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CITIZENS'
ATTITUDES AND INVOLVEMENT
IN PUBLIC CONSUMER INFORMATION

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<p>Abstract</p> <p>In this study public consumer information in Finland was researched from the viewpoint of citizens. The aim of this study was to better understand citizens' attitudes, behavior and information search. The research questions were: 1) What attitudes do citizens have towards public consumer information? 2) How involved are citizens in public consumer information? 3) In what ways can citizens' behavior be affected by public consumer information?</p> <p>As a case study, two stakeholder groups of the Finnish Consumer Agency were studied. Research material was collected by interviews with 79 citizens (49 consumers and 30 business managers). The data were collected between October 2000 and April 2001.</p> <p>It seems, according to this study, that citizens' attitudes toward public consumer information differ. The study showed that if a citizen has a basic knowledge of the Finnish Consumer Agency and a positive attitude towards it, the more likely this citizen will be to use its services. The results suggest that trust is a very important factor which should be maintained and increased.</p> <p>The results also indicate that citizens' involvement differs widely. The level of involvement varies in different situations and it has an impact on citizens' information search and information processing. However, the level of involvement is not always on as high level as might be expected. The results also suggest that an increasing level of involvement doesn't always mean more positive attitudes.</p> <p>This study suggests that citizens' involvement should be taken into account in the planning and implementing of communication by public organizations. At different levels of involvement citizens require information from different communication channels and they also need more or less detailed information. To support these various needs, guidelines for communication strategies according to different levels of involvement are presented.</p>	
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Sari-Maarit Eskelinen

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

On 15 March 1962 former president of the USA, John F. Kennedy, gave impetus to the consumer movement by the Bill of Consumer Rights. Kennedy's bill included the right to safety, information, choice from among a variety of products and services at competitive prices, and a fair hearing by government in the formulation of consumer policy. Nowadays these rights have been expanded and they are the right to be informed, the right to safety, the right to consumer education, the right to the satisfaction of basic needs, the right to a healthy and sustainable environment, the right to be heard, and the right to redress. Since 1982, 15 March has been celebrated as World Consumer Rights Day.

In Western society consumers are nowadays more informed, more educated and more aware of their rights (see e.g. Carrigan & Attala 2001, 563) than in the 1960s. Questionable products, deceptive advertising and environmental pollution are, however, only some examples of the reasons why consumerism, citizens' awareness of their rights, and criticism against consumption have increased during the last decades (see e.g. Kotler 2000). Consumers' attitudes toward ethical consumption have become more positive (Uusitalo & Oksanen 2004, 214). Firms realized, for example, that green consumerism could increase their profits and have taken environmental concerns seriously. According to Eriksson (2004) this does not, however, mean that environmental regulations are less needed. Effective public oversight is still essential. Recent studies also show that even citizens have positive attitudes toward ethical consumption, other issues such as price are often more important choice criteria (Carrigan & Attala 2001, 564-565; Boulstridge & Carrigan 2000).

It could be said that citizens are doing well also in Finland. The country has high living standards, high quality and variety of food, and we

manufacture high-tech products, etc. Finns are able to select from different product and service alternatives. Our safety and quality expectations are on a high level but unfortunately they are not always met. For example dangerous toys are sometimes sold before they have been taken off market and many people are worried about the safety of imported food. After the introduction the Euro in 2002 our price-consciousness decreased, especially in case of older people, people on low incomes, and those who have less general shopping experience (Anttila 2004, 54). All this means that the market needs to be controlled by public organizations and that citizens need information to make different kinds of decisions (like purchasing decisions). According to Lehtonen (1999a; 2000a) giving information to citizens is an important function of public organizations.

In the past public administration was based on secrecy. In Finland the communication of public organizations is nowadays guided by the principle of publicity. Accordingly, every citizen has a right of access to public documents. Such documents are public if the law doesn't say they aren't.

In 2002 the Prime Minister's Office in Finland published its recommendations on the principles the public administration should follow. The aim of these recommendations is to make the communication of public organizations more open. The purpose is to follow the principle of publicity by increasing access to information, public influence over decision making and to increase dialogue with citizens. (Valtioneuvoston kanslia 2002.)

This study examines public consumer information in Finland. Consumer information from public organizations is needed to make both consumers and firms aware of their rights and also about their obligations when, for example, a car someone has bought is not what was agreed. It is also important that compliance with rules and guidelines connected to consumer protection is enforced. This study aims to find out how well public consumer information reaches the citizens and what kind of effect it has to on the behavior of the citizens.

In Finland communication of public organizations has been researched between and within different sciences. Research has been affected, for example, by the views of communication of Kenneth Abrahamsson and Jürgen Habermas (Hakala 2000, 79-96). In recent years Jaakko Lehtonen, Pekka Aula, Hannu Nieminen, Liisa Turunen and Salli Hakala, for example, have published their views and research results on the communication of public organizations. There are many doctoral students and tens of master's level students whose focus is the communication of public organizations. There is a growing interest in this topic.

1.2 Research Questions and Framework of the Study

In this study public consumer information in Finland is researched from the viewpoint of citizens. The aim of this study is to better understand citizens' attitudes, behavior and information search. The research questions are the following:

- What attitudes do citizens have towards public consumer information?
- How involved are citizens in public consumer information?
- In what ways can citizens' behavior be affected by public consumer information?

In this study public consumer information is studied from the viewpoint of two citizen groups - consumers and business managers. Consumers are involved in this study because they are the biggest target group of consumer information. Business managers are involved because the Finnish Consumer Agency controls many areas of business and tries to find solutions to conflict situations between firms and their customers. The role of the Finnish Consumer Agency in Finland can be illustrated by the following figure.

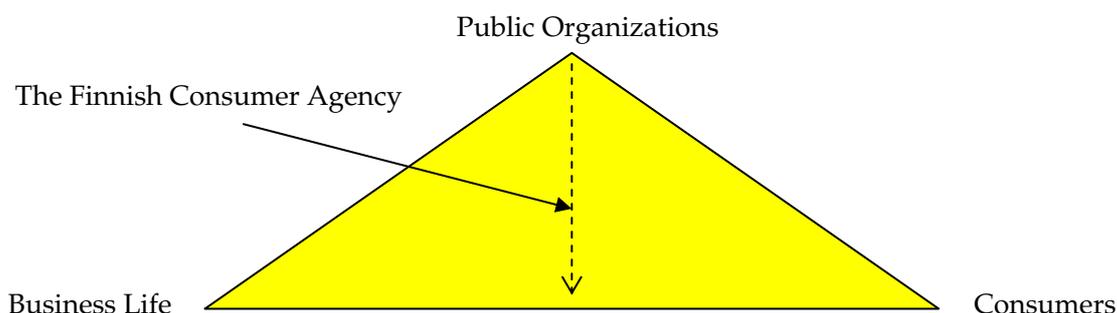


FIGURE 1 The Finnish Consumer Agency's position in a Finnish Society

The framework for studying how public consumer information works is described in figure 2. The Finnish Consumer Agency disseminates public consumer information, for example about the motor trade. Citizens' involvement affects to citizens' awareness, attitudes and behavior, but involvement is also affected by all of them. Public consumer information can spread knowledge concerning a product, and also awareness about the Finnish Consumer Agency. It can reach citizens if they have a positive attitude and interest towards it. This information can have an impact on citizens' behavior.

