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The Role of Time in the Action of the Consumer

MICHELLE M. BERGADAÀ*

A phenomenological approach was used to study the temporal system of consumers, an important but neglected aspect of individual action and consumer behavior. Two patterns of temporal attitude with profoundly different implications for consumer behavior were identified: some individuals appear to live and act as if they are more subject to deterministic functioning in relation to their temporal orientation, while others appear subject to voluntaristic functioning. Different temporal orientations may induce different sorts of motivation, different plans, the consumption of different types of products, and different specific attitudes that elicit a certain organizational process in relation to products.

By explicitly ignoring time, or by simply regarding it as "another variable," the decision-making models of consumer research do not account for the way that individuals and societies view time and how this apprehension affects consumer choices. Time can have a multitude of meanings, such as, for example, ecological time (Braudel 1969), economic time (Becker 1965), social time (Merleau-Ponty 1962), individual time (Sartre 1956), ideal time (Augustine 1954), and so on.

These "times" are perceived by the individual when planning actions, but their diversity does not lend itself easily to analysis (Hendriks and Peters 1986). Nevertheless, some attempts have been made to unite these different elements. Settle, Alreck, and Glasheen (1978) measured individuals' ability to remember their past and work out future plans, their perception of the passing of time, their skill in organizing and executing their plans chronologically, and their ability to wait for a reward. Holman (1980) developed a scale making possible the classification of individuals according to their awareness of the control (or lack of control) they have over their own future and their ability (or lack of ability) to anticipate the future. Gonzalez and Zimbardo (1985) defined seven different types of people by measuring temporal orientation and other variables,

such as individual ways of deciding on and planning actions, degree of fatalism, hedonism, and so forth. Quantitative studies of this kind are sufficiently intriguing to make one want to discover the reasons for these attitudes, the way in which they manifest themselves, and their consequences for consumer behavior.

To understand individuals' actions in relation to time, it is necessary to understand the basic principles in a person's past and imagined future that both account for and influence how the past, present, and future are perceived. This research attempts to understand how consumer actions (motivation and behavior) are influenced by the aforementioned temporal orientation of individuals. The study equally tries to understand whether this phenomenon is further influenced by internal factors (endogenous voluntarism) or external ones (exogenous determinism).

An integrative model is discussed first. A study of its components, defined by an interdisciplinary approach, enables the formulation of research questions. A naturalistic approach is used to study a sample of individuals to show, on the one hand, the similarity between individuals on a principally conceptual level and, on the other hand, the greatest apparent differences between groups of individuals. This enables us to understand the reasons for general attitudes toward life and the reasons for consumer behavior. In the conclusion, the main results derived from this research are considered by taking into account the constraints peculiar to the phenomenological approach as well as the limits of this research (in particular, the consideration of situational variables and personality in the daily life of the individual).

CONCEPTS OF TIME

What is time? "When no one asks me, I know; as soon as I have to explain it, I no longer know," replied

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Saint Augustine (1954, p. 308). Nevertheless, numerous philosophers and researchers have taken turns trying to answer this question. There are numerous articles on the subject of time in every discipline. Without compiling an exhaustive list, one can differentiate the various levels on which the phenomenon is perceived to decide how to integrate the role of time into consumers' actions.

For the philosopher Bergson (1959), the reality of time is its duration. The moment is only an artificial distinction necessary to the understanding of certain phenomena since intelligence is incapable of uninterrupted thought and must bring time to a standstill to grasp its essence. The past and the future are unconditionally linked, while the present carries along actions that conclude past events and sow the seeds of what is to come. Past and future are thus entirely contained in the present. It is through internal states of consciousness that time exists. For Bergson, time is "creation."

The sociologist Merleau-Ponty (1962) accuses Bergson of confusing past, present, and future within a uniform period with the intention of defending the idea of duration. According to Merleau-Ponty, the moment is what enables the individual to visualize a present that is not inert and yet to be aware of future plans and dreams as well as of the past and its regrets and nostalgia. Here, time is a duration shaped by consecutive moments, each of which is able to embody an event that is perceived subjectively. For Merleau-Ponty, time is the construction of the world as directly experienced by mankind.

The physicist Bachelard (1932) sees a fundamental problem in the notion of duration, that of the exact moment in which the action begins. According to him, action must have begun at a precise moment to have a fixed duration. For him, time exists only through the events that are contained within it, and reality is the moment that can be measured and analyzed. Duration can be only the subjective and retrospective synthesis of moments. For Bachelard, time is causal analysis.

The historian Braudel (1969), along with the "Ecole des Annales," puts forward the view of a past that is not factual history but continued evolution. He does not attempt to build up a picture of the past by reinforcing the bonds of causality between events but tries instead to make sense of history in its geopolitical totality. Thus, the past continues to exist in the present and for the future. For Braudel, time is universal. A similar response can be found in Lowenthal (1986), who insists on the importance of the global history of America for each individual. He defends the importance of social past from an ecological point of view. For him, this common past is a subjective idea as far as the historian and his audience are concerned.

On another level, the operationalization of the concept of time in terms of human behavior has been proposed by the economist Becker (1965) with the theory of "human capital." For him, individuals become

producers of their own general satisfaction by allocating units of time to units of activity. His work has been completed and developed by a number of economic researchers (e.g., Dupuy 1975; Hill and Juster 1980; Linder 1970). In the field of consumer behavior, this approach to time has generally been taken. For example, Jacoby, Szybillo, and Berning (1976) have reviewed studies carried out in economics, sociology, and psychology and shown that these disciplines had already regarded time as a specific object for research in the field of consumer behavior. Their conclusion is that time exists in limited and finite quantities and is a basic intangible resource and that the freedom to use time as one chooses can be acquired by trading another resource, such as money or effort. For Becker and the researchers opting for an economic approach, time is a resource.

