involvement/Brand Loyalty: Is there a link? *Journal of Product and Brand Management*, 12(1), 22-38.
- Quixote. (2005). *Polo Marketing Research: Focus Group and Personal Interviews*. Sara Lee Insite Intranet. Retrieved on 6/15/2005.
- _____. (2006). *Polo Marketing Research. Focus Group and Personal Interviews*. HBI Intranet. Retrieved on 7/15/2006.

Richins, M., & Bloch, P. (1986). After the New Wears Off: The Temporal Context of Product Involvement. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 13(2), 280-285.

Rothschild, M. (1984). Perspective in Involvement: Current Problems and Future Directions. *Advances in Consumer Research*, 11, 216-217.

Schiffman, L., & Kanuck, L. (2004). *Consumer Behavior*. Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall.

Seggev, E. (1970). Brand Assortment and Consumer Brand Choice. *Journal of Marketing*, 34(4), 18-24.

Seo, J., Hathcote, J., & Sweaney, A. (2001). Casualwear Shopping Behavior of College Men in Georgia, USA. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management*, 5(3), 208-222.

Silayoi, P., & Speece, M. (2004). Packaging and purchase decisions. An exploratory Study on the Impact of Involvement Level and Time Pressure. *British Food Journal*, 106(8), 607-628.

Slama, M., & Tashchian, A. (1985). Selected Socio-Economic and Demographic Characteristics Associated with Purchase Involvement. *Journal of Marketing*, 49(1), Winter 72-82.

SLU Market Research. (2004). *Underwear Sales Data: Market Insights*. Sara Lee Branded Apparel Research.

_____. (2006). *Underwear Attitude and Usage Data*. Sara Lee Branded Apparel Research.

Solomon, M. (1999). *Consumer Behavior (4th ed.)*. Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall.

Solomon, M. (2006, September) *Consumer Decision-Making Process*. Retrieved September 10 2006, from http://www.pearsoned.ca/highered/divisions/virtual_tours/solomon/Solomon_CH06

Solution Partners. (2006). *Men's Underwear Attitude and Usage Segmentation; Polo Ralph Lauren Brand Review*. Sara Lee Branded Apparel Research.

Spiggle, S. (1994). Analysis and Interpretation of Qualitative Data in Consumer Research. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 21, 491-503.

The DNR List: Under Scores. (2005, May 30). *Daily News and Record*, 32.

The Shape of Things: Trends in Men's Underwear. (2006, May 29). *Daily News and Record*, 22.

Underwood R.L., Klein, N.M., & Burke R. (2001). Packaging Communication: Attentional Effects of Product Imagery. *Journal of Product and Brand Management*, 10(7), 403-22.

Vanderbilt (n.d.). *Consumer Behavior*. Retrieved February, 15 2004, from http://vanderbilt.edu/research/papers/html/studentprojects/best_practise_apparel.retail.

Vintage Skivvies. (2006). *Underwear Glossary*. Retrieved July 01 2006, from <http://www.vintageskivvies.com/pages/archives/glossary.html>

Wikipedia. (2006). *Brand: Wikipedia Web-based Encyclopedia*. Retrieved June 02 2006, from [Http://en.wikipedia.org/brand](http://en.wikipedia.org/brand).

Wikipedia. (2006). *Buyer Decision Process.: Wikipedia Web-based Encyclopedia*. Retrieved June 02 2006, from [Http://en.wikipedia.org/buyer](http://en.wikipedia.org/buyer).

Wolin, L., & Korgaonkar, P. (2003). Web Advertising: Gender Differences in Beliefs, Attitudes and Behavior. *Internet Research: Electronic Networking Applications and Policy*, 13(5), 375-385.

Zaichkowsky, J. (1986). Conceptualizing Involvement. *Journal of Advertising*, 15(2), 4-14.