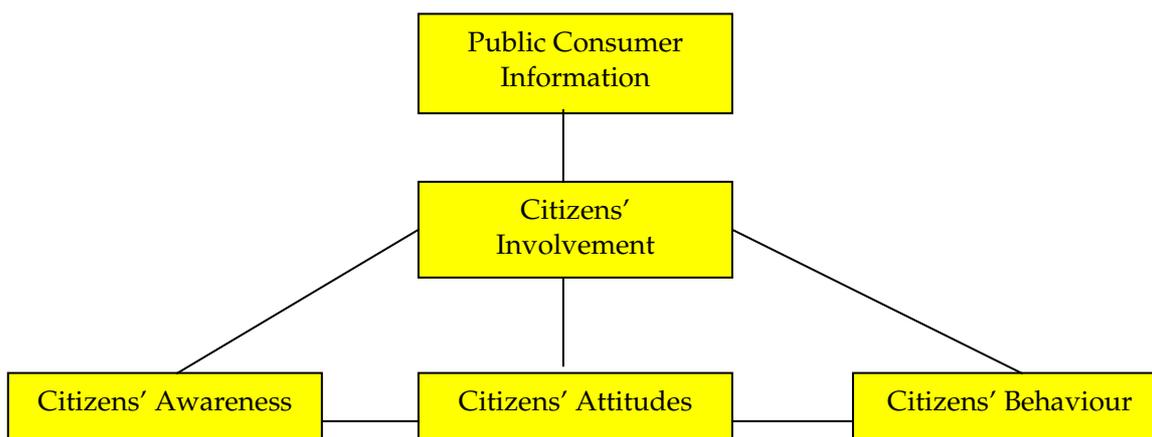


FIGURE 2 Framework for Studying How Public Consumer Information Works

1.3 Definition of The Terms

Some concepts appear repeatedly in this study. They are defined below.

A citizen is a person who is an officially recognized resident of a country. In this study two citizen groups are researched: consumers and business managers. A *consumer* is a person who is able to use the services or products supplied by an organization. A *business manager* in this study is a person who is an entrepreneur or other main owner of a company or a salaried business manager.

Organization. When studying organizational communication the concept of the organization must first be defined. In 1970 Osmo A. Wiio defined organization as a group of people having a common purpose and certain goals to systematically aim (Wiio 1992, 187). Organizations are also seen in many ways according to different disciplines, and there are also many organization theories from classical bureaucracy to postmodern organization. In this study the main focus is on public organizations. A *public organization* is an organization that operates in the public sector (e.g. government agency).

Communication. Communication comes from the Latin verb "communicate". It means to do together. Communication is a dynamic and consistent process: we communicate all the time, whether we want it or not (Kreps 1990, 26). In this study communication means all the situations and functions in which public organizations reserve, produce and share information. Communication with citizens creates meanings in social affairs. (Valtioneuvoston kanslia 2002, 2.)

Public. In this study the public is defined as "a distinct group of people and/or organizations that have an actual or a potential interest and/or impact on an organization" (Kotler 1975, 17). This definition is close to the definition of a stakeholder. In this study a *stakeholder* means a part in a society who can affect the actions of organizations or who can be affected by an organization's actions

or who are affected by the actions of an organization (Lehtonen 1998a, 121; see also Näsi 1995, 21; Freeman 1984, 25).

Public Relations. In this study public relations is defined as in the Delphi study on Public Relations. According to it “PR is the (maintenance of) relationships (with) publics (by) communication (in order to) establish mutual understanding” (van Ruler & Vercic 2002, 13). This is the most common view of public relations in Europe.

Involvement. In this study involvement is defined as a person’s relevance to the object according to inherent needs, values and interests (see Zaichkowsky 1985). There are different types of involvement (e.g. issue, decision and position involvement; see Palm 1994).

Attitude. An attitude is a lasting, general evaluation of people, objects, or issues (Baron & Byrne 1997).

Awareness. In this study awareness means the stakeholders’ knowledge of the object. The level of knowledge can differ between no knowledge of the object to knowing the object very well. Consumers’ awareness of their rights is called *consumerism* in this study.

1.4 Structure of the Study

This study contains six chapters. In the introductory chapter the background of the study is described, the key terms are defined, and the research questions and study framework are presented. Chapter 2 describes the sample, data collection, and research methods, and introduces the Finnish Consumer Agency. Chapter 3 presents different organization theories and principles relating to the communication of public organizations. Chapter 4 presents theories and findings connected to awareness, attitudes and behavior. Chapter 5 includes theories and findings connected to citizens’ involvement and information processing. Chapter 6 presents a summary of the findings, together with the conclusions and suggestions for future research.

2 RESEARCH SETTING

2.1 Sample and Data Collection

This study is based on a research project regarding the communication of the Finnish Consumer Agency. The data was collected between December 1999 and April 2001. Total 197 citizens participated in this study (84 consumers, 30 business managers, 14 representative organizations of business managers, and 83 municipal consumer advisors). Interviews of representative organizations of business managers and quantitative research questionnaires to consumer advisors and 35 consumers were conducted by three students of organizational communication and public relations at the University of Jyväskylä¹ (see appendix 1). Their work was done between December 1999 and June 2000.

This study compares the differences between two citizen groups: 49 consumers and 30 business managers. Those interviews were conducted by the author. Both groups were interviewed in five locations in Finland (Helsinki, Jyväskylä, Viitasaari, Vaasa and Kangasniemi). The interviews with consumers were done between October and November 2000 and the interviews with business managers between February and April 2001.

Among consumers interviewed by the author, the most active ones were picked up on the basis of two criteria: (1) they have been in contact with consumer advisors or (2) they have ordered the Consumer Magazine. The rest of the consumers were chosen among those who were first included in the research project. The aim of was to capture people who are interested in public consumer information as well as those who are less interested and not at all interested in it. The other criteria were age and gender. A full list of the interviewed consumers is given in appendix 2.

The full list of interviewed business managers is given in appendix 3. In the case of business managers fifteen branches of commerce were chosen. The

¹ Warm thanks to Riikka Lehtisalo, Ella Näsi and Heli Kivelä.

choice was made on the basis of their significance to the Finnish Consumer Agency. In every branch one small and one large company were chosen so that at least three managers participated in this study from the same five municipalities from which the consumers were chosen. The most active ones were found among those who have ordered the Consumer or the Consumer Protection Magazine. A couple of business managers were recruited on the basis of hints by consumer advisors. Out of business managers 13 were entrepreneurs and 17 were managers.