Finally, time as a specific variable has been studied in the field of consumer behavior in relation to economic variables (Menefee 1982; Nickols and Fox 1983; Schary 1971; Strober and Weinberg 1980), sociological variables (Holbrook and Lehmann 1981; Hornik 1982) and psychological variables (Hendrix and Martin 1980; Hornik 1984). But the transformation of time from something "that passes" into something "that is used up" is a new pattern arising from the construction of industrial time and the generalization of clocks in Western society (Dubinkas 1988). This pattern imposes its rhythm on the individual (De Grazia 1962). In fact, the temporal dimension may have different patterns, relative to each society (Graham 1981). Fabian (1983, p. 24) says, "As soon as culture is no longer primarily conceived as a set of rules to be enacted by individual members of distinct groups, but as the specific way in which actors create and produce beliefs, values, and other means of social life, it has to be recognized that time is a constitutive dimension of social reality. Once time is recognized as a dimension, not just a measure, of human activity, any attempts to eliminate it from interpretive discourse can only result in distorted and largely meaningless representations."

When we speak of the behavior of the consumer in a given society, we mean the *action* of the individual, that is, the process leading from initial motivation to decision and finally to the act eventually carried out and its consequences. Thus, it is really the dimension of time that is at the center of research, a dimension incorporating the patterns that enable the individual to make sense of social reality and the subjective vision of past and future. This pattern influences the way that motivation and behavior manifest themselves.

A RESEARCH MODEL

The dimension of time in consumer action is presented here in the form of a model of the temporal cognitive system of the individual, which gives equal coverage to the social and personal time of the individual, the motivation to act, and the action process.

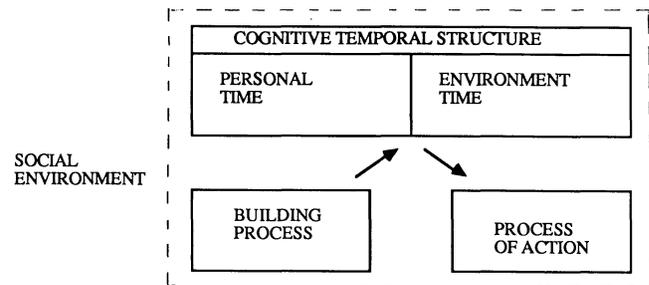
This model is simplifying; it does not claim to outline all of the richness and various nuances of reality as perceived by the individual but rather to define the most simple elements, which facilitate our understanding of this very complex phenomenon. Once the role of these different elements is understood, it will be possible to perceive the whole, that is, the unchanging relationship between these elements. The principal question that brings them all together is, What is the role of time in the action of the consumer?

This model was initially inspired by the proposals of Lewin (1935, 1938); it reconciles the cognitive vision the individual has of past and future and of social and personal time, which have a strong influence on actions. Here, the *temporal cognitive structure* represents reality as perceived and understood by the individual. This structure is composed of *personal time*, defined as the individual's perception of past, present, and future and of personal aims and motivation, and *environmental time*, which is the individual's view of society and the direct environment. This model differs from Lewin's proposals inasmuch as a *construction process* and an *action process* are added to the temporal cognitive structure to form a larger *cognitive temporal system*. The construction process ought to incorporate all of the reasons for which the individual creates a personal view of reality within the basic framework of time. Finally, the action process proceeds from the birth of the individual's motivation vis-à-vis various objects to actions or active behavior. The synthesis of all of these elements constitutes the cognitive temporal system, which is open to the environment and in permanent contact with it. Figure 1 represents this system.

The Construction Process

The ability to organize life within a framework of time is not innate in humans, but is acquired and developed from infancy; the role of parents in children's education greatly influences their future temporal orientation (Lewin 1938; Piaget 1946). Personal past also seems to influence the temporal orientation of individuals. For example, people who have suffered poverty prefer to orient themselves in the present. Furthermore, for psychologists, individuals seem to be past-oriented, present-oriented, or future-oriented, depending on such sociodemographic variables as age, social class, sex, level of education, and so on. For example, lower classes and older and less educated individuals are more past- and present-oriented than other groups (Agarwal, Tripathi, and Srivastava 1983; Freire, Gorman, and Wessman 1980; Klineberg 1967). But other forms of time besides this linear time, which moves from the past to the future, can also form the basis of the cognitive temporal structure of individuals. In some societies, awareness of the cycles of nature results in a perception of time as circular (Graham 1981; Malaurie 1976); in other cultures, one might live in the "eternal present" in accordance with the

FIGURE 1
COGNITIVE TEMPORAL SYSTEM OF INDIVIDUAL



ancestral mode of existence and without trying to influence external events (Hall 1984). The research question is twofold: Is the individual clearly oriented toward a specific temporal area (past, present, future), and how is it possible to define the process of construction of this linear time (or possibly circular time, if it exists in our society)?

Environmental Time

Individuals' environment seems to influence their actions greatly (Braudel 1969; Merleau-Ponty 1962), and research in ethnology shows that individuals give meaning to their lives through the experiences within their cultural network (Geertz 1973; Iteanu 1983; Leitter 1980). In Western society, individuals organize their actions using the objective points of reference on the calendar and the spatial visualization of events in relation to where they have taken place, the people present, and so on (Michon 1972). This environment is also viewed through the valence (negative or positive perception) of anticipated social events, which thus affects the individual's motivation to act (Gjesme 1983). Finally, situational variables arising from the immediate environment, such as the family life cycle, equally affect an individual's actions (Hagestad 1986; Hendricks and Peters 1986; Nydegger 1986). The research purpose is to determine what influence social and immediate environments have on the temporal cognitive structure.

Personal Time

For Bergson (1959), the past and future are wholly contained in the present and contribute to individual creation, but cognitive psychologists dissociate these elements. For them, individuals decide on objectives and then decide on a subsequent course of action. Thus, cognitivists have emphasized the future, since the prime reason for individual motivation and action is derived from an analysis of future events. These researchers concentrate on the subjective distance of the "goal" (Gjesme 1979, 1982), the network of successive actions defined by the individual (Raynor 1974; Ray-

nor and Entin 1983), and the implication in terms of cognitive organization (Lens and Gaily 1980; Sunberg, Poole, and Tyler 1983). The individual is viewed as the initiator of actions that have their roots in the future. Hoping to defend this concept of voluntarism against that of the exogenous determinism of the behaviorists, some researchers in cognitive psychology succeed in commending a voluntarism that verges on endogenous determinism. Hence, the research question concerns what meaning plans and memories have for the individual in relation to the perception of destiny.

