

3.3.2.5 Personality, values and life-style

As could be seen in Figure 3.4, personality, values and life-style form the final component of individual differences. Values represent the beliefs of consumers, personality the way consumers normally behave and life-style consumers' situation in life. These three individual differences will be discussed briefly below.

A) Personality

Engel et al. (1995: 433) define personality, from a consumer study point of view, as: "... consistent responses to environmental stimuli". Schiffman & Kanuk (1997: 114) provide a more comprehensive definition of personality by defining it as: "... those inner psychological characteristics that both determine and reflect how a person responds to his or her environment". Engel et al. (1995: 433) continue by explaining that an individual's personality provides for orderly and coherently related experiences and behaviour. Personality, therefore, can be viewed as the particular pattern of organisation that makes individuals unique.

Schiffman & Kanuk (1997: 114) explain that in the study of personality, three distinct properties are of importance, namely that personality reflects individual differences, is constant and enduring and can change.

Individual differences indicate that consumer personalities differ, since inner characteristics that constitute an individual's personality are a unique combination of factors. No two individuals are therefore exactly alike. Many individuals do, however, appear to be similar in terms of a single personality characteristic, for example consumers may be described as either "high" or "low" in sociability.

Noting that consumer personalities are consistent and enduring suggests that it is unreasonable for marketers to attempt to change consumer personalities to conform to certain products. At best marketers should learn which personality characteristics influence specific consumer responses and attempt to appeal to those traits.

Although consumer personality tends to be consistent and enduring, it may change under certain circumstances. For example, an individual's personality may be changed by major life events, for instance the birth of a child, the death of a loved one or a divorce. Important to note is that the change in personality is not purely based on an abrupt change in the consumer's life but is also part of a gradual maturing process.

Engel et al. (1995: 434) note that three major theories or approaches to the study of personality have been used in consumer research, namely psychoanalytic, socio-psychological and trait-factor. Assael (1995: 379 – 382) adds an additional personality theory, namely the self-concept theory.

The psychoanalytic theory was discussed in greater detail in Section 2.3.4 of Chapter 2 where the Freudian psychoanalytical model was discussed. Briefly, the **psychoanalytical theory** suggests that the human personality system consists of three components, namely the id, ego and superego. The id represents the source of psychic energy and is concerned with immediate gratification of biological and instinctual needs. The superego acts as the ethical constraint on behaviour by representing societal or personal norms. The ego is responsible for mediating the hedonic needs of the id and the moralistic prohibitions of the superego. Assael (1995: 375) adds to the above by explaining that psychoanalytic theory stresses the unconscious nature of personality as a result from childhood conflicts.

The **socio-psychological theory** was discussed in Chapter 2 under the Veblenian social-psychological model (Section 2.3.2). Briefly, the theory recognises the interdependence of the individual and society. The individual attempts to meet the needs of society, whereas society helps the individual to achieve its goals. According to Engel et al. (1995: 434), the theory is not exclusively sociological or psychological but rather a combination of both. The socio-psychological personality theory differs from the psychoanalytic theory in two ways. Firstly, the most important determinants in shaping personality are social variables rather than biological instincts. Secondly, behavioural motivation is directed to meet these different needs.

The **trait-factor theory** provides a quantitative approach to personality, suggesting that an individual's personality is composed of definite predispositional attributes called traits. Schiffman & Kanuk (1997: 125 –126) and Engel et al. (1995: 436) define a trait as: "... any distinguishable, relatively enduring way in which one individual differs from another". Examples of personality traits include a relaxed style, sociability and amount of internal control.

Three factors delineate the trait-factor theory (Engel et al., 1995: 436). Firstly, it assumes that traits are common to many individuals and vary in absolute amounts between different individuals. Secondly, traits are relatively stable and exert fairly universal effects on behaviour despite of the environmental situation. Finally, it is assumed that traits can be implied from measuring behavioural indicators.

By focusing on trait-factor theory, marketers attempt to find a relationship between a set of personality variables and assorted consumer behaviour, such as product choice, purchase, fear and social influence, attitude change and risk taking.

Assael (1995: 379) explains that the **self-concept (or self-image) theory** suggests that individuals have a concept of themselves of who they think they are (called the actual self) and a concept of who they think they would like to be (the ideal self). The self-concept theory is, therefore, related to psychoanalytic theory, since the actual self is similar to the ego and the ideal self is similar to the superego. In addition to the actual and ideal self, the self-concept theory identifies an extended self. The three different concepts of self will briefly be discussed below.

The concept of the **actual self** implies that consumer purchases are influenced by the image they have of themselves. Consumers, therefore, attain self-consistency by purchasing products that are perceived similar to the self-concept. It is therefore suggested that there is congruence between brand image and self-image.

The **ideal self** relates to the individual's self-esteem, implying that the greater the difference is between the actual self and the ideal self, the lower the self-esteem of the individual will be. Consumer purchase behaviour could therefore be influenced by selecting products that will enhance self-esteem, for example a consumer wishing to portray a better image could purchase more formal jackets instead of windbreakers and cardigans or decide to change to a different after-shave.

The **extended self** incorporates some of the more important possessions of individuals in their self-concept, since what consumers own reflects their personalities. Assael (1995: 381) explains the correlation between personality and the extended self by simply stating that consumers are what they wear and use.

Schiffman & Kanuk (1997: 137) add two other types of self-concept, namely the social self-image (considering how individuals feel others view them) and the

ideal social self-image (representing how individuals would like others to see them).

In conclusion to consumer personality, Engel et al. (1995: 440) note that the relevance of forming an understanding of consumer personality is based on the assistance it provides to explain how different consumers behave in the decision-making process.

Assael (1995: 375) supports this view by stating that marketers can often base positioning strategies on different consumer personalities. For example, consumers that diet in an effort to conform to group norms, whereas others may diet because of internalised rather than group norms. Hawkins et al. (2001: 375) conclude that consumers will, based on their personality, purchase products that portray a specific “product personality”. Consumers may, therefore, choose between different types of perfume that support personality traits, such as conservative, extravagant, sensuality or playful. The personality of brands is often portrayed in different advertisements of marketers, attempting to make consumers identify with the product personality.

B) Personal values

Values, according to Engel et al. (1995: 442), represent consumer beliefs about life and acceptable behaviour and provide another explanation of why consumers vary in their decision-making. Values also express the goals that motivate consumers and appropriate ways to achieve those goals.

Important to note is that values can either be regarded as being personal or social. Social values were discussed in Section 3.3.1.1, where values were viewed from a cultural point of view. Engel et al. (1995: 443) continue by stating that social values differ from personal values in the sense that they define “normal” behaviour for a society or a group, whereas personal values define

“normal” behaviour for an individual. It should be noted that social values have a strong influence on personal values. As explained above, values describe goals and ways to achieve them, many of which are derived from the society in which the individual is born and lives in.

Engel et al. (1995: 444) explain that although individuals are exposed to social values of many different groups to which they belong (for example the nation, family and religion), they pick and choose from social values to develop their own values. Consumers’ personal values are, therefore, ultimately not indicated by statements but by their own decisions.

C) Life-style

Assael (1995: 384) explains that life-style reflects a mode of living that is identified by how people spend their time (their activities), what they consider in their environment (their interests) and what they think of themselves and the world around them (their opinions). Engel et al. (1995: 449) support this view by defining life-style as: “... patterns in which people live and spend time and money”. According to Arnould et al. (2002: 273), lifestyle suggests: “... a patterned way of life into which consumers fit various products, activities, and resources”.

Assael (1995: 384) expresses the opinion that life-style variables are also known as psychographic characteristics, since attitudes, interests and opinions are considered psychologically oriented variables that can be quantified. Table 3.1 indicates a number of activities, interests and opinions that define life-style.

TABLE 3.1: SOME ACTIVITIES, INTERESTS AND OPINIONS THAT DEFINE LIFE-STYLE

Activities	Interests	Opinions
Work	Family	Personal relations
Hobbies	Home	Social issues
Social events	Job	Politics
Vacation	Community	Business
Entertainment	Recreation	Economics
Club membership	Fashion	Education
Community	Food	Products
Shopping	Media	Future
Sport	Achievements	Culture

Source: Assael (1995: 384)

Engel et al. (1995: 448) suggest that marketers need to understand the activities, interests and opinions that influence life-style, since marketers often attempt to influence consumer purchasing behaviour through life-style marketing. Marketers would therefore attempt to relate a product to everyday experiences of the target consumers by means of advertising campaigns, depicting how a specific product relates to and can be used in everyday situations.

Engel et al. (1995: 454) note that the values and life-style (VALS) programme is probably the most widely used approach to life-style marketing. Two VALS programmes can be distinguished, namely VALS 1 and VALS 2. The earlier VALS programme, VALS 1, identified three broad consumer segments based on cultural values, namely outer-directed, inner-directed and need-driven (Assael, 1995: 400 and Engel et al., 1995: 455).

According to VALS theory, outer-directed consumers are those who purchase products based on the appearance thereof and what others think. Inner-directed consumers, on the other hand, purchase products to meet their own inner wants rather than to respond to others' cultural norms. The final category, need-driven

consumers, is characterised by severely restricted discretionary income, therefore motivated to purchase what is needed rather than by choice.

VALS 2 was developed since the categories suggested by VALS 1 were considered to be too general. According to Schiffman & Kanuk (1995: 70), Solomon (1996: 589) and Assael (1995: 402), VALS 2 identified eight groups that are split into two dimensions.

The vertical dimension represents consumers' resources (money, education, self-confidence and energy). The horizontal dimension identifies the three different ways consumers see the world, namely principle-oriented consumers (guided by their views of how the world is or should be), status-oriented consumers (consider the opinions of others) and action-oriented consumers (showing a desire for activity, variety and risk-taking).

According to Assael (1995: 403), marketers have used VALS to develop market segmentation, media and advertising strategies. If demographics prove insufficient to derive market segments, marketers may decide to use VALS categorisation for market segmentation purposes. By viewing consumer life-styles, marketers can "fine-tune" marketing segmentation and marketing campaigns, since many products, although showing consumer commonalities as far as demographics are concerned (for example income), can be better positioned in accordance with consumer life-styles. For example, a marketer for expensive outdoor watches may find it far more useful to consider consumer life-styles and the categorisation proposed by VALS for segmentation purposes rather than only using demographics.

The VALS typology can also be used for media selection, since consumer life-styles often dictate the media that they are exposed to. For example, the achievers and fulfilleds seldom watch television, and when they do they will watch news programmes. Marketers can therefore decide to either advertise

during news programmes (depending on the available budget) or alternatively select other media, for example print advertising.

Marketers can also attempt to get consumers to identify with a portrayed life-style in advertising, hoping to influence purchase decisions based on association with a life-style. For example, the cigarette industry often attempts to associate its products with life-style. Virtually all cigarette marketers advertising their brands in South Africa attempt to identify a specific life-style with their brand, for example Camel portraying an outdoor, adventurous life-style.

The first stage of the consumer decision-making process (need recognition) was discussed in great detail in Section 3.3. The discussion also showed how environmental influences and individual difference influence not only the need recognition process but the entire consumer decision-making process. Section 3.4 will focus on the second stage of the process, namely search.

3.4 SEARCH

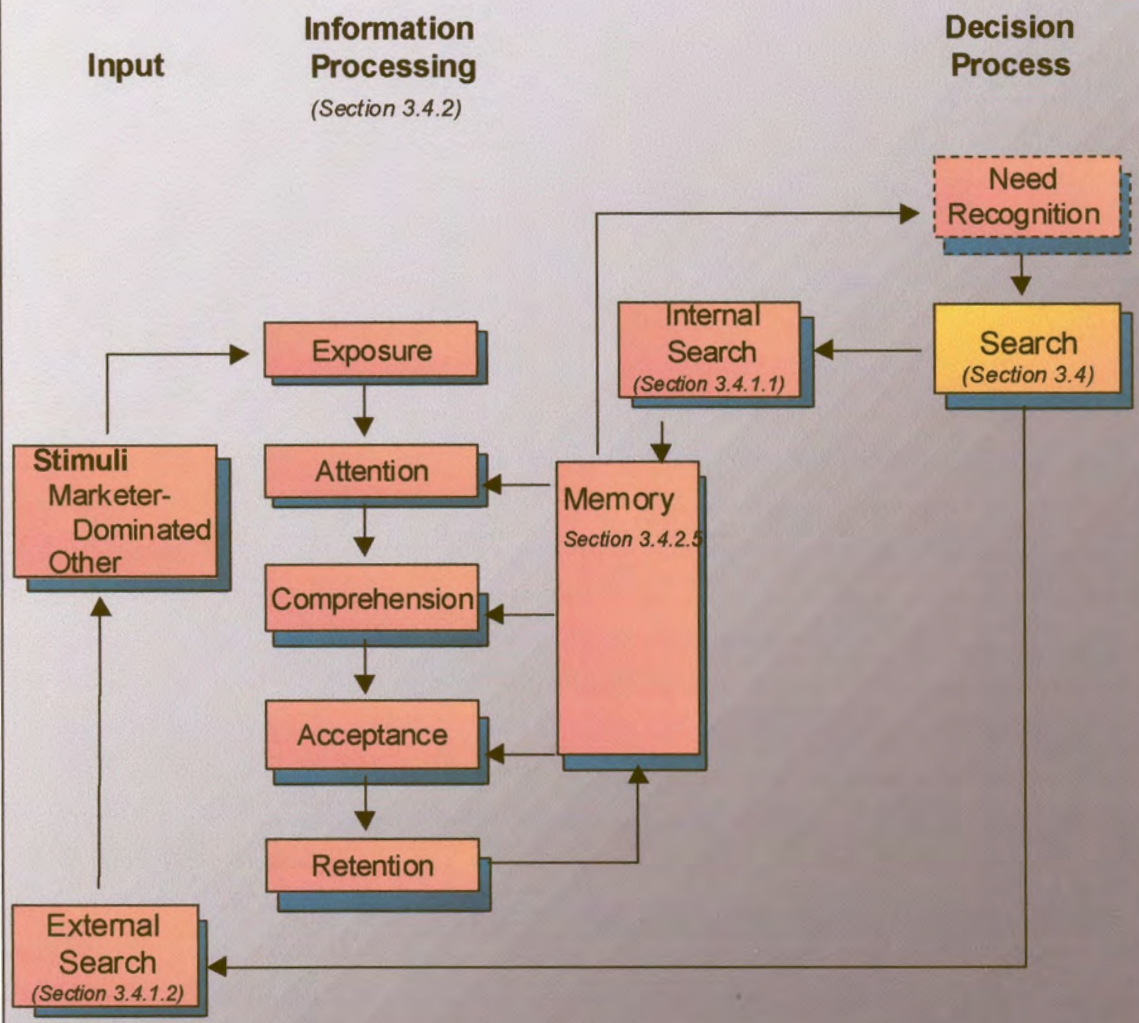
In the consumer decision-making process need recognition is followed by search, comprising acquisition of information and information processing.