2.2 Research Methods

This study is a case study because a single subject, the communication of the Finnish Consumer Agency, was examined. Case study is a detailed examination of a single subject, group or phenomenon (Yin 1994). This method has been criticized for using too small a number of cases to establish the reliability and generalisability of the findings. It is, however, used widely, for example, in the field of business studies (see e.g. Bromley 2002, 41).

Interviews can be exploratory or focused. In exploratory interviews the purpose is to generate issues (Millar & Gallagher 2000, 68). The consumer interviews were done as *focus group interviews*. It is a research method that brings together a small group of people (usually eight to twelve members) to discuss about clearly defined topics (Churchill 1999, 106-107). Most audits require 3-4 focus groups but group meetings are continued until information saturation is reached (Dickson 2000, 98). In this case 49 consumers (5 groups) were brought together to discuss about public consumer information (see topics from appendix 4).

The interviews with the business managers (30 interviews) were done as *individual interviews*. The topics of these interviews are shown in appendix 5. Individual interviews were chosen because members of focus groups should be relatively homogeneous (Churchill 1999, 107). There would also have been problems with timetables.

All interviews also included quantitative parts. All of participants, for example, fill out the RPII Scale in which they were asked how involved they feel towards public consumer information. Their involvement was also studied in quantitative ways. Hereby increasing methodological triangulation. The theoretical triangulation was attempted by using multiple theories to interpret the same data. (see e.g. Frey et al. 2000, 85.)

2.3 The Finnish Consumer Agency

2.3.1 Organization of Consumer Administration in Finland

The *Finnish Consumer Agency* comes under the Ministry of Trade and Industry. Consumer administration in Finland is shown in figure 3 and is described in detail below. This information is adapted from the web-pages of the Finnish Consumer Agency (see www.kuluttajavirasto.fi).

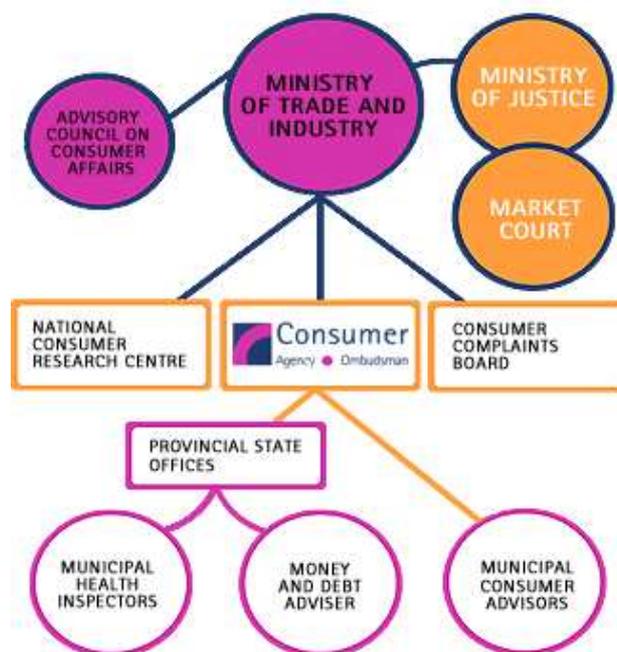


FIGURE 3 Consumer Administration in Finland

The Director General of the Finnish Consumer Agency also serves as *the Consumer Ombudsman*. The task of the Consumer Agency and the Consumer Ombudsman is to ensure consumers' economic, health and legal position and to promote consumers' ability to act intelligently in personal and social decision-making and in the market. The Consumer Ombudsman monitors compliance with legislation concerning the protection of consumers' rights.

A personal consumer advice service is provided mostly by *municipal consumer advisers*. According to law every municipality in Finland must offer its residents consumer-advice services. The Finnish Consumer Agency supervises the municipalities in arranging consumer advice, produces supporting materials and trains consumer advisors.

The Finnish Consumer Agency produces administrative services for other units in its fields and publishes the results of product tests and price comparisons of goods and services. It works in close co-operation with municipal consumer advisors, *provincial state offices*, *money and debt advisers*, and *municipal health inspectors*.

The *Consumer Complaint Board* is a neutral and independent body of experts whose members represent consumers and businesses in a balanced way. The Board issues recommendations concerning disputes involving consumer and housing transactions. It can also issue statements to courts handling cases which fall within its sphere of competence. In addition the Board guides municipal consumer advisers.

The *National Consumer Research Centre* is responsible for the development and the maintenance of the information service related to national consumer research. It researches household activity and consumer behavior, the functionality of the market, and the position of consumers in society. Research results are available from the KULTU databases.

2.3.2 Tasks of the Finnish Consumer Agency

The first task of the Finnish Consumer Agency and the Consumer Ombudsman is to *promote consumers' interests*. It looks at things from a consumer viewpoint. The consumers' position should be on a similar level regardless of what product, service or field is in question.

The Finnish Consumer Agency influences social decision-making at the national and international level. It participates in working groups, committees and various projects. It makes proposals, issue statements, conducts negotiations, performs studies and takes a stand on different issues. It maintains contacts with business, consumer and other organizations and public authorities.

The second task of the Finnish Consumer Agency is to *supervise* compliance with legislation concerning the protection of consumers' rights. All organizations should be familiar with legislation in their own field and comply voluntarily with regulations.

The Finnish Consumer Agency is responsible for seeing that products and services meet the provisions of the Product Safety Act. Key product groups covered by the Product Safety Act are toys, childcare articles, furniture, cosmetics and personal protective equipment. Primary responsibility for product safety is in the hands of manufacturers, importers and retailers. Supervision ensures that in-house control operates effectively, that products and services are safe and that products are properly labeled. Supervision takes place in cooperation with the provincial state offices, municipal health inspectors and other authorities.

To deal with hazardous products the Finnish Consumer Agency can conduct negotiations with businesses to eliminate hazards, impose sales bans and conditional fines, require enterprises to provide information on hazards, provide for the returning of products, and order the destruction of products.

The Finnish Consumer Agency maintains a register of package tour operators in Finland. Package tour operators must furnish securities which can be used to arrange accommodation and return transport and to refund advance payments if a tour is interrupted or cancelled because the tour operator is

bankrupt or otherwise insolvent. The provincial state offices assist in the supervising of package tour operators.

The task of the Consumer Ombudsman is to supervise marketing aimed at consumers and the reasonableness of the terms of contracts used by businesses. The most important legislation includes the Consumer Protection Act, the Decree on Price Marking, the Package Tour Act and the Housing Transactions Act.

The Consumer Ombudsman has also been assigned supervising tasks in other legislation such as the Collection Act, the Guarantee Act, the Electricity Market Act and the Telecom Market Act. To support those supervisory activities the Consumer Ombudsman can conduct negotiations with businesses, impose injunctions and conditional fines, bring matters to the attention of the Market Court, and report matters to the public prosecutor. The Finnish Consumer Agency can also support the legal position of consumers by assisting in individual legal proceedings if the matter has significance for consumers in general or reinforces a decision by the Consumer Complaint Board.