The Action Process

From a behaviorist perspective, which regards human action as a response to events and stimuli arising from the environment, motivation has an external origin. Conversely, gestalt theory assumes that individuals create for themselves a world that informs them of their position in relation to other things in the environment around them; thus, motivation has an endogenous source. But if researchers are divided over the origin of individual action, individuals themselves seem to be equally divided when it comes to this problem: individuals who exhibit an internal locus of control believe that they determine their own future, while those with an external locus of control believe that their future is subject to the vicissitudes of life (Rotter and Mulray 1965). Individuals seem to be more or less active or passive when it comes to their destiny. In the context of consumer behavior, the problem is to understand how this general attitude is manifested when the object is a consumer product.

Establishing the relationship between consumer and consumer product, Sartre (1956) goes beyond tangible value: objects take on a meaning that is related to the world as the individual perceives it. Individuals are thus motivated in the search for their own identity through the objects that surround them.

The consumer product is also implicative on a social level. For example, the patina of the everyday objects of old and rich families was both a social and temporal symbol, proof that the family had a certain status over several generations (McCracken 1988a). This social symbol has been replaced, according to McCracken, by the concept of fashion, just as the value of fixed time has been replaced by that of rapidly moving time. Here the research question is, What is the connection between individuals' cognitive structure (i.e., the relationship between personal and environmental time) and their action concerning products?

RESEARCH PROCEDURES

To answer the questions raised in the previous section and the principal question regarding the role of time in the action of the consumer, naturalistic inquiry was used in this research.

Research strategy has been defined as "an explicit set of guidelines pertaining to the epistemological status of the variables to be studied, the kind of lawful relationships or principles that such variables probably exhibit" (Harris 1979, p. 26). But the choice of a specific research strategy requires the application of a precise research program underlying each of the successive stages of the research. The research program here is different from the positivist ones advocated by Lakatos (1978), but the preoccupation with scrutiny throughout the research is the same. Hence, each research step presented in this section specifies various exigencies: the sample choice has been made to illuminate the research object as recommended by Glaser and Strauss (1967); the collection of data through open-ended interviews and the analysis, performed via two independent processes, are detailed. Validation of results is an important issue in naturalistic inquiry, so two independent validation processes (member check and expert check) are discussed according to the propositions of naturalistic inquiry (Belk, Sherry, and Wallendorf 1988; McCracken 1988b).

The specific research object defines the research strategy. Graham (1981, p. 335) says that "a problem arises when a consumer researcher assumes that all the subjects have the same perception of time, or that subjects' perception is the same as the researcher's perception." The study of the cognitive temporal system thus implies the need to define a research method that recognizes the subjectivity with which the individual perceives reality. This subjectivity rests on the continuous interaction between the individual and the environment (Hudson and Ozanne 1988). Indeed, it is not yet possible to put forward the hypothesis that human action is a response to external stimuli (from a behaviorist point of view) or that action is due, on the contrary, to the intrinsic motivation of the individual (cognitive thought). Hence, it cannot be a question of researching the causes of the action, but of defining a methodology that enables an individual's reasons to manifest themselves. This will enable us to better understand (but not explain) the dimension of time and its implications (Hirschman 1986). Hence, the phenomenon has to be studied in the most natural and rigorous research program possible.

The Sample

In naturalistic research, the size of the sample tends to be small since the method used to enable the interpretation of underlying laws from the data generally requires long interviews. Its exact size depends on the desired balance between the need to understand a particular phenomenon in depth and the need to establish comparisons at data level. Indeed, new subjects can be added at any moment, according to the needs of the study (Belk, Sherry, and Wallendorf 1988; Hudson and Ozanne 1988). In the research described in this article, the initial decision to question 15 people

TABLE 1
SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

Subject number	Sex	Age	Occupation	Educational level	Parents' occupation
1	Female	30	Homemaker (husband is top executive)	Master's	Top corporate executive (father)
2	Female	50	Office worker	9 years	Blue-collar workers
3	Male	50	Office worker	7 years	Farmers
4	Female	35	Middle management	Master's	Top corporate executive (father)
5	Female	40	Office worker	11 years	Blue-collar workers
6	Male	28	Middle management	13 years	Top corporate executive
7	Female	41	Office secretary	13 years	Office workers
8	Female	28	Student (MBA)	Master's	Professional (father)
9	Female	30	Homemaker (husband is middle management)	Master's	Top corporate executive (father)
10	Female	40	Office secretary	11 years	Blue-collar workers
11	Male	35	Middle management	11 years	Blue-collar workers
12	Male	30	Engineer	Master's	Lawyer (father)
13	Male	32	Naval officer	Master's	Top corporate executive (father)
14	Male	39	Corporate executive	Master's	Corporate executive (father)
15	Male	40	Corporate executive	Master's	Corporate executive (father)

proved to be sufficient for analytical purposes. Here, the aim of the sample is to bring to the fore a pattern that will facilitate the study of the similarity between individuals on a principally conceptual level on the one hand and the greatest apparent differences between groups of individuals on the other (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Three interdependent criteria seemed to most clearly differentiate two types of individuals in their attitude to time, and these were used as the sample basis.

1. *Individual background* appears to influence how time is constructed (Agarwal and Tripathi 1980; Agarwal, Tripathi, and Srivastava 1983; Freire, Gorman, and Wessman 1980; Klineberg 1967). In the sample, all of the individuals were French in origin, but seven had been reared in a higher social class (their parents were senior managers or professionals); six others were from a more modest class (children of blue-collar workers, small farmholders, etc.).
2. *The level of education* of individuals seems to influence their skill in structuring their course of action (Agarwal and Tripathi 1980; Armer and Youtz 1971). The sample was therefore selected to include two distinct categories of educational level: secondary or university grade.
3. *Social class* seems to affect both temporal orientation (Freire, Gorman, and Wessman 1980; Lamm, Schmidt, and Trommsdorff 1976; Leroux 1978; Leshan 1952) and attitude toward consumer products. Half of the sample was

composed of middle or senior managers; the other half, of employees. Table 1 presents their characteristics.

Interviews

Individual interviews were carried out, each lasting 40–45 minutes. The interviews at first focused on the following themes defined by the literature review: temporal orientation, perception of fate, formulation of plans, and perception of society. The process of action was studied in relation to several products, chosen for their individual, domestic, or social implications (Grinstein 1955); these were books, banking products, housing, and holidays. For each product, the themes of “action” and “organization” were focused on in the second part of the interview.