Figure 3.7 provides a graphical presentation of the search process together with an indication of the sections in which the individual components of the search process will be discussed under Section 3.4 of this chapter.

As can be seen from Figure 3.7, based on the model of consumer behaviour proposed by Engel, Blackwell & Miniard (see Section 2.4.3.5 in Chapter 2), the search process is influenced by environmental influences and individual differences. These influences were covered in detail when the need recognition process was discussed. It can, therefore, be accepted that all these influences affect the search process in one way or another. A number of examples will be

referred to in an attempt to indicate the possible impact of some of these influences on the search process.

FIGURE 3.7: SEARCH



Source: Compiled from Engel et al. (1995: 149, 150 & 263)

Culture and language could influence which advertisements the consumer is exposed to depending which radio station is listened to and television programmes watched. The **social class and status** of the consumer can influence which magazines are read and which television programmes watched,

which in turn has an influence on the marketing messages exposed to. For example, a person of a higher social class could possibly read National Geographic and Getaway Magazine and watch Carte Blanche, while someone from a lower class and status could read You Magazine and Personality and watch "The Bold and the Beautiful".

The **family** also influences information exposure through, for example, programmes watched on television. For example, on a Thursday night the family could watch "Seventh Heaven" in the 19h30 to 20h30 timeslot, whereas a single person could watch "The single guy" during the same timeslot. **Situational influences**, for instance time pressure, can directly influence the search process. If a consumer's fridge breaks while stocked with perishables, the consumer would most probably within a short period of time have to search for information to replace the fridge. If, however, the consumer received a substantial bonus from an employer, the consumer may engage in an extensive search for information to replace a current television set.

Individual differences can also influence the search process. For example, **consumer resources** can dictate that a consumer with more money (financial resource) could possibly purchase more expensive magazines than consumers with less money (National Geographic, Getaway, Longevity, Food and Home and House & Leisure versus only You Magazine and Personality) and watch Satellite Television in addition to National television. Consumer **knowledge** can have an important influence on the search process. If the consumer possesses substantial knowledge regarding a specific product category (for example pistols), the need for information search could be limited since information contained in memory may prove sufficient to proceed with the decision-making process.

Consumer **attitudes** could also influence the need for information search. For example, a consumer who dreads shopping would possibly also attempt to

minimise search for information. In addition to the above, if the consumer was satisfied with a previous purchase choice, the need for information search may be abolished, since the consumer will opt to purchase the same brand.

The examples indicate, in support of the model of consumer behaviour proposed by Engel, Blackwell & Miniard (1995), that all the listed environmental influences and individual differences (proposed in the model) can and do influence consumer search. The discussion below will, therefore, concentrate on the actual search process together with the components influencing the process.

Figure 3.7 indicates that the search process comprises two components, namely acquiring information (input) and information processing. These two components to the search process will be discussed in greater detail in Sections 3.4.1 and 3.4.2.

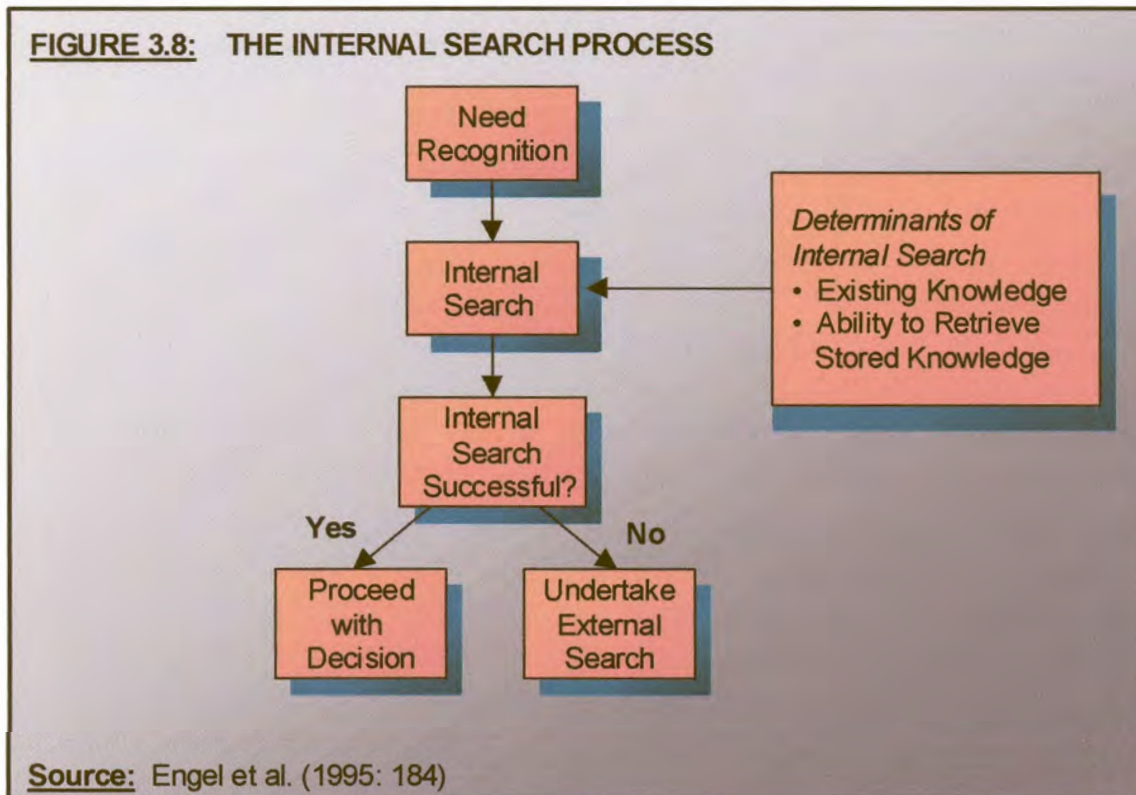
3.4.1 Acquiring information

Engel et al. (1995: 182) define search as: "... the motivated activation of knowledge stored in memory or acquisition of information from the environment". From the definition can be seen that information can be obtained either from memory or the environment. Belch and Belch (2001: 113) and Engel et al. (1995: 182) support this view by stating that search can either be internal or external in nature. Internal search refers to the retrieval of information from memory, whereas external search implies collecting information from the marketplace.

Schiffman & Kanuk (1997: 568 – 569) note an important consideration when viewing information acquisition by explaining that consumer decisions are often based on a combination of past experiences (contained in memory – internal search) and external search.

3.4.1.1 Internal search

Internal search first occurs when a need has been identified. Engel et al. (1995: 183) explain internal search by stating that it represents nothing more than a scan of the consumer's memory for decision-relevant knowledge stored in long-term memory. Solomon (1996: 275) states that through internal search consumers scan their memory to assemble information about different product alternatives. Assael (1995: 227) supports this view and adds that the process is called internal search, since the source of the information is the consumer. If sufficient information is contained in internal memory, the consumer will not continue the search process by searching for external information. Figure 3.8 indicates the internal search process and shows how the success of the search will determine the need for external search or to proceed with the decision process.



Consumers often remember a solution when fulfilling a past need and will therefore not consider obtaining external information in an attempt to satisfy a new recognised need. Schiffman & Kanuk (1997: 568) support this view by stating that past experiences may provide the consumer with adequate information to make the present choice. For example, a consumer who identifies the need to service a motor vehicle may recall the satisfactory service received from the previous service and therefore decide to use the same service outlet.

The usage of internal information depends on the quality of existing information. Consumers purchasing a product for the first time are very unlikely to possess the necessary knowledge contained in memory to be able to make a decision. Experienced consumers may also consider existing information contained in memory as being insufficient when, for example, considerable time has elapsed since the last purchase and a number of attributes associated with the product could have changed (price, new features, additional sales channels or new brands entering the market). Most probably of greater importance when considering the quality of internal information stored in memory is that consumers may forget important information from past experiences.

A final comment to the use of information contained in memory, is that the use thereof is heavily dependent on the degree of satisfaction with prior purchases.

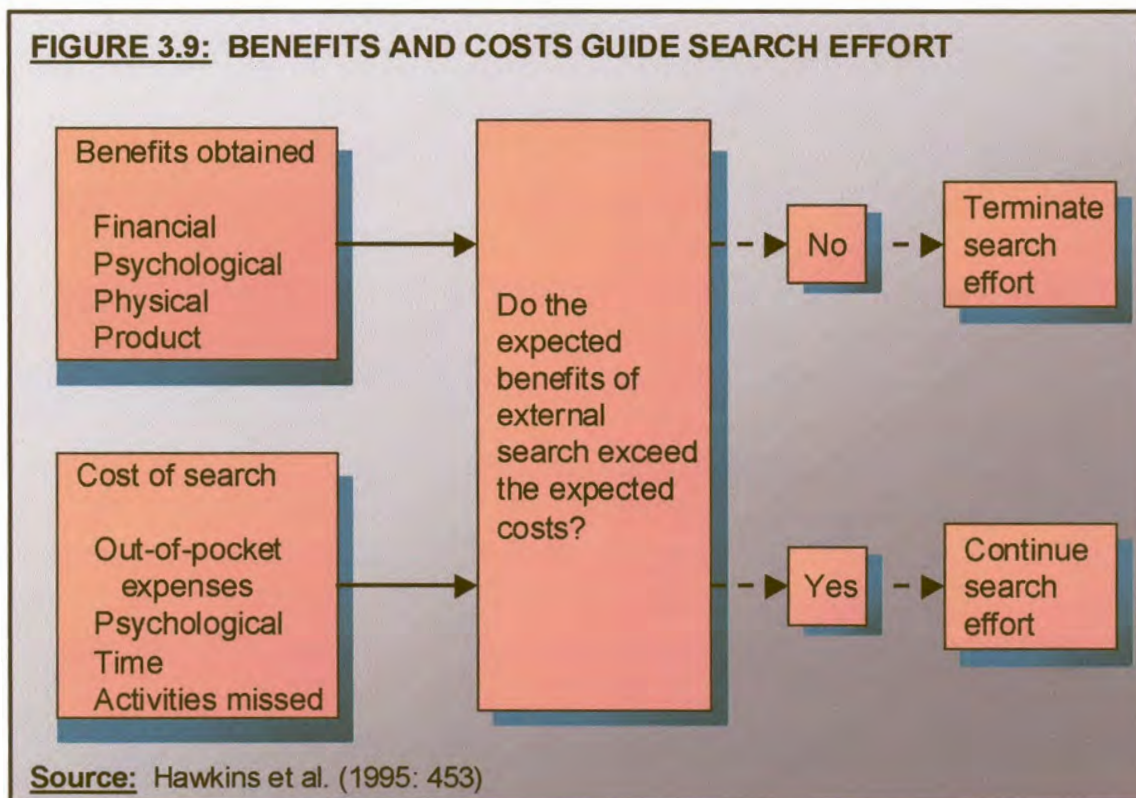
As indicated in Figure 3.8, if the consumer is satisfied with the result, internal search may prove sufficient for decision-making purposes, whereas dissatisfaction probably will lead to external search.

3.4.1.2 External search

Consumers may opt to search for information from the environment if internal search proves inadequate for decision-making purposes (Schiffman & Kanuk, 1997: 568). Assael (1995: 91) notes an important consideration when studying

the consumer search process namely that consumers do not engage in extensive information search, unless the possible benefits gained from additional information are worth the time and cost of the search.

Hawkins et al. (1995: 453) support the statement above by showing (see Figure 3.9) how the benefits that will be obtained from the search are weighted against the cost thereof.