The third task of the Finnish Consumer Agency is to produce *information* and develop effective distribution channels. Information is obtained from supervisory activities, comparative quality tests and different types of studies. It provides consumers with information and advice which helps them make choices and solve problems. It guides and directs enterprises to abide by the relevant rules and regulations. It also supports consumer education in schools.

Information is mostly free of charge and is available in printed form and on the Internet. Information is also given via the media (for example articles in newspapers). There are however two information channels that are not free of charge. The Consumer Protection Magazine is a magazine whose target group is organizations, and it includes, for example, current information on marketing rules and legislation. The Consumer Magazine is targeted at consumers and publishes, for example, the results of product tests. Tests cover technical information, performance, operation, prices and energy consumption. Primary test products are household appliances, tools, children's supplies, leisure products and other items commonly purchased for the home. The goal is to include as broad a selection of products on the market as possible. In selecting products for tests, attention is paid to timeliness. Comparative product tests benefit consumers, who receive information on which to base purchases. Manufacturers, importers and retailers can use feedback in their own product development.

To ensure the neutrality of the product tests the Consumer Magazine does not contain advertising. The products to be tested are purchased from retailers in the normal way. They are not supplied free of charge.

Products are tested by a laboratory with special expertise in the field in question. Tests are conducted in Finland and in other parts of Europe. Testing methods, taking into account the special characteristics of different product groups, have been developed through international cooperation. The Finnish Consumer Agency takes part in European testing cooperation within the

framework of International Consumer Research and Testing Ltd (ITCR). Through ITCR the Finnish Consumer Agency can receive information covering the entire European market.

The fourth task of the Finnish Consumer Agency is *guidance*. Local authorities have the statutory task of providing municipal consumer advice. The Finnish Consumer Agency guides local authorities in the arranging of advice and supports consumer advisors' work. Consumer advisors assist in resolving individual consumer disputes.

Financial and debt counseling are covered by special legislation. The Finnish Consumer Agency directs and supervises financial and debt counseling. The provincial state offices are responsible for seeing that services are adequate across the country.

3 COMMUNICATION OF PUBLIC ORGANIZATIONS

When studying organizational communication and public relations, it is important to understand what an organization is. In this case is important to understand especially what a public organization is. The purpose of this chapter of the study is to investigate the different ways organizations can be seen and the perspectives of organizations are. This chapter also tries to clarify how public organizations have changed and in what direction they are changing. These changes also have an impact on communication of public organizations.

Next in this chapter the concepts of publics and stakeholders are defined after which the special features of public organizations' communication are discussed. Finally the ethics of communication is discussed.

Before starting, I would like to say a couple of words about concepts of communication and dialogue. The word *communication* comes from the Latin phrase "communicare" meaning "to do together". Organizations communicate all the time through everything they do. One widely recognized problem in today's communication work is the overflow of messages surrounding people and organizations (Bernstein 1984, 5). Lehtonen (1989, 4) points to two dilemmas facing communications in the public sector. The first is how to get messages through to an audience which only has impressions and attitudes instead of factual information. The second dilemma concerns the problem of how the various publics can be provided with correct instead of incorrect information.

The word *dialogue* comes from Greek "dialegein" meaning "to converse". Dialogue can be both convergent and emergent (Hammond et al. 2003, 145-146). Convergent dialogue is used to solve particular problems or to create a desired consensus. Emergent dialogue generates something unexpected through the equal participation and empowerment of the parties involved. (Kantanen 2004.) Relationships between an organization and its stakeholders are important in dialogue.

3.1 Organizations and Organization Theories

Organizations have been seen in different ways. The sociologist sees them as a set of people filling roles and statuses. The political scientist sees them as a set of power relations among persons. The economist sees them as a set of people attempting to maximize their utilities. (Kotler 1975, 17.) In this study the main interest is in relationships between organizations and their publics. According to Kotler (ibid. 40-43) it is possible to classify organizations into four groups based on 1) measurement of the needs, perceptions, preferences, or satisfaction of its publics, 2) how the organization encourages consumers to submit inquiries, suggestions etc. and creates formal and informal systems to facilitate this, 3) how it sifts the incoming information and develops its functions, and 4) how it accepts the will of publics.

Hatch (1997, 5) presents four perspectives on the theory of organization: classical, modern, symbolic-interpretive and post-modern. All these four perspectives seek to explain and predict the behavior of organizations and their members in different organizational structures. According to Hatch the classical perspective was dominant until the 1950s, the modern perspective moved into the background in the 1980s when the symbolic-interpretive perspective emerged as dominant. The post-modern perspective started to be recognizable in the 1990s. New perspectives always replace the old ones but the old perspectives can be said to outstrip the new ones.

3.1.1 Classical Perspective

The *classical* school have two streams: the sociological stream (scholars like Emil Durkheim, Max Weber, and Karl Marx) focused on the effects of organizations within society, while Classical management theory (scholars like Frederick Taylor and Henri Fayol among others) focused on practical problem faced by managers of organizations. According to Wiio (2000, 157), Taylor paid no attention to organizational communication whereas Weber and Fayol emphasize the importance of the functions of organizations' communication. Weber underlined official communication channels and written communication in his bureaucratic model. Fayol instead pointed out that different challenges require different kinds of organizational solution. In this respect he represented contingency theory half a decade before the Americans. According to Fayol, communication is an essential part of an organization's functions. He created the principle known as Fayol's Bridge. It makes it possible to bypass official communication channels if going through them brings disadvantages. This would have been prohibited in Weber's concept of bureaucracy.

According to Kotler (1975, 39), bureaucracy is "the tendency of organizations to routinize their operations, replace personal judgment with impersonal policies, specialize the job of every employee, create a rigid hierarchy of command, and convert the organization into an efficient machine".

Claver et al. (1999, 459) summarize the generic features of bureaucracy in the following way:

- A high degree of control and authoritarian management style.
- Little communication, only downward.
- Workers search for stability, have limited scope for initiative, and are oriented towards obeying orders.
- Centralized and repetitive decision-making process.
- Reluctance to start innovative processes.
- A high degree of conformity.
- These beliefs are highly resistant to change.

According to Weber (1979) the positive characteristics of bureaucracy are the following: hierarchical structure, task division, and formal rules and regulation. Unfortunately in Finland the concept of bureaucracy in the context of public organizations has the connotations of being an inefficient, inflexible and regulation focused way of working (see e.g. Eskelinen 2002). Bureaucracy minimizes the citizen's role in the decision making processes (Denhart & Denhart 2000, 551-552). They are seen just as voters.

3.1.2 Modern, Symbolic-interpretive and Post-modern Perspectives

The modern and symbolic-interpretive organization theories and ideas are closely connected to each other. In case of *modernism* the major theory is German Ludwig von Bertalanffy's *General Systems Theory*. According to Hatch (1997, 35) "a system is a thing with interrelated parts". The parts affect each other and all parts are dependent upon the whole. Kenneth Boulding's theory of the hierarchy of systems (levels: framework, clockwork, control, open, genetic, animal, human, social organization and transcendental) is used to explain the major concepts of systems theory (ibid. 36; Building 1956). The hierarchy of systems introduces the idea of an open system. This is discussed in the next chapter. According to Hatch (1997, 38-39) Niklas Luhmann's theory of self-organizing and self-reproducing social systems are examples of the genetic level.