The interviewer is never either totally active or passive during naturalistic inquiry but is involved as an integral part of the research (Belk, Sherry, and Wallendorf 1988). To avoid idiosyncratic bias, an effort was made to ensure that the questions were kept as neutral as possible during the interviews, which were conducted by a single researcher. The questions were thus open, the order in which they were presented varied from one interview to the next, and the interviewees had as much freedom as possible when explaining their reasons, motivations, and attitudes. For example, the introductory question, Do you principally live in the past, present, or future? gave rise in each interview to a response that, although immediate and precise, was also supported by reasons entirely personal, such as the past, plans, fears, joys, and so on. Endeavoring to understand the individual, rather than to judge and interpret, leads to a complicity based on the objectivity

that the interviewee perceives in the interviewer. This trust guarantees the fullness of the information. Exhibit 1 presents the open-ended questions used as a guide by the interviewer.

Analysis

A content analysis (Myers 1985; Wertz and Greenhut 1985) was performed on the basis of the 15 written transcriptions of the interviews, which were about 20 pages each. According to Churchill and Wertz (1985, p. 553), content analysis is "a dialectical movement in the researcher's consciousness from part to whole and back to part, as the researcher proceeds from the initial reading of the description, gaining an intuition of the whole from the flowing coherence of the parts and then returns to the description in an effort to discern and comprehend part/whole relationships." However, Garfinkel (1967) recommends clearly differentiating the global structure from the contents of individual documents. According to him, it is only after the global structure has been established that the contents of individual documents should be interpreted, in reference to the whole. Hence, the content analysis contained two distinct steps, that is, the structuring of the whole and then the comprehension of the individual issues.

The common structure was sought by working through five successive stages. In stage one, the sentences in each interview were grouped under the different themes, since the same topic could have been mentioned at different times during the interview by the respondent. The difficulty here involved sentences appropriate to more than one theme (e.g., the sentence "I am afraid of the future because my destiny is written and I have no power over it" concerns both the future and destiny themes). In this case, sentences were duplicated.

In stage two, the themes (for individuals, temporal orientation, perception of fate, formulation of plans, perception of society; for each product, action process and organization process) were grouped to obtain an overall view of the sample for each topic considered. Hence, individual factors were lost at this stage.

In stage three, each theme was independently analyzed and specific categories were then induced. These categories were inferred from the most prominent differences observed among the individuals. This process of induction was generally easy to perform because of the overall view, but it was sometimes necessary to completely change a categorization because of its inability to contribute to an understanding of the phenomenon. For example, the first criterion chosen for the action process regarding books concerned the place where they were bought or borrowed. This classification did not discriminate the individuals at all from a comprehensive point of view and had to be modified.

In stage four, after each theme was defined in the form of a grid comprising several categories, the 15

EXHIBIT 1

QUESTIONS TO THE RESPONDENTS

Interviewer's questions guide:^a

1. Do you principally live in the past, present, or future? Why?
2. What does the past represent for you? (if not included in the answer to the first question)
3. What does the present represent for you? (if not included in the answer to the first question)
4. What do you think about past society? (if not included in the answer to the second question)
5. What do you think about future society? (if not included in the answer to the third question)
6. Is past or future society better than the present one? Why or why not?
7. In your opinion, does what an individual becomes depend on himself or on fate?
8. What is destiny? (if not included in the answer to the seventh question)
9. In comparison to the child you were, have you changed? Why?
10. Have you any idea about what you will become in the future?
11. Do you make plans? Which? When? How?
12. Are you afraid of something concerning the future? (familial, personal, how to avoid it?)
13. What did your family and surroundings give you in the past?
14. What will your children become?
15. Have you something more to say?
16. For each product: What is a [product category] for you? When do you use it? How do you use it? How did you use it in the past? How do you organize buying this product? How do you organize using this product?

Member-check questions:

1. To what extent does the text that you have just read seem to resemble you?
2. In your opinion, would this description have been the same if someone other than me had conducted these interviews?
3. Are there themes that seem more important to you than other themes?
4. Are there other themes that we have not tackled that you feel are important?
5. Are there elements in this description to which too much importance has been attached?
6. Are there elements in this description to which more importance should be attached?
7. Since our last meeting, have there been events in your life that alter your opinions?
8. Would you like to make any comments about the text that you have just read?

^a During the course of the interviews, the questions arose in different orders, depending on the interviewees' answers.

original interviews were reread one by one and the individuals were classed specifically in relation to each theme. This produced a dynamic view of the whole and created links between themes, leading to an understanding of the elements as a network.

Stage five involved a check of whether the groups defined at the time of the sampling appeared on the grid on a regular basis and whether new groups should be created on new differentiation bases (Belk, Sherry, and Wallendorf 1988; Lincoln and Guba 1985). New categories were not necessary in this study.

If the preceding analysis process enabled a general understanding of the sample network via the themes

and categories studied, a specific understanding of each individual concerned was not possible during this first analysis. Hence, the reasons underlying the organization of the cognitive temporal system of individuals have been established by an independent in-depth analysis of each interview. For this purpose, each individual's initial document was read and reread until the interviewee's perception of reality was felt. This empathic process enabled us to understand how each individual perceived reality (Churchill and Wertz 1985; Glaser and Strauss 1967, p. 101–103). Finally, 15 individual portraits, each two pages in length, were developed. They were written in the first person singular and show the degree to which the individuals understand themselves.

Validation

The validation process was also carried out in two distinct steps, with member checks and expert checks. Member checks are recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Belk, Sherry, and Wallendorf (1988). Ours were carried out by presenting the two-page portraits to the 15 interviewees with an open-ended questionnaire that assessed the degree to which the individual accepted the portrait. (Exhibit 1 presents these written, open-ended questions.) This validation procedure turned out to be very satisfying. It is fairly difficult to sum up an individual's attitudes in two pages and thus very pleasing when individuals agree with the analysis. It is difficult to cheat when face-to-face with individuals who know, and say, whether the researcher has succeeded in understanding them.