Assael (1995: 227) explains the term “external search”, by stating that the sources of information are from the consumer’s environment (that is, external to the consumer). Consumers may, therefore, engage in external search when one of the following conditions (or a combination) apply:

- the consumer believes that alternative brands being considered are inadequate;

- the consumer has insufficient information regarding the brands being considered;
- the consumer receives information from family and friends that is contradictory to own past experiences and current available information; and
- consumers may want to confirm expectations regarding a product's performance when they are close to deciding on a particular brand.

Before continuing with the discussion, it should be noted that Section 4.3.1 in Chapter 4 is dedicated to the influence of the Internet on the search stage of the consumer decision-making process. Specific reference will be made to search tools offered by the Internet and search strategies that Internet users can follow when searching for Online information.

Continuing the discussion on external search, Engel et al. (1995: 183) distinguish between two types of external search, namely pre-purchase search and ongoing search. **Pre-purchase search** suggests external search driven by an upcoming purchase decision. Solomon (1996: 273) adds by defining pre-purchase search as the search for specific information from the marketplace once a need has been recognised. **Ongoing search** refers to acquiring information on a relatively regular basis without the necessity to make an immediate purchase decision. For example, a consumer subscribing to Car magazine will engage in continuous and ongoing search and may use the same magazine during pre-purchase search when considering to purchase a new motor vehicle.

Engel et al. (1995: 183) express the opinion that the primary reason for consumers engaging in pre-purchase search is based on the desire to make a better consumption choice. The consumer may be motivated to search for information on an ongoing basis to develop a knowledge base that could be used

for future decision-making. Ongoing search could also occur simply because the consumer enjoys it. For example, the Car magazine reader may enjoy reading about new motor vehicles and the testing thereof for personal gratification. Also, consumers may enjoy browsing through a shopping centre although there is not an immediate need to purchase something.

It should be mentioned in conclusion that ongoing search can affect the need for pre-purchase search. As consumers continue searching for information, the need to carry out pre-purchase search may be considered unnecessary, since sufficient information is contained in memory to continue with the decision-making process.

Engel et al. (1995: 184) note that external search can be categorised along three dimensions, namely degree, direction and sequence. These three categories will be briefly discussed below.

A) Degree of search

The degree of search represents the total amount of search and is reflected by the number of brands, attributes, stores and information sources considered together with the time taken to perform the search.

Assael (1995: 230) suggests that consumers search for little information, except for expensive products. Engel et al. (1995: 185) support this view but add that consumers often perform limited external search even when considering expensive items, such as furniture, appliances and personal computers. This has led to the question whether or not a decision-making process actually exists. Engel et al. (1995: 185) caution against this view by stating that this approach fails to consider internal search. Consumers could therefore rely solely on internal search, supporting the understanding that a decision-making process does exist.

The degree of search is furthermore directly related to the type of decision-making process. A consumer engaged in an extended decision-making process will, therefore, acquire a substantial amount of information, consider several brands, visit a number of stores and consult friends. In the other extreme, habitual decision-making, the consumer will minimise the search by considering only one product and brand and will possibly ignore other sources of information.

It should also be noted that the amount of search for a product engaged in, will differ from one consumer to another.

B) Direction of search

The direction of search refers to the specific content of search, placing emphasis on the specific brands and stores involved during search rather than simply the number.

The direction of search is as important as the degree (if not more important), since knowing which brands consumers consider will aid the marketer in understanding consumer views of an organisation's competitive set. According to Engel et al. (1995: 188), an understanding of the attributes considered by consumers during search could, therefore, be emphasised in the organisation's promotional material. Puth, Mostert & Ewing (1999: 46) add to the above by stating that marketers should not only refer to important attributes in their promotional material, but also mention differentiating attributes, since attributes that are explicitly mentioned in advertisements are perceived to be of greater importance to the consumer. Puth et al. (1999: 46) continue by stating that marketers stand to fail in the intended message if attributes are not explicitly mentioned in their advertising.

The emphasis a consumer places on price during search can also affect an organisation's pricing strategy and the information sources used during search will influence marketing strategies (Engel et al., 1995: 189).

Information sources can be classified in terms of their source and type. Two sources are distinguished, namely personal and impersonal as well as two types of information, namely commercial versus non-commercial. Assael (1995: 229) supports this view by combining the source and type to form personal marketer-controlled, impersonal marketer-controlled, personal non-marketer-controlled and impersonal non-marketer-controlled sources. Table 3.2 shows the different sources and types of information.

TABLE 3.2: SOURCES AND TYPES OF INFORMATION

	Impersonal	Personal
Commercial	Advertising In-store information	Salespeople
Non-commercial	General purpose media	Social others

Source: Engel et al. (1995: 189)

The sources and types of information showed in Table 3.2 above can be categorised into two main categories, namely marketer-dominated and other (Engel et al., 1995: 148). "Marketer-dominated" refers to anything that the marketer (or the supplier or manufacturer of the product) does for the purpose of information and persuasion, including advertisements and point-of-sale material. Included in the "other" category are those sources that are not dominated by marketers, for example word-of-mouth communication and consumer reports.

(i) Marketer-dominated sources

As mentioned above, marketer-dominated sources refer to anything that the marketer does for the purposes of information and persuasion. Three main marketer-dominated sources are distinguished, namely advertising, in-store

information and sales people. Advertisements and in-store information can be classified as impersonal marketer-dominated sources (Laroche et al., 2000: 500 – 522; Engel et al., 1995: 189 & Assael, 1995: 229).

As consumers recognise needs, they become more receptive to **advertisements** and consult them for information purposes, although these advertisements, when needs are not recognised, would normally have been ignored.

Many purchase decisions are made in the store at the point-of-purchase. **In-store** information can therefore have a strong influence on consumer decision-making. Also included in in-store information are package labels. For example, consumers may consider a number of brands on the shelf, referring to the nutritional information printed on the packaging.

Engel et al. (1995: 189) and Assael (1995: 229) consider the third source of marketer-dominated information, sales people, to be personal (as opposed to impersonal advertisements and in-store information). Laroche et al. (2000: 500 – 522) explain that sales people represent an important personal source of in-store information. The influence of sales people is especially important when there is a need for point-of-sale negotiation and information exchange between the buyer and seller. For example, a pharmacist is considered an important source of information regarding nutrition and health-related matters.

(ii) Other (non-commercial)

As suggested in Table 3.2, two other (non-commercial) sources of information can be identified, namely general-purpose media (impersonal) and social others (personal). It should be noted that in the 2001 version of the model, the terminology “other (non-commercial) sources” (appearing in the 1995 version) is changed to nonmarketer-dominated (Blackwell et al., 2001: 74).

General purpose media refers to information published in the general media that is not funded by marketers, for example editorials in magazines and newspapers. Other general purpose media include consumer reports and speciality magazines, for example Car magazine conducting tests and reporting on new vehicles, often comparing different makes and models, without the manufacturers or marketers of these vehicles approving the copy published in Car. Solomon (1996: 275) clarifies the lack of involvement of marketers in consumer reports by stating that these reports represent unbiased information by third parties. Hawkins et al. (2001: 534) agree with this description by labelling these sources as independent sources.

Social others include family and friends as sources of information. These influences were discussed in great detail in Section 3.3.1 (environmental influences). It should, however, be mentioned that most probably the most important sources of information (in terms of the possible influence thereof) consulted by consumers are friends and family. The sharing of information between consumers and their friends and family occurs in the form of word-of-mouth communication, discussed in more detail in Section 3.3.1.3 (personal influences).

Solomon (1996: 275) mentions another possible source of external information by explaining that consumers can observe others in an effort to fill gaps in knowledge about a product category or brand.

C) Sequence of Search

The sequence of search, the final search dimension, pertains to the order in which search activities occur. Of particular importance is the order in which product attribute information is acquired. Engel et al. (1995: 191) explain that when consumers are exposed to a set of brands described along several attributes, they may follow a brand search sequence (also referred to as

processing by brand). This approach implies that the consumer will examine each brand along the various attributes before searching for the next brand. Another possible option is an attribute search sequence (also called processing by attribute), implying that brand information is collected on an attribute-by-attribute basis. Assael (1995: 248) adds by stating that attribute-specific processing is more likely when the consumer is involved with the brand and knowledgeable about the product category. An example of processing by attribute, is a consumer who may first examine each brand's price, followed by exploring each brand's warranty.

In conclusion it should be mentioned that several factors encourage consumers to obtain more information. These factors, according to Assael (1995: 228 – 229), are:

- high consumer involvement, where more information is acquired as consumers tend to get more involved in the process;
- the presence of high perceived risk with the intended purchase;
- the consumer who has little or no product knowledge or whose past experiences are negative;
- less time pressure on the consumer to make a decision;
- the intended purchase is characterised by a high price; and
- substantial differences between different brands

As noted above, a number of factors can have an influence on whether a consumer will engage in external information search. One particular factor, perceived risk, needs to be discussed in more detail since it can influence the

extent of the external search process due to a number of different risk types perceived by consumers. Tan (1999: 163 – 180) emphasises the importance of discussing perceived risk because risk is perceived in all purchase decisions since consumers cannot always be certain that buying goals will be achieved.

Peter & Olson (2002: 77) note that the amount of perceived risk experienced by the consumer is influenced by the degree of unpleasantness of the negative consequences and the probability that these negative consequences will occur. Hawkins et al (1995: 494) suggest that the past experiences and life-style of the consumer will also affect the degree in which the consumer perceives risk. The different types of perceived risk together with the related uncertainty are summarised in Table 3.3.

TABLE 3.3: TYPES OF PERCEIVED RISK AND RELATED UNCERTAINTY

Type of risk	Uncertainty
Functional/ Performance	Risk that the product will not function as anticipated (e.g. Will it work? or, Will it last?)
Physical	Risk of bodily harm as a result of product performance (e.g. Is it safe to use?)
Financial	Risk that the outcome will harm the consumer financially (e.g. Am I wasting my money?)
Social	Risk that a purchase will not meet the standards of others (e.g. Will my friends and family approve my choice? or, Will they admire me?)
Psychological	Risk that the purchase will not conform or even lower self-esteem (e.g. Will it make me feel or look good? Or, Will it impress others?)
Time	Risk that time spent in product search will be wasted if the product does not perform as expected (e.g. Will I have to go through the shopping effort all over again?)
Opportunity loss	Risk that by taking one action, another option the consumer really would have liked to have chosen will be lost (e.g. Will the purchase of one expensive item deprive me purchasing many other, less expensive items?)

Source: Compiled from Schiffman & Kanuk (1997: 183 – 184), Mostert (1996: 79), Solomon (1996: 278), Assael (1995: 252) & Mowen (1993: 197).

As shown in Table 3.3, consumers can perceive a number of risks when purchasing products or services. Schiffman & Kanuk (1997: 185) state that consumers formulate their own strategies to reduce perceived risk. One strategy to reduce risk (enabling the consumer to grow and act in confidence), is through information search. This search will include both marketer-dominated (for example advertisements and sales people) and non-marketer-dominant sources (for example word-of-mouth communication with friends and family).

The manner in which information in the form of stimuli is processed is discussed below.

3.4.2 Information processing

The second component of the search process is that of information processing, applicable to information obtained from external search. The information processing process forms an important function in the consumer decision-making process with many authors (Assael, 1995: 225 – 264; Engel et al., 1995: 471 – 512, Peter & Olson, 1994: 157) providing elaborate discussions on the topic. Assael (1995: 235) summarises the importance of the process, from a marketer's perspective, by stating that it determines which information is remembered by consumers, which information is used in the evaluation process and how it is used.

As depicted in Figure 3.7 at the beginning of the discussion on “search”, the information processing process comprises five stages, namely exposure, attention, comprehension, acceptance and retention.

Figure 3.7 also shows that memory fulfils an important function in the information processing process, where memory influences attention, comprehension and acceptance. The conclusion to the information processing process, retention, feeds back into memory. Another key input to the process is stimuli, both

marketer-dominated and “other”. The relevance of stimuli and memory in the information processing process could possibly be best described by means of a definition of the information processing process.

Engel et al. (1995: 472) summarise the information processing process by defining it as: “... the process by which a stimulus is received, interpreted, stored in memory, and later retrieved”. From the definition can be concluded that external input is processed and stored in memory, following the information processing process.

The different stages of the information processing process are discussed below to form an understanding of the different stages in the process and the combination thereof, enabling the consumer to retain the message in memory.

Of importance to note is that a pre-requisite for the information processing process to commence, is that a stimulus has to be present and available. In addition, a stimulus has to pass through each of the stages of the process before it can reach the memory.

3.4.2.1 Exposure

The first stage of the information processing process is represented by exposure, occurring when patterns of energy, in the form of stimuli input, reach one or more of the five senses (Engel et al.; 1995: 473). Hawkins et al. (2001: 285) support this view by defining exposure as: “.. when a stimulus comes within range of our sensory receptor nerves”.

Engel et al. (1995: 474) continue the discussion on exposure by providing a rather technical explanation of how it functions by stating that given exposure to a stimulus of sufficient strength, the consumer’s sensory receptors are activated and encoded information is transmitted to the brain along nerve fibres. This

activation, called a sensation, is affected by three thresholds, namely the lower, terminal and difference threshold.

The **lower threshold**, also called the absolute threshold, represents the minimum amount of stimulus energy necessary for sensation to occur. The **terminal threshold** refers to the point at which an increase in the intensity of a stimulus has no effect on sensation. The **difference threshold** represents the smallest change in the intensity of a stimulus that will be noticed by the consumer.