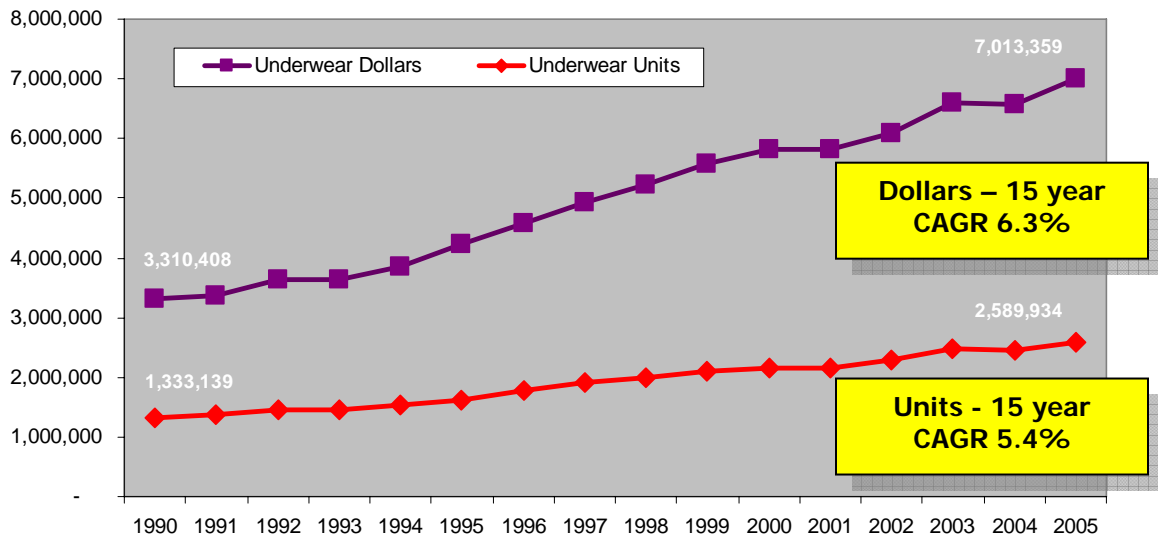
APPENDIX A

UNDERWEAR TOTAL CATEGORY GROWTH GRAPH

Underwear Total Category Growth

	<u>15 Year CAGR</u>	
Total Category	<u>Units</u> 5.4%	<u>Dollars</u> 6.3%

- ▶ **Underwear dollar growth (6.3%) is slightly above the growth rate for personal consumption (5.6%).**
- ▶ **Underwear dollar growth (6.3%) also outpaces the growth of total clothing expenditures (4.8%)**
- ▶ **Underwear unit growth (5.4%) is five times the population growth (1%)**



Source: SLU Attitude and Usage Study 2005-2006.

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. Describe the choice that you just made in men's underwear. Why did you select this product?
2. How important was brand name in your decision?
3. Does the decision you made today reflect a similar process during past purchases of men's underwear?
4. In the past 12 months, how many purchases of men's underwear have you made?
5. Describe the type of men's underwear you usually buy- style, fiber/fabric, color or silhouette.
6. Tell me about your typical purpose in buying men's underwear? Gift? Specific outfits? Occasions? Needs?
7. Rank the evaluative criteria that are most important to you in purchasing men's underwear.

Product based: Color, fabric, price, brand, silhouette, and packaging.

Environment based: Promotions, fixture placement, store layout, and product availability.

8. If you went to the store to purchase what you purchased today and it wasn't available, what would you do? Would you go elsewhere (on-line, other store), buy something else?
9. Have you ever been dissatisfied with underwear you purchased? Why? Tell me about what you did to resolve this.
10. When you are deciding among different types of men's underwear – how important is price to you? Does it relate to quality in your mind?
11. What is most important to you when purchasing a brand of men's underwear?
12. Is there anything that we didn't talk about today that you feel is important to purchasing men's underwear?