A second check enabled an intervalidation, as advocated by Giorgi (1976) and Kirk and Miller (1986). Two professors in marketing, who were unaware of the object of the research and unable to communicate either with each other or with the researcher, were selected. The (blank) grids obtained from the interviews were given to them along with the 15 individual portraits previously described. As the order of the themes was the same for each portrait, it was possible to avoid the halo effect by asking the experts to fill in the grids one by one; in this way, it was impossible for them to have an overall view of an individual at any particular moment. The degree of accord between the experts and the researcher was established by using the method of confidence intervals relative to a binomial probability distribution with a small sample. It is thus possible to interpret the results more exactly than if the crude result of a nonparametric test had been used. (With a sample of this size, the level of risk [beta] is generally high in the case of a strong but imperfect correlation.) Results were satisfactory: with an alpha of 0.05, the correlation between the researcher's and the experts' classification was .98 for temporal orientation, .93 for destiny, .92 for the type of project; hence, these gave confidence intervals of 88.23–99.94, 81.73–98.60, and 81.61–97.24, respectively. Correlation on

the questions concerning the products was always above .96.

RESULTS

Shared Temporal Cognitive Structure

Temporal orientation is the temporal zone favored by individuals. The 15 individuals interviewed were able to identify themselves spontaneously as living principally in the past, present, or future. They were also able to give reasons for their orientation (e.g., problems related to the past, fear of the future, delight in making plans, etc.). The two types defined at the time of sampling can thus be clearly distinguished as far as this theme is concerned. The seven present-oriented individuals in our sample are listed second, fifth, seventh, ninth, tenth, eleventh, and fourteenth in Table 1; the six future-oriented individuals are listed first, fourth, sixth, eighth, twelfth, and thirteenth. Only two people claimed to live in two temporal zones—the man listed third is both past- and present-oriented, and the man listed fifteenth is present- and future-oriented. The fact that these two located themselves in two temporal zones despite the precautions taken during the sampling procedure seems to indicate that, in reality, individuals might situate themselves in multiple intermediate positions.

Perception of fate has been assessed by Rotter and Mulray (1965), who use a dichotomous scale to define whether individuals believe themselves to be the masters of their own fate (internal locus of control), or whether, on the contrary, they feel at the mercy of external forces (external locus of control). Here the object was to understand the main attitudes and not merely the opinions, as obtained with the scale for determining locus of control. During the interviews, subjects were able to express themselves freely in response to the specific open-ended question about destiny. The term "fate" had different meanings for different people: some claimed not to believe in fate at all; for others, this term accounts for every incident in an individual's life; for still others, the term has a religious meaning. To limit this diversity, a method of classification was established on the basis of the conative attitude of individuals. Two principal categories were thus established.

An *attitude of reaction* typifies individuals who claim that they react to external events. It is only when confronted with a new situation that they might decide to act and, if so, in what way. As one subject explained, "I don't want to think about what might happen. That would frighten me. If something happens, then I'll decide what to do then and there." This was the attitude of nine individuals in our sample (those listed second, third, fifth, seventh, ninth, tenth, eleventh, fourteenth, and fifteenth in Table 1).

An *attitude of action* is attributed to individuals who say that the environment comprises a range of possible

EXHIBIT 2

CHARACTERISTICS OF PRESENT AND FUTURE ORIENTATION

Present orientation	Future orientation
It is characterized by motivation to improve the present well-being of the individual.	It is characterized by motivation to develop oneself.
The origin of this motivation is situated in the present.	The origin of this motivation is situated in the future.
The principal attitude of these individuals is that of reaction.	The principal attitude of these individuals is that of action.
They wait for the external stimulus (or event) to occur before they react. Sometimes, they resist change or refuse to consider it.	They try to maintain an attitude of open-mindedness toward the environment. They search actively for opportunities to develop themselves.
The individuals do not have any plans or make concrete plans.	The plans made by the individuals are abstract ones.
These plans are characterized as follows: Individuals know what they want to do. The object is essentially precise.	These plans are characterized as follows: Individuals know what they want to become. The object is essentially vague.

opportunities that they actively seek for progress, self-improvement, and so on. They behave actively in this sense, wanting to "construct" their own lives. This is the attitude of those listed first, fourth, sixth, eighth, twelfth, and thirteenth in Table 1.

The formulation of plans was tackled with the help of the open-ended question "Do you make plans?" It turned out that all of the individuals had made one or more plans, even if they at times rejected the idea of planning. Thus, one person at first stated, "No, I don't make any; there's no point; the future is too unpredictable," but finally admitted that he planned to buy a house after retirement. The analysis then focused on the nature of the plans to establish a system of classification on the basis of the form that the plans took.

Concrete plans are definite, and individuals are able to describe clearly the actions necessary to implement them. These plans can be professional, material (e.g., the purchase of a house), or domestic (e.g., "When my son goes to a good business school, I'm sure he won't run the risk of unemployment"). This type of plan was made by the individuals listed second, ninth, eleventh, fourteenth, and fifteenth in Table 1. In contrast, *abstract plans* are not precisely explained. In a more philosophical manner, individuals talk about what they would like to become in the immediate or more distant future. This type of plan, unlike the previous one, does not entail a specific sequence of actions, but rather an analogical process of reasoning (e.g., "When I see my children laughing and joking on their way to school, I'll know that they'll be successful in life, and that I too will have succeeded"). Included in this category are those listed first, fourth, sixth, eighth, twelfth, and thirteenth in Table 1.

Four subjects claimed not to want plans. The man listed third in Table 1 was described as "in the continual process of improving his house"; the women listed fifth and tenth buy lottery tickets in hopes of having their dreams come true, and the woman listed seventh refused to have her plans categorized.

A Synthesis of Temporal Structure

The previous analyses show that the individuals in the sample could be classified fairly easily as either

future-oriented or present-oriented. Further, future-oriented individuals held attitudes that were perfectly homogeneous for all of the themes considered. The present-oriented were less homogeneous but fairly consistent nevertheless. Furthermore, the two men who defined themselves in terms of two temporal zones had attitudes similar to those oriented in the present, and they were placed in this group for the follow-up to the research.

It can be seen that all of the individuals designated as future-oriented have a single attitude of action with regard to their future; they do not believe in fate, judging themselves to be responsible for their own future. In contrast, all of the present-oriented individuals have an attitude of reaction to their environment, considering themselves to be subject to fate. Thus, it appears that the notions of voluntarism and determinism are not only general concepts but two distinct modes of experience on an individual level. These results are summarized in Exhibit 2.