The importance of mentioning the three different thresholds is embedded in the fact that exposure and therefore the information processing process cannot commence if consumers are not able to notice stimuli.

In conclusion: The consumer can influence stimuli exposure through active self-nature. Hawkins et al. (2001: 286) explain this capability of the consumer by referring to “zipping” and “zapping”. “Zipping” occurs when consumers fast-forward through commercials on a pre-recorded television programme. “Zapping” refers to the switching between different television channels when commercials appear.

3.4.2.2 Attention

From the discussion on exposure can be deducted that, due to the limitations of the cognitive resources of individuals, not all the stimuli that activate the consumer’s sensory receptors will receive additional processing. According to Engel et al. (1995: 476), the cognitive system can, therefore, rather be viewed as constantly monitoring sensory inputs and selects some of them for further processing. This screening, at a pre-conscious level, is called pre-attentive processing. Only once stimuli have passed through the screening process do

they enter the second stage of the information-processing process, namely attention.

Engel et al. (1995: 476) defines the attention stage as: "... the allocation of processing capacity to a stimulus". Hawkins et al. (2001: 287) provide a more detailed explanation of how attention occurs by defining it as: "... when the stimulus activates one or more sensory receptor nerves and the resulting sensations go to the brain for processing".

Engel et al. (1995: 476) explain the importance of attention by stating that one of the greatest challenges to marketers is to get consumers to pay attention to what the marketer has to say and sell. This is no easy task, considering the hundreds (if not thousands) of marketing messages consumers are exposed to every day. Schiffman & Kanuk (1997: 209) expand on this statement by explaining that consumers are bombarded with stimuli from the environment.

Consider for a moment all the advertisements that a consumer could be exposed to in one single day: radio advertisements and prizes sponsored by marketers over the radio (to which the consumer listens from the time the radio alarm wakes the consumer in the morning and travelling in the motor vehicle to the office); newspaper advertisements (many consumers may read – or only page through – more than one newspaper a day, for example The Star and Business Day); more radio advertisements on the way home; product information in the supermarket; reading or paging through magazines (reading the Car magazine and Financial Times when relaxing at home); and finally television advertisements (shown continuously between all programmes, news broadcasts and sports events). The example above does not even include non-marketer-dominated information the consumer is exposed to in the normal run of life where views and opinions of friends, family and colleagues are shared on a continuous basis.

Schiffman & Kanuk (1997: 210) and Assael (1995: 231) agree with the statement in the form of the example above by stating that too much information may result in an information overload, defined as a confusion in the decision task that results in an ineffective decision. Schiffman & Kanuk (1997: 209) elaborate on this view by suggesting that consumers will, subconsciously, block out a great deal of information that they think they do not “need” or cannot use.

From the elaborate example above can be concluded that consumers will, due to the limitation of cognitive and processing capacity, selectively pay attention to messages by marketers. Engel et al. (1995: 476 – 477) identify two major categories of factors influencing consumers’ selective attention, namely personal and situational determinants.

Personal determinants (also called individual determinants) refer to characteristics of the individual that influence attention, including needs or motivation, attitudes, adaptation level and attention span. Consumer **needs** have a strong influence on stimuli that will receive attention, for example hungry consumers will be far more receptive to food stimuli than when they are not hungry. The consumer is therefore more motivated to attend to messages (stimuli) that address needs already identified. Hawkins et al. (2001: 291) add consumer **interests** to needs by stating that they reflect the overall life-style of consumers and a result of long-term goals and plans.

Engel et al. (1995: 477) suggest that consumers are more likely to be receptive to stimuli that maintain or enhance held **attitudes** and beliefs, therefore avoiding information that challenge them. For example, an anti-smoker will be more receptive to a message stipulating the rights of non-smokers than a smoker would be.

An **adoption level** implies the tendency of consumers to become so accustomed to stimuli that they are no longer noticed. For example, a person moving to the

centre of Johannesburg from a small Karoo town will initially find the noise levels very disturbing but will eventually get used to the noise to the extent that it is no longer noticed. The same phenomenon applies to marketing stimuli, for example Vodacom advertising virtually at all sports events broadcasted on a Saturday afternoon. A person may become so used to the same sponsor that eventually it is not noticed. Marketers, therefore, need to carefully draft strategies for repeat advertisements.

The **span of attention** suggests that the amount of time that can be focused on a single stimulus or thought is very limited. Hawkins et al. (2001: 291) add to the discussion by noting that individuals differ in their ability to pay attention to information. When consumers focus for too long on a specific stimulus, they tend to be distracted and their minds begin to “wander”. Engel et al. (1995: 480) suggest that a possible solution to this problem would be the use of shorter commercials. However, too many short commercials can again influence the level of adoption.

Situational determinants, reflecting characteristics of the stimulus itself, form the second set of factors influencing attention. These factors can be controlled by marketers and are often used to gain consumer attention. Situational determinants include a variety of factors, including size, colour, contrast, position, intensity, movement, isolation, novelty, attractive spokesperson and directionality. Only four of these factors (size, colour, contrast and isolation) will be briefly discussed to indicate that stimulus determinants can influence attention.

The **size** of the stimulus can attract attention, for example a large advertisement in a newspaper or magazine. The amount or size of shelf space allocated to a product could also attract attention. For example, Oros orange squash is displayed over two display units (from top to bottom) in Pick & Pay, whereas competing orange squashes are only displayed on one shelf of one unit.

Consumers considering to purchase orange squash when visiting Pick & Pay may be overwhelmed by the display of Oros and ignore other, potentially better, alternatives.

The use of **colour** could also have an influence on attracting attention. Hawkins et al. (2001: 288) argue that bright coloured packaging is more likely to attract attention than dull packaging. People also pay more attention to stimuli that **contrast** to their background. For example, a commercial that is louder than the programme during which it is shown, could possibly attract attention. Finally, attention can also be attracted through **isolation**, referring to a single stimulus (or a few stimuli) in a relatively barren perceptual field. In following this method of attracting attention a substantial portion of the advertisement remains “unused” in an attempt to draw attention to the single stimulus (or a few stimuli).

It can be concluded that stimulus determinants can have an influence on attracting attention.

3.4.2.3 Comprehension

The stimulus is interpreted in the third stage of the information processing process, comprehension, where meaning is attached to the stimulus. According to Engel et al. (1995: 487), the meaning ascribed to a stimulus will depend on how it is categorised and elaborated in terms of existing knowledge.

The process of classifying a stimulus by using concepts stored in memory is called stimulus categorisation, whereas elaboration refers to the amount of integration between existing knowledge stored in memory and the new information. In addition to the above, consumers organise incoming stimuli into a meaningful whole.

As with attention, comprehension is influenced by personal and stimulus factors. The **personal factors** influencing comprehension include motivation, knowledge and expectations.

Motivation can influence the elaboration that occurs during comprehension, since more elaborate processing should occur if the stimulus is perceived to be personally relevant (seen as useful for satisfying a recognised need). Engel et al. (1995: 492) suggest that if consumers are motivated while processing an advertisement, they will engage in more thinking about the advertised product.

The categorisation of an advertisement depends heavily on **knowledge** contained in memory. For example, a novice will see a pistol whereas an expert will identify a Glock 23, .40 calibre. Knowledge also increases the ability of the consumer to understand the advertisement and recognise faulty logic and conclusions. Knowledge, therefore, reduces the likelihood that consumers will make an incorrect interpretation during message processing.

Comprehension also depends on prior conceptions or **expectations** of what consumers are likely to see. For example, if consumers were asked to rate a specific cigarette that was not labelled, it may have received a total different rating than it would have received if it had been labelled.

Different **stimulus determinants** could also influence comprehension. For example: the size of a stimulus (a smaller pistol may be perceived as lacking penetrating power), colour (Aquafresh toothpaste adding a new plaque-fighting ingredient, shown visually to consumers by adding a blue stripe) and packaging (fresh fish displayed on crushed ice simply looks fresher than if it were pre-wrapped in plastic).

Misperception or misinterpretation of stimuli occurs during the comprehension stage of the information processing process. Engel et al. (1995: 496) explain that

this occurs when consumers attach different meanings to stimuli than those intended by marketers, resulting in the conclusion that accurate comprehension of even a simple message cannot be assumed. Miscomprehension can occur when consumers allocate inadequate attention to the stimulus during the processing thereof, or when the stimulus itself is ambiguous, for example claims that a retail store offers “lowest prices guaranteed”, could be interpreted as lower than the competitors, lower than usual or lower due to a sale. According to Puth, Mostert & Ewing (1997: 14), consumers may be “forced” to consider previous held beliefs and perceptions if specific guidelines or attributes are not provided by marketers in advertisements. This could possibly lead to miscomprehension of the meaning of the message intended by the marketer.

3.4.2.4 Acceptance

The fourth stage of the information processing process is acceptance, focusing on the persuasive effect of a stimulus (Engel et al., 1995: 497). The persuasiveness of a stimulus may influence consumer knowledge, attitudes and behaviour.

It is important to note that even if an advertisement received attention and was correctly comprehended, it does not necessarily mean that persuasion occurred, since comprehension is not the same as message acceptance. A consumer may understand the advertisement but may not agree with its claims. Acceptance, therefore, depends on the thoughts (referred to as cognitive responses) of consumers during the comprehension stage.

A consumer considering to purchase a product may engage in considerable thinking about the claims of an advertisement. Engel et al. (1995: 497) state that the nature of such cognitive responses will determine the acceptance of the claims. Two responses are identified, namely support arguments, representing

favourable thoughts to the claims and counter arguments, implying thoughts opposing the message claims.

Acceptance is, therefore, enhanced when support arguments increase and reduced by counter argumentation.

Acceptance of an advertisement's persuasiveness could also depend on how it makes the consumer feel. This represents affective responses, defined by Engel et al. (1995: 498) as the emotions and feelings elicited by a stimulus. Affective responses can take many forms, classified in three main categories, namely upbeat, negative and warm. Upbeat and warm feelings will, generally, enhance acceptance of a message, whereas negative feelings will reduce acceptance.

3.4.2.5 Retention

Retention forms the final stage of the information processing process, involving the transfer of stimulus interpretation and persuasion into long-term memory. Memory consists of different storage systems. Engel et al. (1995) distinguish between three different storage systems in memory, namely sensory memory, short-term memory and long-term memory.

Information receives an initial analysis in the **sensory memory** based on physical properties, for example loudness and pitch. Auditory processing at this stage of memory is called echoic and visual processing is referred to as iconic. Schiffman & Kanuk (1997: 209) explain the working of the sensory memory by stating that sensory input lasts for only a second or two in the mind's sensory store. If a stimulus is not processed immediately, it will be lost through the functioning of the sensory memory.

The **short-term memory** component is accessed when a stimulus passes through sensory processing. Short-term memory operates by combining sensory

input with concepts of long-term memory to enable categorisation and interpretation of stimuli. Schiffman & Kanuk (1997: 209) explains short-term memory as the working memory, where information is processed and held for a brief period.

Assael (1995: 239) adds to the discussion by explaining that short-term memory acts as a filter to either store the information in long-term memory or discard it as it is perceived to be unimportant or undesirable. The decision to retain or discard information is made by relating it to information already stored in long-term memory. Engel et al. (1995: 502) add two limiting characteristics of memory, namely that it can hold only a limited amount of information and that the time that information can be kept active without any effort, is limited.

The final memory storage system, **long-term memory**, is viewed as an unlimited and permanent “storehouse” that contains all the knowledge contained by individuals. Assael (1995: 239) distinguishes two different forms of long-term memory, namely episodic memory (concerned with images that reflect past events) and semantic memory (represented by words and sentences that reflect concepts and facts that are remembered). Hawkins et al. (2001: 342) refer to semantic memory as schemantic memory and explain it as the stored representation of consumers’ generalised knowledge of the world they live in.

Assael (1995: 242) maintains that once information has been filtered through the short-term and long-term memory, it is available for retrieval. When information is retrieved from long-term memory, it is briefly stored in short-term memory for the purpose of brand evaluation.

The objective of marketers, therefore, is for their advertisements to be accepted and retained in long-term memory for future reference purposes.