APPENDIX C

RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

Recruitment Script

Hello, my name is [INSERT NAME]. I'm with Quixote Group, a local marketing research company. We are recruiting participants on behalf of Rosanna Shouli, a student at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, who is conducting a research study on the men's clothing and underwear purchases and would like to hear your views. In order to hear them first-hand, she will be conducting interviews to be held on: [INSERT DATE AND TIME]. Do you mind if I ask you some preliminary questions to determine your eligibility for the study?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	
No	<input type="checkbox"/>	THANK AND TERMINATE

Are you the primary purchaser of men's apparel for your household? [CHECK RESPONSE]

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	
No	<input type="checkbox"/>	THANK AND TERMINATE

Have you purchased men's branded apparel at a department store in the past twelve months? [CHECK RESPONSE]

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	
No	<input type="checkbox"/>	THANK AND TERMINATE

One week prior to the interview you will receive a \$50 voucher to spend in the men's underwear department, and you will be asked to purchase items with the voucher prior to the interview and are allowed to keep the items that you select. This process should take no longer than sixty minutes.

During the interview you will be asked to discuss the shopping experience and other relevant topics. The interview will last approximately one hour and you will need to bring the items you purchased to the facility to serve as the basis for the interview.

No one will attempt to sell you anything and no one will call on you as a result of your participation.

This is an important research effort and we hope that you will be part of it. Can we schedule your participation? [CHECK RESPONSE]

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	
No	<input type="checkbox"/>	THANK AND TERMINATE

Prior to arriving at the interview location, should you have any questions about the research or the interview procedures, please feel free to contact either Chuck Mattina of Quixote Group at 336-544-2402 or Rosanna Shouli at 336-926-4452.

APPENDIX D

CONSENT FORMS

**UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO
CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN PARTICIPANT: Long Form**

Project Title: Exploring the Decision-Making Process of the Men's Branded Underwear Consumer

Project Director: Rosanna Shouli

Participant's Name: _____

DESCRIPTION AND EXPLANATION OF PROCEDURES:

The goal of this project is to explore the decision making process of men's branded underwear consumers. To address this goal, perceptions of male and female consumers will be explored.

If you agree to this study, you will be interviewed concerning your shopping experiences in the men's branded underwear product category. The interview will be audio-taped and will last approximately 30 to 60 minutes.

You may terminate the interview or audio-taping at any time. You may ask any questions you may have about the interview or study at any time. Full confidentiality of participation will be maintained. Actual names will not be used in any written accounts of the research project. Digital audio files will be saved on the investigator's computer and password protected. Any written transcriptions of the interviews will be kept in a locked cabinet in the faculty sponsor's office. Data will be disposed of via shredding and the digital audio files will be erased within three years from the initial start date of data collection.

RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS:

It is anticipated that there are no psychological, physical, or sociological risks involved in participating in this study.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS:

The benefits of participating in the study include contributing to the understanding of the decision-making process of the men's underwear consumer. The results of this study will provide an in-depth understanding of the motivations and involvement levels of this particular consumer group and shed light on the criteria important in their evaluation of this product category. Participants will receive a \$50 voucher for the purchase of men's underwear.

By signing this consent form, you agree that you understand the procedures and any risks and benefits involved in this research. You are free to refuse to participate or to withdraw your consent to participate in this research at any time without penalty or prejudice; your participation is entirely voluntary. Your privacy will be protected because you will not be identified by name as a participant in this project.

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro Institutional Review Board, which insures that research involving people follows federal regulations, has approved the research and this consent form. Questions regarding your rights as a participant in this project can be answered by calling Mr. Eric Allen at (336) 256-1482. Questions regarding the research itself will be answered by Rosanna Shouli by calling 336-926-4452. Any new information that develops during the project will be provided to you if the information might affect your willingness to continue participation in the project.

By signing this form, you are agreeing to participate in the project described to you by Rosanna Shouli.

Participant's Signature*

Date