The Action Process Concerning Products

After having questioned individuals on the preceding themes, the interviewers turned to the subject of the products studied. The analysis was carried out in the same way as that described previously and gave rise to various categories that will now be described.

Holidays. An analysis of holidays resulted in three categories: relaxing, enriching, and varied holidays. For *relaxing holidays*, individuals seek peace and quiet, relaxation, the enjoyment of being with family or friends, improving their physical health, or forgetting about their jobs. This was the choice of those listed seventh, ninth, tenth, and eleventh in Table 1. Individuals who prefer *enriching holidays* expect their holidays to offer them something new and enhancing from a personal point of view. This was the choice of those listed first, sixth, eighth, twelfth, and thirteenth in Table 1. *Varied holidays* may be either relaxing or enriching, according to the time of year or the individual's particular situation (e.g., whether someone has

young children). This category applied to those listed fourth, fourteenth, and fifteenth in Table 1.

Holidays may also be categorized by the degree of organization involved. *No specific organization* is involved when individuals hand over arrangements to specialized agencies or apply to holiday clubs (e.g., Club Med). And organization is reduced to a minimum when people do the same thing every year. This category characterized the holidays of those listed second, third, fourth, fifth, seventh, ninth, tenth, eleventh, fourteenth, and fifteenth in Table 1. Conversely, some individuals want complete control over the organization of their holidays. They spend a lot of time on this, obtaining information from numerous sources. Such *personal organization* characterized the holidays of those listed first, sixth, eighth, twelfth, and thirteenth in Table 1.

Banking products. It proved difficult to analyze banking products since certain individuals seemed to confuse them. Some claimed to have shares (on the stock exchange) whereas, in fact, they had government bonds. One person reported having a "house-buying savings plan, not to buy a house, but to save money without noticing it, the deductions being automatic." It was decided not to attempt to define categories common to individuals with regard to this product. However, the analysis of the action process in buying products has essentially focused on the degree to which individuals take charge of the organization, and categorization on this basis was possible.

The woman listed fourth in Table 1 left the task of managing her money to her husband, but all other subjects in the sample looked after their own finances. Two categories of management style were suggested. With *personal organization*, individuals want to keep control of their finances, and, in this case, the banker is regarded as a mere intermediary who receives their instructions. Those listed first, sixth, eighth, twelfth, and thirteenth in Table 1 expressed this preference. With *nonpersonal organization*, individuals have only accounts that are easy to manage (e.g., checking, savings) and choose to diversify their investments by following the advice of some other person (e.g., the banker, a parent, co-workers, etc.). Individuals in this category are listed second, third, fifth, seventh, ninth, tenth, eleventh, fourteenth, and fifteenth in Table 1.

Housing. An analysis of housing was easier since individuals had clear views on this subject. It was thus possible to establish main categories that show this product's meaning for individuals.

Individuals in the category of *functional value* (those listed fourth, fifth, sixth, eighth, twelfth, and thirteenth) prefer to make investments in real rather than personal property. The concept of "home" is independent of that of accommodation, and they would not hesitate to move if it were necessary for professional or family reasons. Individuals expressing *sentimental value* believe that accommodation, the per-

sonal or family home, is a "refuge," a "landmark." It is important to keep this accommodation. Some talk of keeping their house or apartment for "several generations." (Those listed first, second, third, seventh, ninth, eleventh, fourteenth, and fifteenth in Table 1 are in this category. The woman listed tenth is divorced, has no savings, and declared herself too poor to envisage buying accommodation. She absolutely hates the public housing in which she is obliged to live.)

The results for the action process for housing are surprising when one considers the financial implications of this product. Again, there are discernible categories, including that of "not relevant" for the subject with no savings.

With *simplified process*, individuals bought or rented their accommodation rapidly, seizing an opportunity. (Those listed fourth, fifth, sixth, eighth, twelfth, and thirteenth in Table 1.) With *elaborate process*, individuals planned the purchase a long time in advance. They had visited numerous estate agents and numerous apartments and houses before making a decision. Those who do not yet own their own property can say precisely when they will, thanks to their house-buying savings plan. (Those listed first, second, third, seventh, ninth, eleventh, fourteenth, and fifteenth in Table 1 fall into this category.)

Books. The analysis of books concentrated on the motivation described by individuals, as well as on the type of book read. For example, the statement "I read historical sagas such as *Kennedys: An American Saga* or *The Thorn Birds* in order to learn while enjoying myself" was classified as light reading. Light reading is for individuals who want to relax and forget their daily routine. They do not want anything that will drain them mentally. This category was appropriate for those listed second, fifth, seventh, eighth, and ninth in Table 1. Two individuals, listed third and eleventh in Table 1, specifically described the type of nonfiction they read—true stories describing the world they know or knew in the past. Informative books were read by those wanting to educate themselves, to learn and gain a better understanding of a topic, discipline, or author. These individuals are listed first, fourth, twelfth, thirteenth, and fifteenth in Table 1. Those listed tenth and fourteenth never read books; the classification was not relevant for them even though both had subscriptions to a mail-order firm for books.

An analysis of the action process was difficult because of the complexity of motivation with regard to reading. However, two categories were defined on the basis of the degree of personal autonomy characterizing choice. With *personal choice*, individuals decide for themselves what they will read, rejecting the idea of subscribing to mail-order firms. Those listed first, second, fourth, sixth, eighth, twelfth, thirteenth, and fifteenth in Table 1 claimed personal choice. With *external choice*, someone other than the reader decides

TABLE 2
 TYPES OF PRODUCTS AND PROCESSES OF ORGANIZATION OF PRESENT- AND FUTURE-ORIENTED PEOPLE

Type		Process
Present-oriented:		
Vacations	Relaxing, 7/9; enriching, 0; varied, 2/9	Nonorganized, 9/9; personally organized, 0
Banking products	NA	Nonpersonalized, 9/9; personally organized, 0
Living	Functional value, 1/9; sentimental value, 7/9; irrelevant, 1/9	Simplified process, 1/9; elaborated process, 7/9; irrelevant, 1/9
Books	Relaxing, 4/9; true stories, 2/9; informational content, 1/9; NA, 2/7	External selection, 7/9; individual selection, 2/7
Future-oriented:		
Vacations	Relaxing, 0; enriching, 5/6; varied, 1/6	Nonorganized, 1/6; personally organized, 5/6
Banking products	NA	Nonpersonalized, 0; personally organized, 5/6; irrelevant, 1/6
Living	Functional value, 5/6; sentimental value, 1/6; irrelevant, 0	Simplified process, 5/6; elaborated process, 1/6; irrelevant, 0
Books	Relaxing, 1/6; true stories, 0; informational content, 5/6	External selection, 0; individual selection, 6/6

NOTE.—NA, not applicable.

on the reading material (e.g., a spouse, mail-order firm, etc.). Those listed third, fifth, seventh, ninth, tenth, eleventh, and fourteenth in Table 1 reflected external choice.