3.5 PRE-PURCHASE ALTERNATIVE EVALUATION

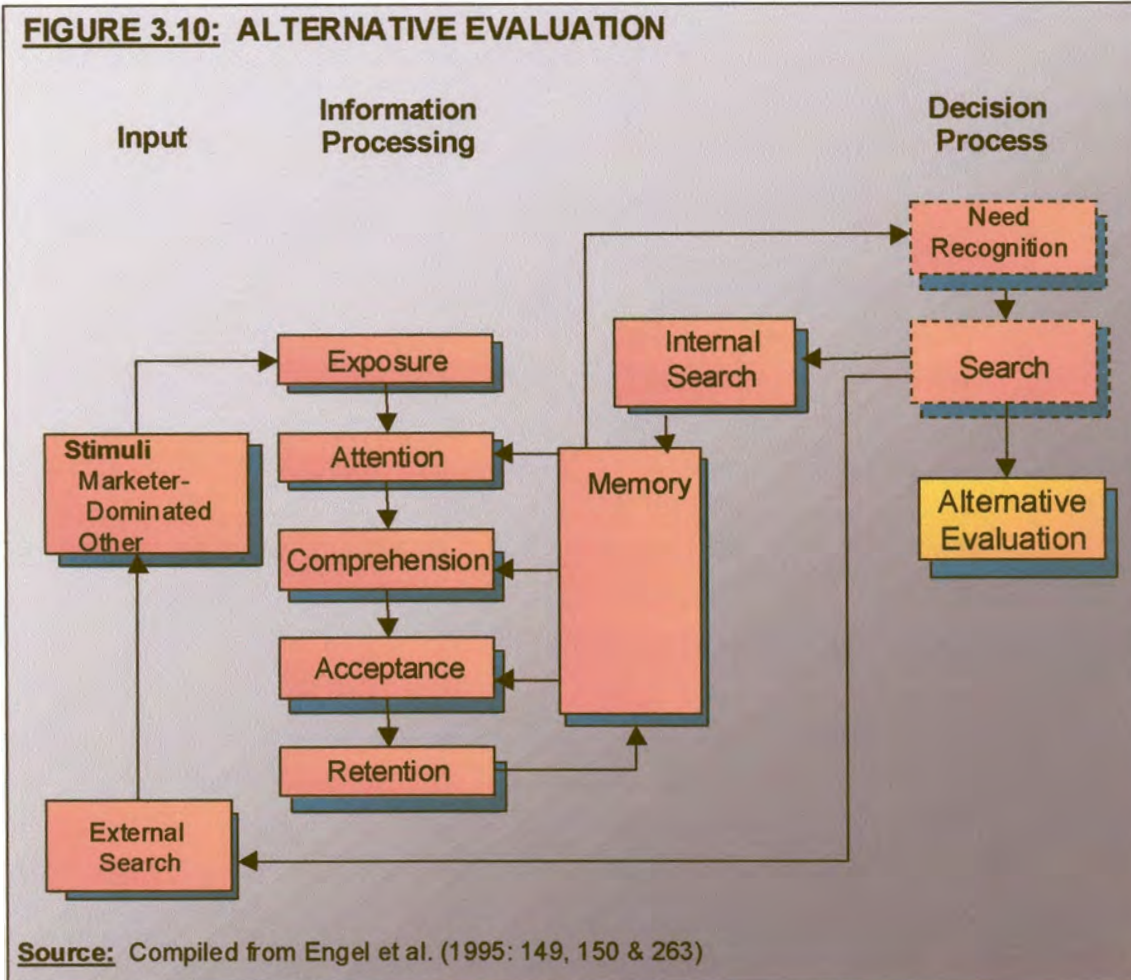
Pre-purchase alternative evaluation, re-worded as pre-purchase evaluation of alternatives in the 2001 version of the EMB model (Blackwell et al., 2001: 76), forms the third stage of the consumer decision-making process and is influenced, as with need recognition and search, by environmental influences and individual differences.

It should be noted that Section 4.3.1.2 in Chapter 4 will provide insights on how the Internet can assist the consumer with pre-purchase alternative evaluation.

Solomon (1996: 279) draws attention to the importance of pre-purchase alternative evaluation by stating that much of the effort associated with the decision-making process occurs at this stage, where the consumer has to choose from available alternatives.

Assael (1995: 92) explains that, as a result of information processing, consumers will associate brands that they are aware of with their expected benefits based on past and current information. Adding to this view, Engel et al. (1995: 206) define pre-purchase alternative evaluation as: "... the process by which a choice alternative is evaluated and selected to meet consumer needs".

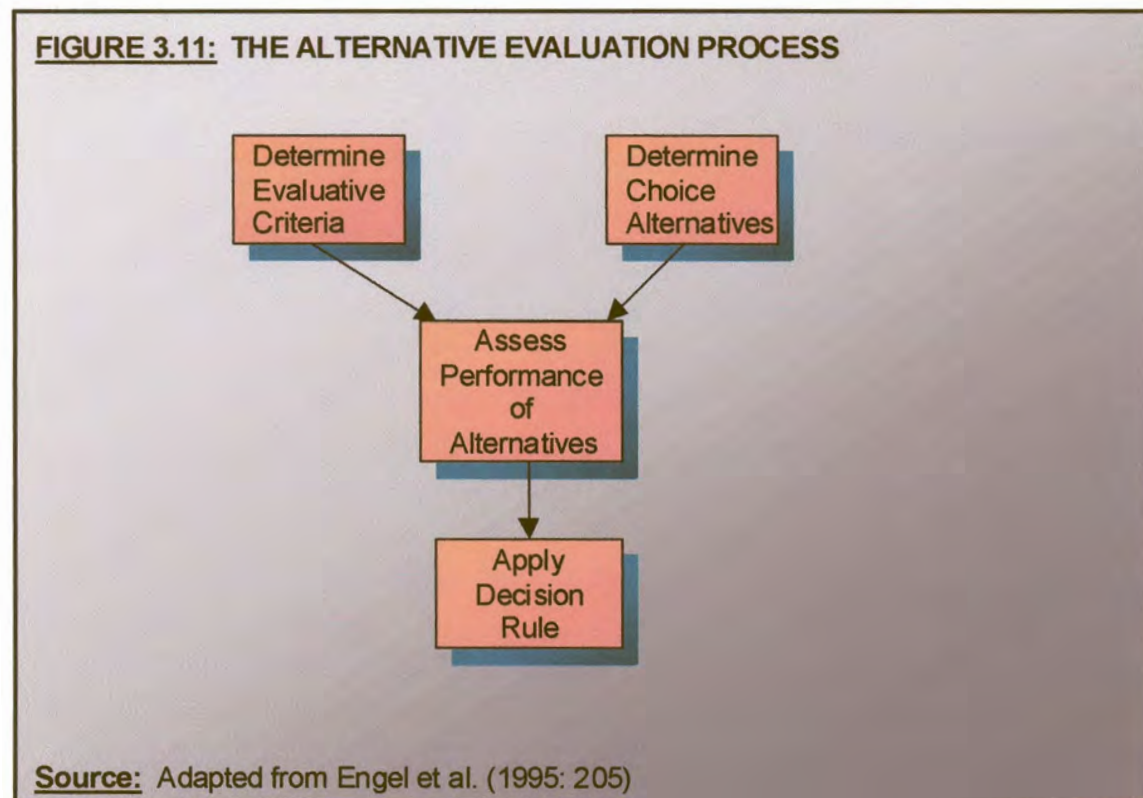
The alternative evaluation process within the broader model of consumer behaviour proposed by Engel, Blackwell & Miniard (1995) is illustrated in Figure 3.10.



Although search and pre-purchase alternative evaluation is discussed as two separate stages, search and evaluation are intertwined during decision-making. Information obtained from the environment will often lead to some evaluation (for example, “these jeans at Edgars are too expensive) that may guide the consumer to subsequent search (for example, “let’s find out the price of Woolworths’ jeans elsewhere in this shopping mall”). Engel et al. (1995: 207) explain that the complexity of alternative evaluation is very likely to vary according to the decision-making process followed by the consumer. For example, if decision-making is habitual in nature, the consumer will (at this stage of the decision-process) form an intention to purchase the same brand as before.

If the consumer, however, engages in complex decision-making, the evaluation process will be complex.

The alternative evaluation process can be summarised by means of an illustration, indicating the functioning of the process and the components considered in the process. The functioning of the evaluation process, indicating the most complex form thereof, is shown in Figure 3.11.



As indicated in Figure 3.11, a decision first has to be made about which choice alternatives to consider as well as the relevant evaluation criteria when comparing possible alternatives. This is followed by a comparison (judgment) of the chosen alternatives along the evaluation criteria (assessing the choice alternatives). Finally, a decision rule is applied to these judgments to select an alternative. These components of the alternative evaluation process are discussed below.

3.5.1 Evaluation criteria

According to Schiffman & Kanuk (1997: 571 – 573) consumers evaluate brands in terms of important product attributes. Hawkins et al. (1995: 468) support this view by defining evaluation criteria as: "... the various features a consumer looks for in response to a particular type of problem". Engel et al. (1995: 208) provide clarity on the function of evaluation criteria by defining it as: "... nothing more than the particular dimensions or attributes that are used in judging the choice alternatives".

As suggested by the definitions above, there are many different forms of evaluation criteria. Engel et al. (1995: 208) support this statement with the following example: when purchasing a motor vehicle, the consumer may consider factors such as safety, brand name, price, reliability, warranty, country where it was manufactured and fuel consumption. The consumer may, however, also consider evaluation criteria more hedonic in nature, including the feeling of owning the motor vehicle (status and prestige) and driving it (for example excitement and exhilaration).

As can be derived from the example above, the possible evaluation criteria consumers could use in decision-making seem endless. Therefore, only three possible evaluation criteria (price, brand name and country of origin) will be discussed in an attempt to show the importance of evaluation criteria in the alternative evaluation process.

One of the most important evaluation criteria is **price**, often influencing the product choice. Engel et al. (1995: 208) note that there is a considerable difference regarding the importance of price across consumers and products. Factors that could influence consumers not to purchase the lowest price or the best price-to-quality products include brand name and convenience. For example, a consumer purchasing milk, cigarettes and Coke from an Engen Quick

Shop may (knowingly) pay considerably more for the products than at Pick & Pay. The reason for still purchasing at the Quick Shop may be based on convenience, since Pick & Pay is another two kilometres away and there is hardly ever sufficient parking available.

Brand name often forms the most important evaluation criteria, since it serves as a surrogate indicator of product quality. Consumers may, therefore, be prepared to pay a premium for a specific brand due to the perceived high quality of the product. For example, a consumer may purchase Disprin for a mild headache because of the well-known name despite regulations that all over-the-counter aspirin products should conform to certain specifications. The brand name could also be of importance to the consumer when it is seen as a status symbol and the consumer is motivated by such considerations. A consumer may, therefore, attach the same (if not greater) value to a brand name as to other product features. For example, a teenager may consider the Nike brand name as being more important than the actual comfort of the running shoe.

The **country of origin** often forms an important evaluation criteria to consumers. This view is expanded on by Knight & Calantone (2000: 127 – 145) stating that, when known to consumers, country of origin influences the evaluation of products, since the country of origin's image reflects the consumer's general perception about the quality of products made in a particular country and the nature of the people in that country. Piron (2000: 308 – 321) adds that imagery of country of origin comprises the picture, reputation and stereotype that consumers attach to products of a specific country.

Piron (2000: 308 – 321) continues by stating that consumers may be influenced by a halo effect, where a country's name triggers feelings that may be transferred to a product.

For example, products manufactured in Germany are often considered to be of better quality because of precise quality specifications and workmanship. This is eminent when considering some of the world-class (and well-known) brands emerging from Germany, for example BMW, Mercedes Benz, AEG and Siemens. In practical terms, a consumer may decide to purchase a product from a more reputable country when all other evaluation criteria are considered equal. For example, a dinner service manufactured in the United Kingdom may be perceived as better quality than a product boasting: "Made in Taiwan".

As illustrated in the examples above, it can impose formidable barriers for marketers attempting to enter a market or position its products in an existing market (Knight & Calantone, 2000: 127 – 145) if the stereotype attributed to a country is negative.

An important concept to consider when discussing evaluation criteria is that of salience, reflecting the assumption that evaluation criteria differ in their influence on consumer product selection. Engel et al. (1995: 211) show the relevance of salience by explaining that it refers to the potential influence that each criterion may exert during the comparison process. Whether this potential influence materialises depends on how consumers perceive the alternatives to perform along an evaluation criterion. For example, all modern airlines comply with the highest safety standards and although safety is probably the most important evaluation criteria to the consumer when undertaking a flight, safety will not form a deciding factor when selecting an airline. Similarly, although price may be an important consideration, the impact thereof as an evaluation criteria will essentially fall away if all the airlines charge the same price.

According to Engel et al. (1995: 212) and Solomon (1996: 284), the salient attributes that actually influence the evaluation process are known as determinant attributes.

The evaluation criteria used by consumers during decision-making depend on a number of factors, including situational influences, similarity of the choice alternatives, motivation, involvement and knowledge. These factors, as determinants of evaluation criteria, will be discussed briefly below.

Situational factors often influence the salience of evaluation criteria. For example, a consumer may purchase a prestigious brand of liquor when entertaining friends or colleagues but will use a less prestigious brand for personal consumption.

The **similarity of choice alternatives** directly influence the evaluation criteria used by the consumer. If, for example, the consumer receives a substantial bonus at work, the consumer needs to decide on diverse alternatives, such as purchasing a new wardrobe, going on an overseas vacation or buying unit trust investments. Greater similarity will exist, however, when choosing a brand within a product category.

The consumer may also have to use abstract evaluation criteria when considering non-comparable alternatives. Schiffman & Kanuk (1997: 580) support this view by explaining that, for products with great dissimilarity, consumers will abstract the products to a level that comparisons are possible. Engel et al. (1995: 213) explain how this is done practically by means of the following example, where a consumer has to decide between a refrigerator, expensive outfit or new television. These alternatives share a few concrete attributes along which a direct comparison can be made. The consumer will, therefore, use abstract dimensions as evaluation criteria, for example necessity, status and entertainment. Although a new television will offer the consumer entertainment and a new outfit support the consumer's (perceived) status, the refrigerator may be selected, based on necessity.