The *symbolic-interpretive* perspective sees organizations through subjective perceptions. There are two major theories: Karl Weick's *enactment theory* which overlaps with Peter Berger's and Thomas Luhmann's *social construction of reality theory*. According to enactment theory, the use of concepts creates the phenomenon to study. According to the social construction of reality theory "human social order is produced through interpersonal negotiations and implicit understandings that are built up via shared history and shared expectations". (Hatch 1997, 41-42.)

The fourth perspective is *post-modern* organization theory. According to Hatch (1997, 43) it is not possible to find a core theory or a typical set of ideas to epitomize postmodernism. Postmodernism offers a critical view of the dominant (also post-modern) theories. It was developed in France and

elaborated by scholars like Bourdieu, Derrida, Lyotard, Foucault, Baudrillard, Deleuze, Gauthier, Laclau and Mouffler. (Deetz 2001, 30-31.) Post-modern organizations can be seen as the opposite of bureaucratic organizations.

The term “post-modern” was first applied to organizations by Peter Drucker in 1957. The post-modern organization may be defined as “comprising a networked set of diverse, self-managed, self-controlled teams with polycentres of coordination that fold and unfold according to the requirements of the tasks” (Boje & Dennehy 2000). According to Eisenberg & Goodall (1997) the post-modern organization “is characterized by team-based organizing, minimal hierarchies, computer-aided technology and global networks, and project-based (rather than career-oriented) jobs.” According to Joensuu (2004, 157) Finnish post-modern organizations are best described using Lehtonen’s definition. According to Lehtonen (2000b, 18) a post-modern organization gives its employees power and responsibility, emphasizes the importance of customer relationships, and supports creativity and innovations in its functions. Traditional employment relationships based on mutual commitment are replaced by the vigorous reappearance of market forces (Lehtonen 2004, 146).

The term post-modern is often confused with the term modern. For this reason characteristics of post-modern and modern organizational management are described in table 1. For example the modern view sees workers as a cost, and the post-modern as an investment. Post-modern management uses self-controlled teams instead of de-skilled and fear-based controlled workers.

TABLE 1 Modern and Post-modern Principles of Management (Boje & Dennehy 1993)

	MODERN	POST-MODERN
Planning	Short term profit goals. Mass production. Worker is a cost. Vertical planning. Top down focus. Planning leads to order.	Long term profit goals. Flexible production. Worker is an investment. Horizontal planning. Internal and external customer focus. Planning leads to disorder and confusion.
Organizing	One man, one job and de-skilled jobs. Labor-management confrontation. Division of departments. Tall is better. Homogeneity is strength. Top has voice & diversity is tolerated. Efficiency increases with specialization, formalization, routinization, fragmentation, division of labor.	Work teams, multi-skilled workers. Labor-management cooperation. Flexible networks with permeable boundaries. Flat is better. Diversity is strength. Many-voices and diversity is an asset. Efficiency decreases with specialization, formalization, routinization, fragmentation, and division of labor.
		(continues)

Influencing	Authority vested in superiors. Extrinsic rewards and punishments. Surveillance mechanisms everywhere. Women paid 68% of men; minorities paid less. Discourse is white male-based. Individual incentives.	Authority delegated to leaders by teams. Intrinsic, empowered, ownership over work process. People are self-disciplined. Women and minorities equally paid. Polyvocal/polylogic discourse. Team incentives.
Leading	Theory X or Y. Centralized with many layers and rules. Boss-centered. White male career tracks. Tell them what to do.	Theory S (Servant Leadership). Decentralized with few layers and wide spans. People centered. Tracks for women and minorities. Visionary.
Controlling	Centralized control. End-of-line inspection. Micro surveillance. Red tape. Lots of procedures, rules, MBO & computers for surveillance. Train top of pyramid. Measure result criteria. Hoard information. Fear-based controls.	Decentralized control. Quality control is everyone's job. Two-way surveillance. Cut red tape. Dump procedures. Train people. Measure process criteria. Information is given to all. Self-control.

Citizens, too, can be post-modern. According to Lehtonen (2004, 146) the *post-modern citizen* is not committed to any idea, system, or value. In post-modern society citizens are skeptical of and cynical about the promises of politicians, and employees about employers, and consumers about the promises of advertisers etc. Citizens have potential moral implications for a large number of issues. Citizens feel powerlessness and they are also too busy to participate in the life of community (Stevenson 2002).

What causes this post-modernism? Lehtonen (2004, 147) argues that citizens don't feel only that their vote has no power, they also feel that their delegates don't have power because important decisions are made in the lobbies and in the assembly rooms of big international corporations. What happens to democracy in a society where the interest of individual citizens decreases still and the activity of organizations increases? Lehtonen (ibid. 148) also points out that the cynicism of citizens might be caused by many other phenomena in addition to those mentioned earlier: Are television and the entertainment industry responsible for voter apathy? Have all the new technologies isolated citizens from social participation?

3.2 Public Organizations: From Bureaucracy to Citizen Orientation

Public organizations have been transformed from a traditional bureaucratic system of public administration to a market-oriented results-driven system of public management during the last 20 years (see, for example, OECD 2003). The first stage of this transformation was associated with major changes in systems

of financial accountability designed to introduce cost-consciousness, economy and concern for efficiency throughout the public services. This was followed by structural changes to create autonomous agencies responsible for service delivery, which could operate within clearly defined policy framework indicators. Some countries in Europe favored mass transfers of public services to the private sector (privatization) both to reduce public expenditure and to inject market competition into their operations. Others were more selective about privatization and introduced internal contracting to create the semblance of competition and results-driven systems.

During the 1990s emphasis in the reform of modernization was on quality and became more customer-oriented. This “public service orientation” was characterized by efforts to find out what service users wanted and to meet their needs in the most efficient and effective way (Stewart & Clarke 1987, 164). Public participation was facilitated through customer surveys, focus groups and charters which set down what the rights of citizens were and how they could hold the suppliers of services accountable. There was greater transparency of public services and many targets set for them related to satisfying the expectations of customers, consumers and their users. It was argued that this enhanced the accountability of public services downward to their users in the way that private companies were accountable to their customers. A major difference remained, however; namely that customers can refrain from purchasing a commercial product if they are dissatisfied, while public sector users generally have no such choice.

The customer of a public service is not the same as the customer of a service in the market. Customers don't necessarily buy the service or they get it at a subsidized rate. Also, they can not always choose whether or not to be a customer. This is because a public organization may have a monopoly in its field. On the other hand the public and private sectors nowadays take care of the same functions and there is even competition within and between them (e.g. education and health care). It is also important for private organizations to maximize the sales of goods or services either by getting more and more customers or by getting frequent buyers.