A Synthesis of the Action Process

The preceding results again reveal markedly similar attitudes within the two groups defined. Thus, those oriented toward the future have a "voluntarist" attitude toward products, as they claim to have toward life in general. They want to enrich themselves intellectually when they read and go on holiday and do not attach much importance to housing. For all of the products studied, they want to keep control over the consumer process. In contrast, the individuals oriented toward the present, although more heterogeneous, talk about simplifying their lives, prefer relaxing holidays and books, and describe accommodation as a refuge. For all these products considered except housing, they try to entrust the action process to other people. Table 2 summarizes these results.

Comparing Table 2 and Exhibit 2 casts a fresh light on the following quotation from Grinstein (1955, p. 184): "Some people seek to derive a greater extension of their ego boundaries by increasing their material possessions. With others, this extension takes place by filling their ego with increasing amounts of newly found knowledge, investigation, research, reading, talking with people, travelling, etc." Belk (1988) shows that possessions are an integral part of the self-concept. The results of this study seem to confirm that assertion: individuals use (or do not use) a product and generally organize their lives in terms of either action or reaction, in accordance with their cognitive temporal structure. It can thus be concluded, with regard to this first analysis of the structure shared by individuals, that the cognitive temporal structure appears to strongly influ-

ence action process when it comes to consumer goods. Hence,

- Individuals who say that they want to be masters of their own destiny and who claim to know exactly what they want to become have a voluntarist attitude toward consumer products, whereas those who display an attitude of reaction with regard to life seem to be subject to an exogenous determinism when it comes to products.
- For those who are future-oriented, consumer products (except for housing) are part of a plan to enable them to become what they would like to be. For those who are present-oriented, only housing fits into such a plan.

So far, the analysis has been global; to learn the reasons behind these attitudes, it is necessary to analyze the interviews one by one.

Individual Analyses

The study of the individual interviews showed that the cognitive structure of individuals has developed through a process firmly anchored in personal history, education, experiences, and hopes and fears. The individuals expressed the reasons for their various attitudes simply in their own words. These words lose their specificity when they are transcribed, but the sense remains.

Personal history is primarily concerned with the education that the individual has received. For all 15 individuals, the role of the parents was considered fundamental. The degree of intellectual and moral encouragement they received affected their orientation. As parents themselves, they see their roles as educators somewhat differently: the present-oriented say they want to help their children to obtain their certificates and find their first jobs and are willing to support them financially if necessary; the future-oriented want to of-

fer their children the greatest possible number of curricular activities to broaden their minds and help them to become autonomous and independent. Thus, the notation of concrete or abstract plans can be found here too.

One particular case deserved special treatment. The man listed third in Table 1 claimed to be past-oriented but had attitudes or reactions similar to the present-oriented and was classified in this group for the preceding analysis. But it turned out that in numerous cases the classification established appeared to be largely unsuitable. In fact, the individual concerned is the son of a farmer and was a farmer himself until the age of 30, when he became an office worker. He is, moreover, deeply attached to his cultural background as a native of Brittany. At the interview, he finished by saying that he felt different from his work colleagues. He does not count the hours, nor does he long for the holidays. For him, time is "cyclical."¹ He wants to pass on to his children the sense of neighborly solidarity (which he himself learned from country people), his language, and the things he considers important in life (the sense of family, the respect of life and nature, etc.). Thus, this individual perceives a future that is a continuation of the past, and his present is close to the "eternal present" (Hall 1984).

Fears of the future, and fears based on past events that individuals have had to face, clearly influence perceptions of the future. The present-oriented speak about the difficulties they or family members have encountered, (death, serious illness, etc.), which lead them to fear the future and to say "It's better not to think about the future" or "You have to live life fully from day to day." The future-oriented, however, say that they are "curious" and "impatient" to see the future changes in their environment and the opportunities that will present themselves to them. Unlike the present-oriented, none of them spoke about social hazards (drugs, unemployment, AIDS, etc.). The analysis has not given prominence to the fact that an outstanding life event can lead to a change in attitude. Individuals recount such events to explain their attitude but point out that "they were already like that as children" (the question asked was very precise). At this stage, therefore, it is possible to say that the education received seems to influence the way in which individuals perceive events and that temporal orientation is based on the meaning attributed to these events.

An analysis of the type of motivation has shown that the future-oriented know what they want to be-

come and have every intention of doing all they can to succeed. They do not set out any particular plan of action since their projects are intangible ("It depends on life and the opinions of those around me," said the woman listed first in Table 1). They make very little reference to their present situation. They want to remain as flexible as possible to profit when the right opportunity presents itself. The present-oriented, conversely, want more than anything else to improve their present situation. They make precise plans to do this (being unable to have the accommodation of her choice, the woman listed second in Table 1 makes unrealistic, albeit precise, plans; the woman listed tenth buys tickets for the lottery). By the time the present-oriented retire, the certificates their children were to obtain, their holidays, and so forth, have already been known for a long time. These detailed projects rely on a precise sequence of actions.

With the conclusion of the individual analyses, I can now complete the proposed model of the cognitive temporal system, adding that a person's construction process has its roots in the education received and certainly in the cultural background (as for the man from Brittany). General attitude toward personal or social events develops either an attraction for or apprehension about the future and thus leads to an orientation toward the past, present, or future. This temporal orientation, which seems a priori to be fairly stable, leads the individual to develop different types of plans and to choose a type of relationship with the environment. This attitude of action or reaction with regard to the environment seems to exist equally and with appreciable consistency in attitudes toward consumer goods. Figure 2 summarizes these elements.