If the choice alternatives are closely related and no differentiating factor can be distinguished (for example gardening services), the consumer will heavily rely on price as evaluation criteria.

Motivation, specifically whether the consumer is driven by utilitarian or hedonic considerations, could influence evaluation criteria. Engel et al. (1995: 213) illustrate this importance by means of an example, where utilitarian motivations during the purchase of running shoes could lead to examining the price and construction, whereas hedonic motives would lead to the feelings associated with product ownership (for instance the purchase of Nike to project a desirable image).

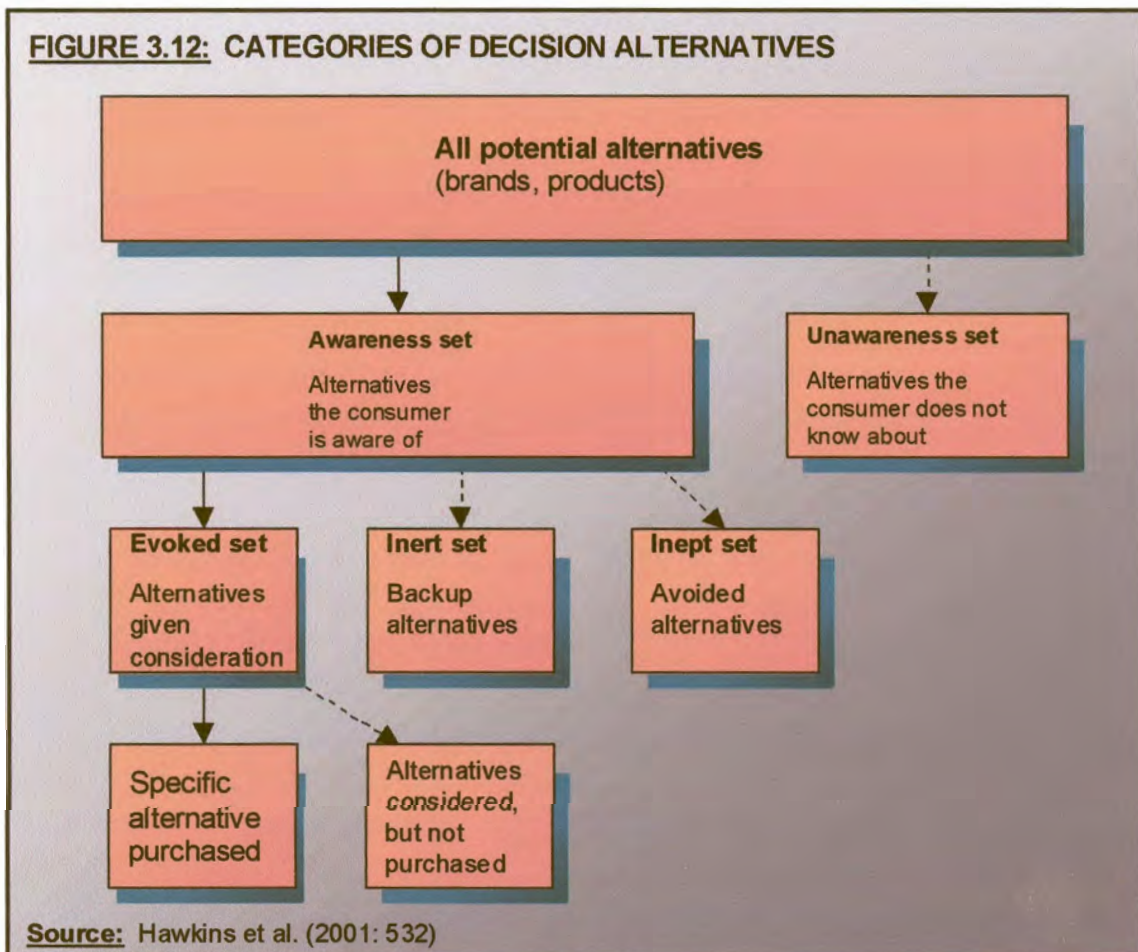
As consumers become more **involved** with a purchase decision, the evaluation criteria are likely to increase. Involvement could also possibly influence the relative salience of evaluation criteria. For example, a consumer who is more involved in the purchase decision may consider service attributes of a service organisation, whereas a less involved consumer would consider only the size and reputation of the organisation.

The final determinant of evaluation criteria is **knowledge**. Consumers who are well-informed will have information stored in memory about the useful dimensions for comparing alternatives. Engel et al. (1995: 215) expand this view stating that an advertisement that suggests evaluation criteria that consumers should consider are likely to be more effective for first-time buyers. A study by Mostert (1996: 152) supports this view by concluding that explicitly mentioned attributes in advertisements were perceived to be of greater importance to consumers when comparing the ratings the attributes received when all possible attributes for the product category were rated.

3.5.2 Determining the choice alternatives

Consumers not only have to determine the evaluation criteria during the evaluation of alternatives but also the alternatives from which a choice will be made. Hawkins et al. (1995: 446) note that all the brands within a product category can be categorised in either an awareness set or an unawareness set. The awareness set comprises all the brands the consumer is aware of, whereas the unawareness set represents those brands the consumer does not know about. Hawkins et al. (2001: 530 - 531) continue by explaining that the awareness set comprises three subcategories, namely the evoked, inert and inept sets.

Figure 3.12 depicts the evoked, inept and inert sets as subsets of all the brands in a product category.



Schiffman & Kanuk (1997: 570) provide clarity on the **evoked set** by defining it as: "... the specific brands a consumer considers in making a purchase within a particular product category". According to Engel et al. (1995: 215) and LeBlanc & Turley (1994: 10 – 17), the evoked set will contain only a subset of the total number of alternatives (considered to be acceptable alternatives) available to the consumer. Some consumers may have a large evoked set, whereas others have a relatively small set. Consumers who are loyal towards a specific brand will only have one brand in their evoked set for a specific product category.

Schiffman & Kanuk (1997: 570) and Hawkins et al. (1995: 446) explain that the **inept set** refers to all the brands the consumer excludes from purchase thought because they are considered to be unacceptable. These brands could, for example, be seen as inferior. The **inert set** represents the brands to which the consumer is indifferent towards due to being perceived as offering little value.

It can be derived from Figure 3.12 that it is essential that a product forms part of a consumer's evoked set for it to be considered at all during the alternative evaluation process (Schiffman & Kanuk, 1997: 571 & Engel et al., 1995: 216).

Schiffman & Kanuk (1997: 571) explain that in the selection of choice alternatives, as depicted in Figure 3.12, five prominent positions in the model do not result in an alternative being considered for purchase. Firstly, brands may be unknown to the consumer, for example, due to the consumer's selective exposure to advertising media. Secondly, as suggested by the inept set, brands may be considered unacceptable based on poor quality or product attributes. Thirdly, brands may be perceived as being indifferent because they are being perceived as not offering any special benefits to the consumer (the inert set). Fourth, brands may be overlooked because they have not been positioned correctly and are therefore not targeting the consumer market where a selection has to be made in the product category wherein the brand is competing. Finally,

brands will not be selected if they are unable to satisfy perceived needs to the same extent as the chosen alternative.

Engel et al. (1995: 217) and Solomon (1996: 280) add to the discussion by stating that the evoked set comprises a retrieval set (a recollection of alternatives from memory) and prominent products from the environment. Engel et al. (1995: 218) continue by stating that if the consumer does not have sufficient knowledge (stored information in memory) in the retrieval set, the evoked set will be developed in a number of ways, for example talking to others, search for information or considering all the brands in the product category. A consumer may therefore select a brand in the retail store by scanning the brands on the shelf, choosing a recognised brand rather than relying on recall. It should be mentioned in conclusion to this section that a consumer's evoked set can comprise retail outlets in addition to brands (LeBlanc & Turley, 1994: 10 – 17).

3.5.3 Assessing the choice alternatives

The third component of the alternative evaluation process is assessing the choice alternatives, thereby judging the performance of the chosen alternatives along salient evaluative criteria. Engel et al. (1995: 219) explain that consumers often have judgements or beliefs regarding the performance of the selected alternatives being considered. Consumers lacking such stored knowledge will, however, need to rely on external information to form beliefs about the performance of these alternatives by using either cut-offs or signals.

A **cut-off** simply represents a requirement (or restriction) for acceptable attribute values. An example of a cut-off is price, where consumers will have a fairly defined range of prices that they will be willing to pay. A price falling outside this range will be deemed unacceptable, for example a consumer intending to purchase a water-feature will expect to pay between R 700 and R 950. If, however, the price of one of the alternatives being considered is R 1 500, the

consumer will view this price as being unacceptable, thereby not considering the alternative as a viable purchase option. Other examples of cut-offs for evaluation criteria include refusing to consider any fruit juice that does not contain at least 80% pure juice, insisting that a health treat contain less than a certain amount of calories or reject considering any generic cola brands. Consumer cut-offs will therefore have a very important influence on the final choice of the consumer.

Judgements about alternatives can also depend on certain **signals** or cues. Examples of signals include brand name and warranties relating to product quality. For example, a consumer deciding between two types of wall-to-wall carpeting may be unable to infer the quality of the carpets. The warranty offered by the manufacturers could therefore act as a signal of the quality, resulting in the consumer purchasing the carpet offering the most comprehensive warranty. Another example of a signal used to judge alternatives is price, where consumers will often use price as an indicator of quality.

3.5.4 Selecting a decision rule

The decision rule forms the final element of the alternative evaluation process. Engel et al. (1995: 222) define decision rules as: “.. represent the strategies consumers use to make a selection from the choice alternatives”. Schiffman & Kanuk (1997: 576) support this view and states that consumers use decision rules to reduce the burden of making complex decisions by providing guidelines that make the process easier.

Decision rules applied by consumers vary from very simplistic procedures, requiring little time and effort, to very elaborate procedures involving considerably more time and processing effort by the consumer. Engel et al. (1995: 222) explain that when choice is habituated, a simple decision rule will be applied, for example purchasing the same brand as before. Simplistic decision rules could

also be used by consumers when the choice is not habituated, for example “purchase the cheapest brand” or “buy the brand preferred by the family”.

Engel et al. (1995: 222) explain that consumers will often follow a decision rule that offers a satisfactory (as opposed to an optimal) choice while minimising their time and effort. Consumers may, however, also use more elaborate decision rules that require a greater processing effort as they become motivated during the decision-making process.

Schiffman & Kanuk (1997: 576) and Engel et al. (1995: 222) broadly divide decision rules into two categories, namely compensatory and non-compensatory decision rules. Assael (1995: 93) notes that compensatory decision rules imply that consumers will evaluate each brand across all evaluation criteria, whereas non-compensatory decision rules ascribe that brands are evaluated on one criterion at a time. Non-compensatory and compensatory decision rules together with the different types thereof are discussed below.

3.5.4.1 Non-compensatory decision rules

According to non-compensatory decision rules, a product's weakness on one attribute cannot be offset by strong performance on another attribute, for example, consumers desiring healthier snacks (for instance biscuits). Although many brands offer healthy ingredients, they taste awful. Such products may score high marks on health considerations but this strength cannot overcome the weakness in taste.

The simplistic decision rules mentioned before (e.g. “buy the cheapest”) support a further potential for decision-making to follow a non-compensatory strategy. For example, if the consumer's decision rule is “buy the cheapest”, a brand that is more expensive will not be chosen no matter how well it performs on other

evaluation criteria. The weakness in price is, therefore, not compensated by other favourable attributes.

According to Engel et al. (1995: 223), three types of non-compensatory rules are distinguished, namely lexicographic, elimination by aspects and conjunctive. Schiffman & Kanuk (1997: 577), Hawkins et al. (1995: 478) and Mowen (1993: 431) identify a fourth type of non-compensatory decision rule, namely the disjunctive rule.

Important to note is that a consumer can either process by brand or by attribute. When processing by brand, the consumer will obtain information on one brand at a time, whereas processing by attribute implies that the consumer will gather information on a specific attribute of various brands.

A practical example, provided by Engel et al. (1995: 223) in the form of Table 3.4 below assists in differentiating between the various decision rules.

TABLE 3.4: HYPOTHETICAL RATINGS FOR ILLUSTRATING DECISION RULES

Attribute	Importance ranking	Brand performance ratings			
		Brand A	Brand B	Brand C	Brand D
Taste	1	Excellent	Excellent	Very good	Excellent
Price	2	Very good	Good	Excellent	Fair
Nutrition	3	Good	Good	Poor	Excellent
Convenience	4	Fair	Good	Good	Excellent

Source: Engel et al. (1995: 223)

A) Lexicographic decision rule

Sheth, Mittal & Newman (1999: 539) and Schiffman & Kanuk (1997: 577) explain that with the lexicographic rule, consumers first have to rank the attributes in terms of perceived importance.

According to Assael (1995: 249) and Engel et al. (1995: 223), this is followed by comparing brands on the most important attribute. The brand perceived as superior on this attribute will be selected. If two or more brands are considered to be equal on the attribute, they will be compared on the second most important attribute. This process is continued until one brand is perceived to be superior to the other remaining brands.

