

# Why do we consume?

## Adverts based on the different functions of consumption

### Overview

The purpose of this method is to critically examine consumer behaviour, without imposing moral judgments, which generally have more of a deterrent effect than a motivating one. Participants learn about the various functions of consumption, and take stock of how their consumption decisions are influenced by advertising which targets particular needs. To this end, they work in small teams to create adverts based on different needs and present them to the rest of the group.

### Instructions




#### Preparation

The functions of consumption (cf. background text) are written on moderation cards:

- > “Satisfaction of basic needs”
- > “Well-being/happiness”
- > “Attractiveness/affection”
- > “Identity/belonging”
- > “Social importance”
- > “Habit”

#### Execution

1. The participants are asked the question: “Why do we consume?”. If the group has difficulty understanding what is meant by this question, facilitators can use the example of a surprise ice cream: consumption of a surprise ice cream provides pleasure, playfulness, fun and excitement. To begin with, answers from the group are collected orally. These answers are then compared with the functions of consumption listed by Tim Jackson (cf. tips for facilitators) and completed, and the background texts on the functions of consumption can be read out if necessary.

	12-24
	60 minutes
	Moderation cards, markers; Downloadable materials ( <a href="http://www.endlich-wachstum.de">www.endlich-wachstum.de</a> ): Background text on the functions of consumption
	A separate room for each team, if possible

2. Once all of the functions have been presented, the facilitators introduce the topic of advertising. The goal of advertising is to influence our consumption behaviour by deliberately exploiting certain needs. It is not just about selling a product, but about appealing to an emotion or need.
3. The participants’ task is now to create adverts appealing to the different functions of consumption in the form of short theatrical sketches. For this task, the group is divided into teams of 4 people. Each team chooses one of the functions of consumption as the basis for its advert, without revealing it to the other teams. The teams now have 25 minutes in which to develop a short sketch advertising a particular product. The product can be specified by the facilitators or chosen by the group. Suitable products include e.g. shower gel (identity, well-being), a car (attractiveness, social importance), a jacket (identity, belonging) or coffee (well-being, habit). It can be fun to create adverts for silly imaginary products such as e.g. virtual cress. Ideally, the teams should have separate rooms or areas to work in to keep the sketches secret.

4. While the teams are preparing their sketches, a “stage” is prepared. This can be as simple as a line of adhesive tape on the floor and a pinboard as a curtain, or something more elaborate, depending on the available time and materials.
5. The group then reassembles. As the sketches are acted out, the audience must guess which of the functions of consumption is targeted by the advert. Each advert can be introduced by a start signal from the audience or the facilitator. The performances can be met with applause from the audience.

### Evaluation

Facilitators can refer to the following questions to guide the evaluation session:

- › Have these functions of consumption always existed? Where do they come from?
- › Why do we make the satisfaction of many of our needs dependent on consumption?
- › Assuming we want to consume less out of consideration for ecological limits, how can we satisfy these functions?
- › How does advertising work?
- › What would a world without advertising be like?
- › What role is played by advertising in a growth society?

Variations	<p>For smaller groups, or if time is scarce, fewer functions can be chosen for the adverts.</p> <p>The adverts can also all be made for the same product. This variation illustrates how many different needs we try to fulfil with a single product. The product chosen must be a suitable one, e.g. a car, an item of clothing, a shower gel or a holiday.</p> <p>The method can also be conducted as an analysis of advertising in public spaces: first, the functions of consumption are discussed and the group is divided into teams. The teams then go out, ideally in an area in which there is a large amount of advertising. The participants collect pictures of advertising which exploits the function assigned to them, using a digital camera. The photos are then displayed to the entire group using a projector, and the function corresponding to the photo is guessed/discussed.</p>
Tips for facilitators	<p>Additional background information on the functions of consumption can be found in the text “Consuming Paradise? Unsustainable consumption in cultural and social-psychological context” by Tim Jackson (&lt;<a href="http://portal.surrey.ac.uk/pls/portal/docs/PAGE/ENG/RESEARCH/CES/CESRESEARCH/ECOLOGICAL-ECONOMICS/PROJECTS/FBN/PARADISE.PDF">http://portal.surrey.ac.uk/pls/portal/docs/PAGE/ENG/RESEARCH/CES/CESRESEARCH/ECOLOGICAL-ECONOMICS/PROJECTS/FBN/PARADISE.PDF</a>&gt;).</p>
Suggestions for follow-up	<p>A suitable follow-up for this method is “Building another world” (chapter 5), which features people who practise and promote alternatives to a consumer society.</p>