CONCLUSION

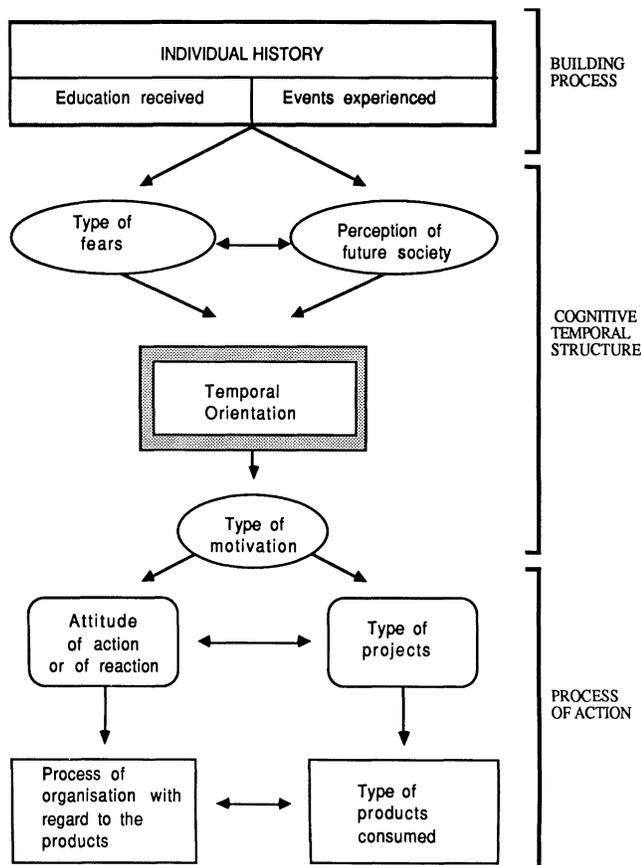
The desire to find a global structure for the phenomenon of time is an important preoccupation for many researchers (see, e.g., *American Behavioral Scientist* on aging and time [Hendriks and Zeltzer 1986]). In fact, it seems natural to try to structure the phenomenon via a global approach before deepening the field of investigation with specific situations.

The two methods of analysis used for this natural research complement and validate each other. An overall view of the phenomenon was obtained with the matrix approach to the object of research; the horizontal content analysis enabled it to be characterized, and the vertical analysis of each individual allowed it to be understood. The double control validated the results. The method used (the selection of two identifiable groups and an ethnological approach) for this research made it possible to clarify the global structure of the role of time in the action of the consumer. Thus, the principal result of the research is that there seems to be no absolute determinism or voluntarism at the root of human actions. Individuals oriented toward the future appear to act in a more voluntaristic way,

¹"Up in Brittany, time isn't important; you do your job that's all. What's more, at the end of the day, you can turn round and see what you have accomplished, and that gives you great pleasure. Here the days are filled with a multitude of little tasks which you can't really remember. . . . Personally, I don't count the time, or the days, or the months. I don't say to myself: 'You've got to realize this or that project.' For me, time is cyclical."

FIGURE 2

ELEMENTS CONSTITUTING THE COGNITIVE TEMPORAL SYSTEM OF THE INDIVIDUAL



while those oriented in the present seem to be guided by an exogenous determinism.

The groups identified, in fact, present noteworthy characteristics in terms of consumer behavior. The future-oriented have an attitude of action, actively seek change, and want to be ready for opportunities that will enable them to develop. It would certainly be interesting to study the behavior of these individuals with regard to new products. They are possibly the agents for change in society, the first to adopt new techniques or products, and they may even be initiators. The future-oriented are also independent in their action process, which minimizes their interaction with commercial intermediaries. In contrast, the present-oriented have a general attitude of reaction or resistance to external stimuli. Advisers or prescriptors (whether a banker, mail-order firm, travel agency, etc.) seem to be much more important to this group than to the other group. In view of the increasing importance of direct marketing and the marketing of services, it could be useful to check the specific attitudes of these groups with regard to the way goods are sold and distributed to extricate the specific criteria for segmentation. Al-

though the method used for this research places individuals within the general context of their interaction with the environment, it does not permit the analysis of individual heuristics in particular situations. Future research should study the stability of the proposed model when the individual's action is directed toward products or objects different from those studied here.

Specific sociodemographic criteria were used to select two distinct groups of individuals. The study shows that these groups can be distinguished with regard to their temporal orientation and consumer behavior. However, the fact that two individuals in the sample are situated between the groups shows that the groups defined in this study most likely represent two poles of temporal orientation, personal motivation, and consumer behavior. Furthermore, these two individuals (listed ninth and fourteenth in Table 1) orient themselves in the present, whereas their sociodemographic characteristics are similar to those of the future-oriented. It would, of course, be useful to introduce measures of personality regarding the development of the ego (Hanna 1971), nostalgia (Platt and Taylor 1967), dogmatism (Krauss 1967), materialism (Belk 1988), or hedonism alongside the temporal system to broaden our understanding of temporal orientation on an individual level. A combination of the elements within the global structure developed here and personality variables could require a quantitative process based on a representative sample of the population and, hence, a positivist paradigm.

Complementary interpretive research on time could also be conducted with the aim of better understanding the temporal structure rather than merely establishing its existence. This study has focused primarily on linear time. However, one person in the sample appears to live in circular time. In harmony with his cultural past as he remembers growing up in Brittany, he says he has no plans other than the cyclical ones concerned with improving his house, raising his family. Further research could determine whether there are numerous similar subcultures that structure time differently. Is there, in fact, an important group of people who live in harmony with circular time? Moreover, to what degree does this type of attunement exist in each of us?

Of all of the variables put forward to explain individual perspectives of time, age has been used the most frequently. According to research in psychology, individuals' perspective of time appears to grow shorter with age, and this age pattern was also found in this research: six individuals out of eight younger than 35 are future-oriented, and the seven people older than 35 are all present-oriented. But the influence of this variable with regard to individual action has not been clearly established. Researching the influence of age at the level of temporal orientation with quantitative methods would not enable us to understand whether an individual's evolution is due to the events encountered or to another process of global maturation. To define questions such as the influence of culture on

the temporal structure with the passage of time, we would again have to opt for a naturalistic inquiry.

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