By using the lexicographic decision rule, consumers will require processing by attribute. From the example provided in Table 3.4, Brand A will be selected based on an “excellent” rating on importance ranking 1 (Brands B and D will continue to the next importance ranking, whereas Brand C will be discarded based on a “very good” rating) and the best rating when compared to the remaining brands on importance ranking 2 (“very good” versus “good” for Brand B and “fair” for Brand D). Note that although Brand C had a higher rating than the other brands on importance ranking 2, it was excluded, based on importance ranking 1. If, however, price (importance ranking 2) were considered the most important attribute, then Brand C would have been chosen.

B) Elimination by aspects decision rule

The elimination by aspects rule closely resembles the lexicographic rule, where brands are evaluated on the most important attribute (Sheth et al., 1999: 540). The difference is that the consumer imposes cut-offs, for example the brand has to be nutritious or below R 20. As with the lexicographic rule, the brand that meets the cut-off on the most important attribute will be chosen. If two or more brands meet the cut-off, the next most important attribute is selected and the process is repeated until only one brand meets the set criteria.

Engel et al. (1995: 224) note that it is important to consider that if none of the alternatives are acceptable, the consumer has to revise the cut-offs, use a different decision rule or postpone choice.

According to Solomon (1996: 286), by using the elimination by aspects decision rule, processing by attribute will be required as with the lexicographic decision rule. Considering the example in Table 3.4, if the consumer set the minimum acceptable values for taste and price as “excellent” and “very good” respectively, Brand A would once again be chosen. If, however, the cut-off for taste was lowered to “very good” and the cut-off for price was raised to “excellent”, Brand C would be the selected choice.

C) Conjunctive decision rule

Cut-offs are prominent with the conjunctive decision rule, where the consumer will establish cut-offs for each salient attribute. With this rule, in contrast to the two rules discussed before, each brand will be compared individually against the set cut-offs, thereby resulting in processing by brand (Sheth et al., 1999: 538; Solomon, 1996: 280 and Engel et al., 1995: 224).

According to the conjunctive decision rule a brand will be chosen if it meets the cut-offs for all the attributes. If the brand fails on any of the cut-offs, it will be rejected. If none of the brands meet the required cut-offs, the consumer has to postpone choice, select a different decision rule or lower the set cut-offs.

D) Disjunctive Decision Rule

According to Schiffman & Kanuk (1997: 577) and Mowen (1993: 431), the disjunctive decision rule is a “mirror image” of the conjunctive rule, where the consumer will set a minimal acceptable level as cut-off point for each attribute (which may be higher than that for the conjunctive rule). If a brand meets or

exceeds any of the established cut-off points for any one attribute, it will be accepted.

If a number of alternatives meet or exceed the cut-off point, the consumer will either apply a different decision rule or accept the first satisfactory brand as the final choice.

Considering the example in Table 3.4, if a consumer requires that a brand at least had to receive a rating of “good” on all the attributes, Brand B will be selected. Brand A will be rejected because of a “fair” rating for convenience, Brand C for a “poor” rating on nutrition and Brand D for a “fair” rating on price.

3.5.4.2 Compensatory decision rules

It will be noticed from the decision rules discussed above, when applied to the example in Table 3.4, that Brand D was never selected although it had an “excellent” rating on three of the four salient attributes (including the most important attribute). The reason why Brand D was never selected is based on a “fair” rating for price, showing the primary characteristic of non-compensatory decision rules, where an unacceptable rating on one attribute cannot be offset against an otherwise excellent performance.

In contrast to non-compensatory decision rules, compensatory decision rules permit that the perceived weakness of one attribute may be offset (or compensated for) by the strength of another attribute (Engel et al., 1995: 224).

Two different types of compensatory rules are distinguished, namely the simple additive and the weighted additive rules.

The **simple additive decision rule** implies that the consumer will simply count the number of times each alternative is judged favourably in terms of salient

evaluative criteria. The attribute with the most positive attributes will be chosen. By using the **weighted additive decision rule**, consumers will engage in a more refined judgement about the performance of attributes rather than simply deciding whether it is favourable or unfavourable. The relative salience of relevant evaluation criteria will, therefore, also be incorporated into the decision rule. Engel et al. (1995: 225) also state that the weighted additive decision rule is equivalent to multi-attribute attitude models, for example the Fishbein model.

Peter & Olson (1994: 164 – 165) are of the opinion that this form of compensatory rule is considered a multi-attribute model, since a negative consequence can be compensated by a positive consequence. The Fishbein model can briefly be explained by first representing it symbolically (Sheth et al., 1999: 409 and Engel et al., 1995: 269):

$$A_o = \sum_{i=1}^n b_i e_i$$

Where:

- A_o = attitude towards the object,
- b_i = the strength of the belief that the object has attribute i ,
- e_i = the evaluation of attribute i , and
- n = the number of salient attributes

The Fishbein model proposes that attitude towards a product is based on the summed beliefs about the product's attributes weighted by the evaluation of these attributes.

The discussion on decision rules is concluded by Engel et al. (1995: 269) stating that it should be noted that consumers could involve the sequential use of at least two different decision rules, called a **phased decision strategy**. Mowen (1993: 435) supports this view by explaining that the consumer can either

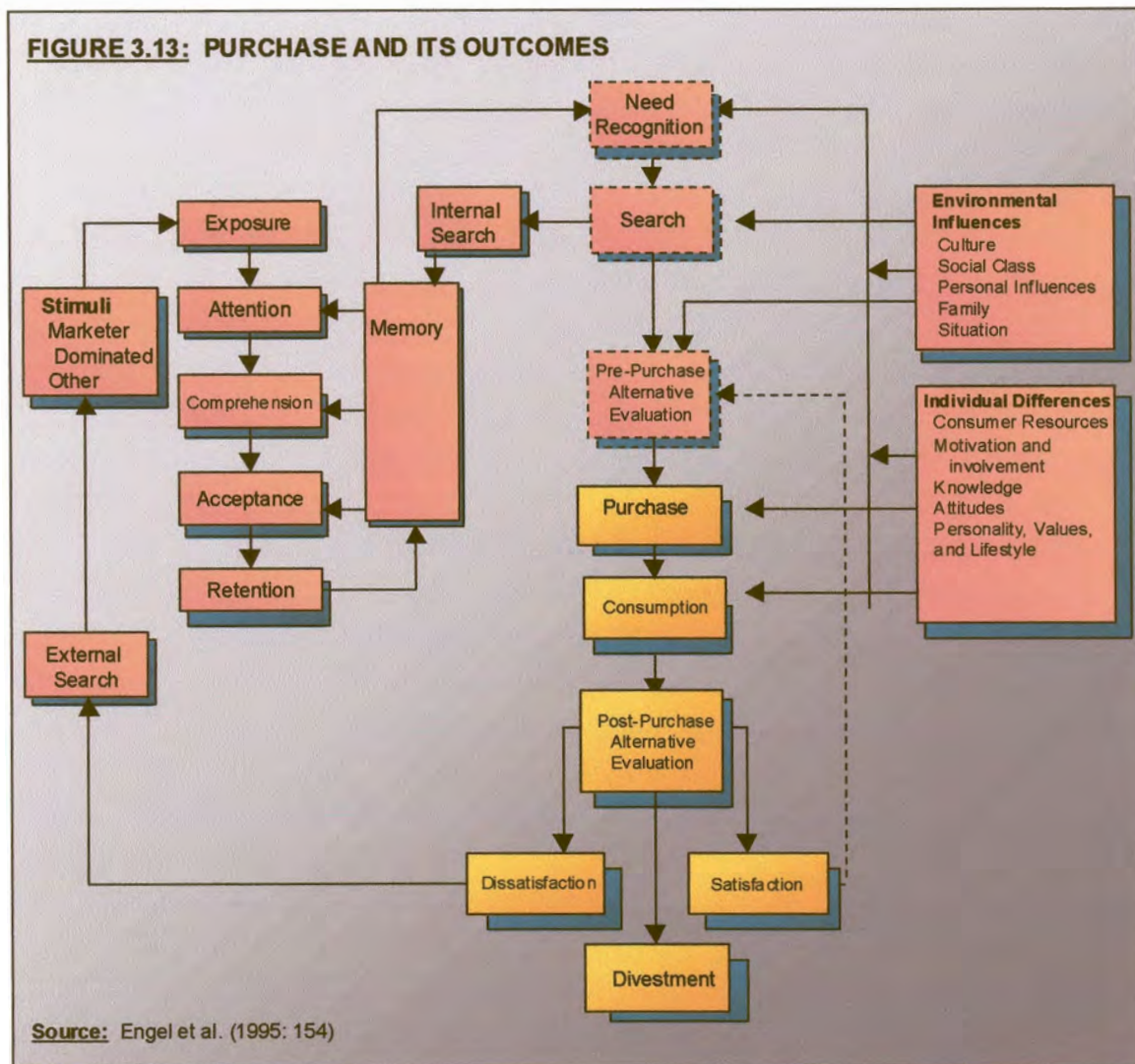
sequentially use two non-compensatory decision rules or alternatively use a non-compensatory rule, followed by a compensatory rule. Engel et al. (1995: 225) explain that this would occur as a means of coping with many different choice alternatives. Phased decision strategies, therefore, typically consist of a two-phased process, where the consumer will at the initial stage use one type of rule as a screening device to narrow the choice set to a more manageable number. A final choice is then made by applying a second decision rule to the remaining choice alternatives.

According to Engel et al. (1995: 225), consumers can also retrieve a decision rule from memory as experience accumulates in making choices. If consumers lack such experience, they can construct their own decision rule at the time of choice by using “fragments” of rules available in memory that can accommodate the decision situation, called **constructive decision rules**.

A special type of decision rule identified by Engel et al. (1995: 225) is **affect referral**. According to this rule, consumers have previously formed attitudes towards each choice alternative, therefore retrieving these attitudes from memory rather than judging alternatives on various evaluative criteria. The alternative having the most favourable attitude will be chosen, implying that attitude serves as the only evaluative criteria used to determine the choice alternative. Schiffman & Kanuk (1997: 579) view this decision rule as most probably the most simplistic of all decision rules.

3.6 PURCHASE AND ITS OUTCOMES

Purchase forms the fourth stage of the decision-making process. This section will cover purchase together with the outcomes thereof (stages five, six and seven of the decision-making process). Figure 3.13 depicts purchase and its outcomes (consumption, post-purchase evaluation and divestment).



According to Engel et al. (1995: 236) the consumer has to decide during the purchase stage whether to buy, when to buy, what to buy, where to buy and how to pay. The decision whether to purchase implies that the intention to purchase is not always fulfilled, since consumers can abort the process at this point. Examples of factors that could have an influence on whether or not to purchase include changes in motivation and circumstances, new information and unavailability of the chosen alternative.

Changing motivations can have an influence on whether a product is purchased, for instance when a need is fulfilled in other ways or new needs become

dominant. Likewise, changes in circumstances (for instance a shortage of financial resources) can lead to the postponement of a purchase decision.

Timing of a purchase is also a consideration, for instance, the purchase of a heater will most probably accompany the arrival of winter or milk will only be purchased once current stock is depleted. Purchase intentions are often left open-ended, thereby necessitating further information search on which alternative to select. In addition to the above, the consumer has to decide where to purchase, selecting from a number of different outlets available, for example a retail store, wholesaler, manufacturer or in-house shopping. Assael (1995: 95) explain that the store selection in itself may require a decision-making process. Finally, the consumer has to decide how to pay for the intended purchase.

Engel et al. (1995: 238 – 239) continue by explaining that three categories of consumer purchase intentions, following pre-purchase alternative evaluation, can be distinguished, namely fully planned, partially planned and unplanned purchases.

Fully planned purchase intentions imply that the consumer knows exactly what to purchase and is willing to shop until it is found. Fully planned purchase intentions are often the outcome of high involvement and extended decision-making, where the consumer chose the product and brand in advance. Lower involvement purchases can also be fully planned, where the consumer decided on the product and brand and will therefore simply scan the shelves for the chosen product when visiting the store.

With **partially planned** intentions to purchase, consumers select the specific product to be purchased but the specific brand will only be selected at the point of sale. The consumer could, therefore, apply a simple decision rule by selecting the cheapest brand or a familiar brand. For example, a consumer who has recognised the need for aspirin may, once confronted in-store by a shelf

displaying multiple product options, purchase Disprin based purely on recognition.

Unplanned purchases represent impulse purchases where product displays in mass merchandising stores act as a surrogate shopping list. As discussed earlier, this does not imply that the decision-making process does not exist, since the in-store display trigger need recognition, leading to purchase.

In addition to the above, Schiffman & Kanuk (1995: 581) distinguish three different types of purchases, namely trial purchases, repeat purchases and long-term commitment purchases. A **trial purchase** constitutes the purchase of quantities smaller than usual, normally by first time buyers. A trial can therefore be seen as the exploratory phase of purchase behaviour where the consumer will attempt to evaluate the product by using it. For example, a consumer would try new toothpaste by purchasing a 35 ml tube instead of 75 ml (the usual size purchased). Consumers can also be encouraged by marketers to try new products by offering free samples, discount coupons and reduced prices.

If the trial product is perceived to be more satisfactory or better than other brands, the consumer is likely to repeat the purchase. **Repeat purchases** are closely related to brand loyalty and consumers will, unlike with trial purchases, purchase larger quantities based on satisfaction with the use thereof. Considering the toothpaste example, the consumer will purchase a 75 ml tube instead of 35 ml as was done with the trial purchase.