It is important to point out that public administration differs from one country to another. This makes it difficult to study characteristics, roles and changes in public administration from a general viewpoint. According to Sinclair (1991) there are four models of public administration culture: cultural control model, subculture model, professionals' multiculture model and public service or public interest culture model. In the first model there is only one culture and it is based on control. In the subculture model there are a number of different, independent subcultures. In the professionals' multiculture model subcultures are recognized, but they are grouped under a strong, homogeneous culture common to all public agencies. In the last model there is a common culture, but its main feature is its orientation towards public service. (Claver et al. 1999, 455, 458.) Public administration culture is not researched in this study, but I would argue that the above mentioned cultures could be classified into

two groups: bureaucratic culture and customer orientation. The classification is the same in spite of possible subcultures. The question of whether the Finnish Consumer Agency is bureaucratic or customer oriented or even citizen oriented is answered at the end of this study later. The customer orientation has arisen thanks to the concept of new public management. The citizen orientation has arisen because of the concept of new public service. Both of these orientations are described in details in table 2.

TABLE 2 Comparing Perspectives: Old Public Administration, New Public Management, and New Public Service (Denhart & Denhart 2000, 554)

	Old Public Administration	New Public Management	New Public Service
Primary theoretical and epistemological foundations	Political theory, social and political commentary augmented by naïve social science	Economic theory, more sophisticated dialogue based on positivist social science	Democratic theory, varied approaches to knowledge including positive, interpretive, critical, and post-modern
Prevailing rationality and associated models of human behavior	Synoptic rationality, "administrative man"	Technical and economical rationality, "economic man", or the self-interested decision maker	Strategic rationality, multiple tests of rationality (political, economic, organizational)
Conception of public interest	Politically defined and expressed in law	Represents the aggregation of individual interests	Results of a dialogue about shared values
To whom are public servants responsive?	Clients and constituents	Customers	Citizens
Role of government	Rowling (designing and implementing policies focusing on a single, politically defined objective)	Steering (acting as a catalyst to unleash market forces)	Serving (negotiating and brokering interests among citizens and community groups, creating shared values)
Mechanism for achieving policy objectives	Administering programs through existing government agencies	Creating mechanisms and incentive structures to achieve policy objectives through private and non-profit agencies	Building coalitions of public, non-profit, and private agencies to meet mutually agreed upon needs
			(continues)

Approach to accountability	Hierarchical – administrators are responsible to democratically elected political leaders	Market-driven-the accumulation of self-interest will result in outcomes desired by broad groups of citizens (or customers)	(continues) Multifaceted - public servants must attend to law, community values, political norms, professional standards, and citizen interests
Administrative discretion	Limited discretion allowed administrative officials	Wide latitude to meet entrepreneurial goals	Discretion needed but constrained and accountable
Assumed organizational structure	Bureaucratic organizations marked by top-down authority within agencies and control or regulation of clients	Decentralized public organizations with primary control remaining within the agency	Collaborative structures with leadership shared internally and externally
Assumed motivational basis of public servants and administrators	Pay and benefits, civil-service protections	Entrepreneurial spirit, ideological desire to reduce size of government	Public service, desire to contribute to society

New public management approach began to set in during the post-War boom period and has been variously branded as managerialism, market-based public administration and entrepreneurial government. It has a clear emphasis on downsizing the civil service, decentralization and devolution of functions and authorities, pursuit of greater efficiency and value for money, and marketizing public service delivery. (Cheung 1996, 38.) In the new public management, public organizations are seen as large companies and citizens are seen as their customers. In the new public management, the authorities are like entrepreneurs who invest their money. This kind of market-oriented thinking is however problematic. If citizens are treated like customers they are not treated equally.

In the *New Public Service* citizens are involved in a discourse. Citizens are seen as citizens. Citizens are helped rather than controlled. Relationship building is important because public interests and responsibility are shared. The goal is not just to find quick solutions. The new public service also values people, not just productivity. (Denhart & Denhart 2000.) In this kind of collaboration citizens are treated as partners. Unfortunately modern societies are confronting a growth in citizen passivity instead of public participation.

Lehtonen asked “whether the new public service culture really is citizen-oriented or customer oriented, and whether the ultimate goal really is empowerment and encouragement of participation, or whether it is customer satisfaction” (2004, 146). Customer-oriented public organizations teach citizens to buy public services. Citizens can lay claim to the quality of services, but as

customers, not as citizens who expect the organization to answer for those services. (Lehtonen *ibid.* 158.)

3.3 Neoliberalism - Towards Responsibilization?

The previous examples have shown that public organizations are operating in a changing environment. Lowdnes & Skelcher (1998) claim that they are now expected to “enact new relationships and partnerships, think and act strategically, network with other agencies, manage resources effectively, redefine boundaries of systems, and govern for accountability and transparency” (White 2000, 164). Public organizations are said to be moving towards a more citizen or customer-oriented culture. At the same time, e.g. in the USA, fewer people are involved in civic life, fewer citizens turn out at the polls, participate in community organizations, or go to church (Putnam 2000). In a neo-liberal public policy citizens are treated as consumers, and big corporations are allowed to interfere in public management by active public affairs strategies, and they are replacing the individual citizens as active members of democracy (Lehtonen 2004, 146). Do the authorities want citizens to be active or passive? Citizens are encouraged to participate in public discussion but in the same time the neo-liberal movement works towards making citizens more independent. In practice it means increasing the responsibility of citizens and decreasing the responsibility of public organizations. According to Hodgson (2002, 324) discussions about pensions are example about this responsibilization. People are persuaded to take personal responsibility for financing their retirement.

The third sector has arisen alongside government and the global market. For example youngsters in Finland are not interested in politics yet most of them belong to some association (lifestyle, sport or other hobby). They consume and make choices and try to persuade via those associations or those principles. Youngsters feel they have more impact this way than if they vote. (see e.g. Ahonen 2004.) Unfortunately the third sector has less power than government. The market seems to have the real power. The purposes of associations are also often limited. Strong associations like Greenpeace and Amnesty International have, however, an impact on public debate. These kinds of associations and pressure groups have taken on the role of society’s watchdogs from the media.

From the viewpoint of this study is important to find out how influential citizens are willing to be. It is important to know whether strong consumer associations are important or whether it is better if individual consumers are heard.

3.4 Theories of Organization-Environment Relations

Some general principles exist which are suitable for explaining the interaction between organizations and their environment. Organizations can be seen as open or closed systems. In open systems an organization receives inputs from its environment and transforms them into outputs. The system boundaries regulate the impact of environmental factors on the system. In open systems boundaries are permeable and the input is selective. An open organization can redirect its operations based on feedback. In closed systems boundaries are rigid and there is no impact. (Kast & Rosenzweig 1985, 107.) Bureaucratic organizations are closed systems.

Organizations have goals to achieve. These goals can be achieved in different ways in different initial conditions. *Contingency theory* explains variations in organizational actions in specific situations. It has its roots in *general systems theory*, which explains the relationship of an organization to its sub- and suprasystems (its environment). (Kast & Rosenzweig 1985, 16-18.) Systems theory is often related to functionalism. It stresses the objectives of system maintenance and environmental control. Systems theorists established the idea of organizations as open to their environments.