Trial purchases are, however, not always feasible and consumers have to move directly from evaluation to a long-term commitment through purchase, for example when purchasing a refrigerator, hi-fi or hairdryer.

Before addressing the actual shopping environment, the different types of shoppers need to be identified. Solomon (1996: 315) identifies five different shopping types, namely:

- the **economic consumer** (a rational, goal-oriented shopper wishing to maximise value for money);
- the **personalised consumer** (a person with strong attachments to the store personnel – shop where the person is known by name);
- the **ethical consumer** (a shopper that will support locally-owned stores rather than large supermarket chains);
- the **apathetic consumer** (one who does not enjoy shopping but sees it as a necessary chore); and
- the **recreational shopper** (a person who loves shopping and views it as fun and a social activity).

The purchase environment fulfils an important role in the purchase process, since many factors influence where consumers will purchase their selected products. Factors influencing the retail outlet selection include the store image, retail advertising and outlet location and size.

The outlet's **image** comprises a number of different dimensions and components. The importance of listing the dimensions influencing store image in Table 3.6 below is that all of these factors may have an influence on whether or not a consumer will purchase at a specific store, i.e. consumers will purchase products from outlets based on the image of these outlets.

These image-determining dimensions are listed in Table 3.5, indicating both the dimension and its components.

TABLE 3.5: DIMENSIONS AND COMPONENTS OF STORE IMAGE

Dimension	Component(s)
Merchandise	Quality, selection, style and price
Service	Lay-away plan, sales personnel, easy return, credit and delivery
Clientele	Customers
Physical facilities	Cleanliness, store layout, shopping ease and attractiveness
Convenience	Location and parking
Promotion	Advertising
Store atmosphere	Congeniality, fun, excitement, comfort
Institutional	Store reputation
Post-transaction	Satisfaction

Source: Adapted from Hawkins et al. (1995: 490)

Note that the listed dimensions are most probably only applicable (or a number of them) to physical stores. Image for other types of retail outlets, for example telesales (out-bound and in-bound call centres), will be determined by other factors. For example the image of a telesales outlet will be influenced by whether or not a toll-free number is provided (0800 – where the called party pays for the call), busy call attempts and 24-hour availability.

Retail advertising and promotion influence the consumer's choice of store selection by communicating its attributes to consumers. Of particular importance is advertising of prices (Levy & Weitz, 2001: 25-26). From a consumer point of view, an advertisement communicating a special price for a product, which the consumer has selected as the preferred alternative, may result in the consumer purchasing the selected item from the retailer advertising the special offer. Hawkins et al. (1995: 492) explain that consumers could possibly, when responding to the advertisement, also purchase other products (referred to as spill-over sales) in addition to the product on special promotion.

The **location** of the outlet plays an important role in consumer store selection, since consumers will most probably select the outlet closest to them if all other

considerations are equal. Similarly, unless fast service or convenience is required, consumers will probably select larger **sized** stores than smaller stores. Worth mentioning is that other internal factors of the store could determine the store selection. These factors include the store atmospherics, point-of-sale material, displays and sales people. Hawkins et al. (1995: 503) clarify store atmospherics by stating that it comprises, amongst other attributes, lighting, presentation of merchandise, layout, fixtures, colours, sounds, odours, appearance and behaviour of sales people and even the number, characteristics and behaviour of other consumers.

To conclude the discussion on purchase, it is important to include the physical act of purchasing in addition to factors consumers consider when purchasing products and services. Hawkins et al. (1995: 506) explain that once the brand and store has been selected, the consumer has to conclude the transaction, which is called the “purchasing” of the product. Dunne & Lusche (1999: 98) explain that the consumer can negotiate with the seller, apply for credit if necessary and determine the terms of payment (cash, credit offered by the seller or credit card) during the transaction process.

According to Hawkins et al. (1995: 506), credit is not only a means of purchase but also a product itself. A consumer intending to purchase an expensive item could, therefore, recognise a need for credit. Since many different forms of credit are available, the consumer may repeat the decision-making process for this identified need.

Dunne & Lusch (1999: 98) note that unexpected factors can intervene during the transaction phase that could influence the decision whether or not to proceed with the intended purchase. For example, the consumer can become aware of unanticipated costs, such as taxes and delivery costs.

3.6.1 Consumption

Consumption normally follows the act of purchase, where the consumer needs to decide how to consume the purchased product. It should be mentioned that authors such as Belch & Belch (2001: 107); Hawkins et al. (1995: 628); and Assael (1995: 81), unlike Engel et al. (1995: 263), do not include consumption as a specific stage in their discussions on the decision-making process.

Engel et al. (1995: 263), however, continue with the discussion of their process by stating that the consumer has several consumption options, including usage at the earliest convenience, short-term storage in anticipation of later use, long-term storage with no anticipated or specific use in mind or aborting the consumption process. As an example of the last option, the consumer may have been retrenched at work, the family could possibly disagree on the purchase choice or new information could suggest that the choice is inappropriate. In any of the above cases, the consumer would attempt to return the purchased product for either a refund or exchange it for a different alternative.

One well-known result from purchase is cognitive dissonance (post-purchase or buyers regret), where consumers have doubts whether they made the right choice or not. Cognitive dissonance can also lead to the consumption process being aborted. Hawkins et al. (1995: 514) explain that cognitive dissonance occurs when the consumer has to make a relatively permanent commitment to a chosen alternative, while other alternatives with attractive features are not chosen. Engel et al. (1995: 264) note four circumstances that can activate cognitive dissonance. Firstly, a certain threshold or dissonance-motivated tension is surpassed. Secondly, the action is irrevocable. Thirdly, there may be other, unchosen alternatives, with qualitatively dissimilar but desirable attributes. Finally, the choice was made by free will, implying that the consumer was not constrained by social or parental pressure.

According to Engel et al. (1995: 264), consumers experiencing cognitive dissonance have one of two options to reduce the dissonance. They can either confirm the choice or conclude that an unwise decision has been made. Confirmation of the correct choice can be achieved through search of supporting information. Schiffman & Kanuk (1997: 582) add two additional strategies that consumers can follow to reduce the dissonance, namely persuading friends or neighbours to purchase the same brand or turning to other satisfied owners for reassurance. Assael (1995: 96) lists a final method of choice confirmation, namely that consumers can lower their expectations for the performance of the product, for example finding the product acceptable although a few problems were experienced.

3.6.2 Post-purchase alternative evaluation

Engel et al. (1995: 273) are of the opinion that the consumer decision-making process does not cease once the product has been purchased and consumed. Schiffman & Kanuk (1997: 582) support this view by explaining that consumers will, when performing a post-purchase evaluation, judge their experience from purchasing and consuming the product against their expectations.

It is important to note that, for many products, there are two different dimensions for product performance, namely instrumental and symbolic or expressive performance. Hawkins et al. (1995: 522) explain that instrumental performance relates to the physical functioning of the product. In contrast, symbolic performance refers to the aesthetic or image-enhancement performance. Consumers will, therefore, evaluate the chosen product on these dimensions against their expectations.

According to Engel et al. (1995: 273), post-purchase alternative evaluation takes one of two forms - consumer satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

Engel et al. (1995: 275) broaden this view with the so-called expectancy disconfirmation model, suggesting that satisfaction or dissatisfaction is the outcome of a comparison between pre-purchase product expectations and actual outcomes. Consumers, therefore, purchase a product with certain expectations of how it will actually perform once it is used. Three categories of expectations are distinguished, namely **equitable performance** (a normative judgment reflecting the performance the consumer should receive given the cost and efforts devoted to purchase and use), **ideal performance** (representing the optimum or hoped-for “ideal” performance level), and **expected performance** (what the performance probably will be). The expected performance is used most often by consumers in arriving at satisfaction or dissatisfaction, since that is the logical outcome of the pre-purchase alternative evaluation process.

Schiffman & Kanuk (1997: 582) and Engel et al. (1995: 275) note that consumer satisfaction or dissatisfaction judgements take one of three different forms, namely **positive disconfirmation** (performance is better than expected), **simple confirmation** (performance equals expectations) and **negative disconfirmation** (performance is worse than expected). Schiffman & Kanuk (1997: 582) explain that simple confirmation, where actual performance matches expectations, will lead to neutral feelings.

Before discussing satisfaction and dissatisfaction, it is important to note the view of Simintiras, Diamantopoulos & Ferriday (1997: 857 – 872) and Assael (1995: 95) on the importance of post-purchase evaluations. The likelihood of a brand being repurchased at this stage depends on the decision-making process. As will be seen below, dissatisfaction will lead to a negative consumer response, directly influencing any loyalty for the product and future potential repurchase thereof.

3.6.2.1 Satisfaction

Engel et al. (1995: 273) are of the opinion that consumers hold certain expectations about what a product or service will do when it is purchased, with satisfaction being the hoped-for outcome.

Engel et al. (1995: 273) continue by defining satisfaction as: "... a post-consumption evaluation that a chosen alternative at least meets or exceeds expectations". In short, satisfaction implies that the product has performed at least as well as the consumer has hoped for.

Considering the three different forms of consumer satisfaction or dissatisfaction judgements listed above, it can be concluded that positive disconfirmation will lead to a satisfaction response.

Assael (1995: 95) indicates that an important outcome of consumer satisfaction is that it reinforces the purchase decision. Satisfaction also reinforces a positive attitude towards the brand, resulting in a greater likelihood that the consumer will repurchase the same brand.

3.6.2.2 Dissatisfaction

Engel et al. (1995: G-5) explain dissatisfaction by defining it as: "the outcome of purchase when the consumer perceives the choice as falling short of expectations".

Considering the three different forms of consumer satisfaction or dissatisfaction judgements listed above, it can be concluded that negative disconfirmation will lead to a dissatisfied response. Engel et al. (1995: 275) state that the negative disconfirmation represents the worst possible outcome from purchasing and consuming a product.

According to Hawkins et al. (1995: 523), consumers that are dissatisfied with their purchased product have to decide whether to take some sort of action or not.

By taking some action, consumers can respond to dissatisfaction in a number of ways. Singh (in Engel et al., 1995: 276) lists three different categories of **complaints**, namely voice responses (the consumer seeks redress from the seller), private responses (negative word-of-mouth communications) and third-party responses (the consumer takes legal action). Hawkins et al. (1995: 523) add two more possible responses, namely complaining to private or government agencies (for example Isabel Jones' Fair Deal) or simply no longer buying the product.

Hawkins et al. (1995: 523) note that an important consideration with dissatisfaction responses is that even if the consumer does not take any external action, a less favourable attitude towards the store or product will be formed.

3.6.3 Divestment

Divestment forms the last outcome of purchase and the final stage to the consumer decision-making process. Hawkins et al. (1995: 517) explain that divestment or disposition of a product or the packaging or container thereof could occur before, during or after product use.

According to Engel et al. (1995: 282), three methods of product divestment are distinguished, namely outright disposal, recycling and re-marketing. Hawkins et al. (1995: 517) add that consumers often do not have to consider divestment of a product, since it is completely consumed, for example, eating in a restaurant or simply eating an ice cream with its cone.

All products have to be **disposed** of even if the disposal thereof follows years after the use thereof. Examples of immediate disposal of products include empty ballpoint pens, torn and washed-out jeans and a used toothbrush. Disposal of products characterised by being used for many years before actual disposal, include a television set that cannot be fixed after years of service, books and motor vehicles. Peter & Olson (1994: 325) add by stating that consumers can also dispose of products by giving them away to others or donating items to charity.

Products are often **recycled** when they reach the end of their life-cycle. Products or product packaging that are often recycled commonly contain some or all of the following: metal, aluminium, glass, paper and plastics. Peter & Olson (1994: 325) explain that consumers could decide to recycle a product once it has been used, although it could simply be disposed of as garbage, based on concerns for the environment.

Consumers also have the option to **resell** products once they have been used. For example: selling a power drill, exercise equipment or a used motor vehicle by advertising them in the Junk Mail, under classifieds in newspapers or on billboards at community centres or churches or selling them at flea markets.

It can be derived from the brief discussion on divestment, that consumers can choose from a number of options to divest products once they have been used. Products, therefore, often have extended life-cycles through re-use by consumers once they have been disposed of in some way or another by the original consumer.

3.7 SUMMARY

Chapter 3 focused on the consumer decision-making process. The chapter commenced with a discussion on different types of consumer decision-making processes, varying on a continuum from extended decision-making to habitual decision-making. Three factors determining the extent of decision-making were identified, namely the degree of involvement of the consumer in the purchase, differentiation of alternatives and time available for deliberation.

This was followed by a detailed discussion on the different stages of the decision-making process, namely need recognition, search, pre-purchase alternative evaluation and purchase and its outcomes (including consumption, post-purchase alternative evaluation and divestment).

Chapter 3 also considered the influence of individual differences and environmental influences on the consumer decision-making process. Environmental influences considered the manner in which the components thereof, namely culture, social class, personal influences, family and situational influences, influence consumer decision-making. Individual differences, comprising consumer resources, motivation and involvement, knowledge, attitude and personality, values and life-style, together with their influence on the decision-making process were also considered as possible influences on the decision-making process..

Chapter 4 will focus on the influence of the Internet on consumer decision-making by considering how the Internet can assist the consumer at different stages of the decision-making process.