There are some problems in defining organizations as open or closed systems. Closed systems ignore the environment, and open systems differentiate between internal and external factors even too precisely. Nowadays it is not always clear what is internal and what external (e.g. extranet for customers, service outsourcing). In contingency theory the system is open. According to it the best way to operate is dependent on environmental factors. One school of thought says the best way to operate is through chaos (see e.g. Aula 1999).

Most organization theorists conceptualize the organizational environment in the same way as the modernists. The modernists see the organizational environment as "an entity that lies outside the boundaries of the organization". The symbolic-interpretive perspective sees the environment as a social construction. (Hatch 1997, 63-64.) Post-modern theories, instead, offer many approaches because the new organizational forms that have arisen like virtual organizations and the notion of organizations without boundaries. In classical management theory the organizational environment has no role because the system is closed.

In this study organizational-environment relations are discussed from the viewpoint of the stakeholder approach. Public organizations are surrounded by several publics or stakeholder groups who can affect the actions of the organizations or vice versa. Relationships between organizations and their environments are more deeply understood in the stakeholder approach than e.g. in contingency theory.

3.4.1 Classification of Publics

The word “*public*” comes from the Latin phrase “*poplicus*” or “*populus*” meaning “the people”. Kotler (1975, 17) defines a public as “a distinct group of people and/or organizations that have an actual or a potential interest and/or impact on an organization”. Publics can be classified by function, their level of involvement with the organization, or their interrelations (Kotler 1975, 17-21). If the classification is based on function publics can be divided, for example, into customers, the local community, the general public, the mass media, staff, and competitors. This is problematic in the case of the Finnish Consumer Agency. It has several publics and one and the same person can represent several publics (e.g. all business managers interviewed in this study are also consumers and they can be consumers even in their own business field). According to Bernstein (1984, 93) the fact that people belong to different publics is beneficial to the organization if its communications are planned and coordinated. However, it is believed here that an organization also needs to employ targeted communication with its various publics. This is because each public may have a different image of the organization and may also serve different purposes in relation to the organization.

Kotler’s second classification, the level of involvement, can be made on the basis of whether a public is interested or not in the organization, and if the organization is interested or not in the public. In this study the participants were divided according to both function (consumer and business managers) and also level of involvement.

Kotler’s third classification is based on the interrelations of the various public. This category is important because various publics are also connected to each other in that one public may have considerable influence over other publics or its behavior may affect other publics’ attitudes. For example, a public that is highly satisfied or dissatisfied with an organization’s operations will correspondingly affect the behavior and attitudes of other publics (Kotler 1975, 20-21). The *communication satisfaction* of publics also varies. In this study communication satisfaction is seen as “an overall attitude or emotion that tells how satisfied a person is with the information he receives through different channels and what kind of opportunities he has to communicate with others and to express himself” (Juholin 1999, 25).

3.4.2 Stakeholders and Stakeholder Thinking

The *stakeholder approach* was first introduced to the science of management by Freeman (1984). It has remained one of the leading organizational theories ever since. *Stakeholder theory* is an alternative form of monetarist economic theory because it claims that an organization should consider the interests of all stakeholders, not just shareholders. According to the traditional stockholder theory, the primary function of the organization was to maximize the return on investments to the owners of the business. The stakeholder theory aims at answering the question “what is in the firm’s best interest all things considered.”

(Lehtonen 2003.) According to stakeholder theories, organizations need to pay attention to the interests of different stakeholder groups and their social duties.

There are three varieties of the stakeholder theory. *Descriptive theory* describes literally what organizations do with their stakeholders. *Instrumental theory* points out that certain outcomes will obtain if certain behaviors are adopted. Instrumental theory may, for instance, argue that mutual trust and cooperation have economic value to the firm. *Normative theory* deals with the reasons why corporations ought to consider stakeholder interests even in the absence of any apparent benefit. (Lehtonen 2003; see also Tampere 2003, 22-23.)

Stakeholder thinking sees organizations as acting in an environment which is changing all the time and which contains different kind of stakeholder groups. The success of an organization is based on how well it handles these changes. Adjustment to changes can be based on more or less conscious strategy.

According to Lehtonen (2003) the concept *stakeholder* was allegedly introduced in 1963 to cover "those groups without whose support the organization would cease to exist". Initially the concept referred to shareholders, employees, customers, suppliers, lenders, and the society.

In this study a stakeholder means a party in society who can affect the actions of an organization or who can be affected by an organization's actions or who are affected by the actions of an organization (Lehtonen 1998a, 121; see also Näsi 1995, 21; Freeman 1984, 25). These definitions are broad as they only exclude persons whom an organization can't affect (have no claim or relationship) and who can't affect the organization (have no power). These kinds of definition are also near to Kotler's (1975) definition of public. Stakeholder groups can be defined more narrowly simply to mean groups which are economically or in other ways very important groups to the organization. (see Mitchell et al. 1997, 856.)

Different stakeholder groups hold different meanings and different consequences to the organization (see e.g. Heath 1994, 147). This means that each public sees the organization from a different perspective and places different degrees of importance on the organization. Stakeholders can be classified in many ways. It is also possible to focus on stakeholders' networks and their mutual bonds. They can be divided, e.g. into internal and external ones, and primary and secondary ones. According to Carroll (1993, 62) *primary stakeholder* groups have formal and official relations with an organization. *Secondary stakeholder* groups are often not in contact with an organization or not directly. These groups are not vital to the organization's existence. Primary stakeholder groups are more important to organizations, and it is very important to have close relationships with them. Problems will arise if a secondary stakeholder group thinks it is a primary stakeholder group and is not getting as much information and attention as it would like to have. A secondary group can also very quickly become a primary one.

From the viewpoint of this study is important to see that there are many stakeholder groups within the group of citizens. According to the Consumer

Ombudsman, Marita Wilska, stakeholders of the Finnish Consumer Agency are for example consumers, journalists, business managers, schools, and also those with whom they engage in a lot of cooperation: consumer advisors, national health officers, the County Administrative Boards, the Consumer Research Centre, the Food Agency, the Consumer Complaint Board, and other authorities. Also different kinds of industrial and commercial organizations and different kinds of civic organizations expect to get information from and/or to be controlled by the Finnish Consumer Agency. They also expect it affect various consumer issues. (Personal information from Marita Wilska, 18 April 2000.)

In practice all citizens are stakeholders of the Finnish Consumer Agency. This means huge challenges in communication. For example, Mendelsohn (1973, 50) argue that information directed to different stakeholders requires totally different communication strategies and tactics. This means that the citizens must be segmented to better target the communication. Later in this study I will argue that segmentation could be done on the basis of the level of involvement. I will also show what kind of communication is needed at different levels of involvement.

According to Mitchel et al. (1997) stakeholders can display urgency, power and legitimacy in order to be recognized by and perhaps influence an organization (see Frooman 1999 for more on influence strategies). According to Mitchel et al. (1997, 865) *power* is tricky to define, but easy to recognize. It is "the ability to those who possess power to bring about the outcomes they desire". Power can be it can be acquired as well as lost. *Legitimacy* is "a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions" (Suchman 1995, 574). According to Mitchel et al. (1997, 866) "legitimacy and power are distinct attributes that can combine to create authority (defined by Weber as the legitimate use of power) but that can exist independently as well". They (ibid. 867) define *urgency* as the "degree to which stakeholder claims call for immediate attention". On the basis of urgency, power and legitimacy stakeholders form seven different classes (see Mitchel et al. 1997, 874).

Jawahar & McLaughlin (2001, 405) integrated different stakeholder theories and presented a descriptive stakeholder theory. In it they show which stakeholders are important, when they are important, and how organizations should deal with stakeholders on different levels of importance. This and other stakeholder theories are written from the viewpoint of private organizations. They don't give public organizations any specific role among organization's stakeholders. According to Lehtonen (2004, 155) the emerging importance of private organizations as corporate citizens have, e.g. led to the creating of new journals (like *Business and Politics*, and the *Journal of Public Affairs*) which focus on interactions between organizations and governments. This leads us to the concept of lobbying which means an attempt to influence politicians, government institutions and civil servants at all levels of the public

administration (see e.g. Lehtonen 2004, 153). Lobbying has been a fundamental element in political communication and in the process of decision-making ever since the birth of politics itself (Harris 2002, 49). Figure 4 shows the ways in which decision making can be influenced at the national and trans-national level.

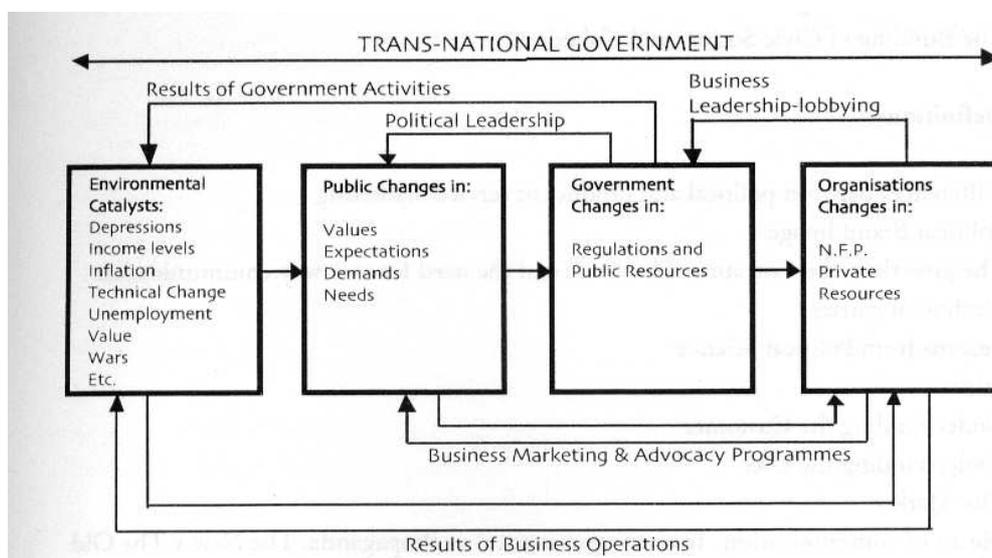


FIGURE 4 Decision Making Levels (Harris 2002, 57)

Lobbying is, however, questionable from the viewpoint of democracy. Citizens are not told the agenda or the results of discussions between lobbyists and politicians or civil servants. As stated earlier, big companies are replacing citizens as communication partners in the post-modern society. Now organizations are developing strategies to influence the decision making.

From the viewpoint of this study lobbying occurs in many places. Business and non-governmental organizations as well as consumer organizations (like the Finnish Consumer Association and the Consumers) can try to affect the decision making of the Finnish Consumer Agency. They can also affect the government legislation on matters such as product safety. According to Harris (2002, 56), the Machiavellian graph shows that each time government increases regulation, lobbying activity increases to shape that regulation. In many cases public organizations are important stakeholders to private organizations.

3.5 Communication Differences Between Public and Private Organizations

Public sector organizations are not the same as private sector organizations. According to Claver et. al. (1999, 455) public organizations have less autonomy and flexibility in decision making than private organizations. They are very sensitive to changes in political influence.

Jürgen Habermas' concepts of strategic and communicative action can be used to describe differences between private and public organization. In *strategic action* the aim of communication is to have an impact on others to get them to act in a desired way. In case of private organizations the final goal of strategic actions is given: usually it is to be economically profitable. The aim communication in *communicative action* is to achieve a common understanding. This is close to Habermas' publicity theory (1989) in which the central idea is to ensure open publicity and equal rights to participate in public debate. (Habermas 1984; see also Nieminen 2000, 109-110.) Nieminen (2000, 110-112) also points out that public organizations have different goals (to handle basic functions like public health case), a different competitive situation (usually monopoly), basic values (equality, justness and joint responsibility) and membership (all citizens are members).

According to Nieminen (2000, 109) the characteristics of public organizations in Finland are so different from those other organizations that their communication is not possible to start to examine from the same starting point as other organizations. In many textbooks there is indeed often a separate chapter on the public relations of public organizations, and in some universities there are even separate courses of the communication of public organizations (see e.g. Baker 1997).

However, the majority of the theories do not distinguish between the communication of public and private organizations because the tools and methods of communication are perceived as the same for all organizations. When public organizations carry out public relations, there are matters which must be taken into consideration as distinct from public relations carried out by private organizations. First of all the public organizations have often more stakeholder groups and they must take opposing stakeholder groups into consideration. Additional challenges may also come from the fact that the leaders of public organizations are not the leaders of only their own organization alone but also legislators and the leaders of a country, province or locality. (Grunig & Jaatinen 1999, 222.) In addition to these, the need for communication also is increased by the citizens, who want to influence the operations of the government and to find solutions to their problems. It is even possible to claim that the communication and public relations of public organizations are more important than in the case of private organizations.

The research results of Larissa and James Grunig and David Dozier showed only small differences in communication tools and methods between

public and private organizations (see Grunig & Jaatinen 1999, 220). The study was conducted in three English-speaking countries. The results showed that the communication staffs of public organizations have more management roles when compared to other non-public organizations and that they participate more often in strategic management. Correspondingly their tasks were more often technical or focused on media relations.

It is reasonable to state that the communication of public organizations can be built on the same foundation as the communication of other organizations. The way in which communication principles are followed in public organization is, however, depended on whether the society in question is pluralist, social corporatist or corporatist. Grunig & Jaatinen (1999, 228) point out that the principles of social corporatism can only be applied if the government operates according to the theory.

According to Bolton (2003, 20-21) public and private organizations have many activities that can be carried out in a similar way (like employee training and equipment maintenance). Some of the approaches, methodologies, tools and techniques applied in the private sector have to be modified to make them relevant for public organizations. For example customer satisfaction is important to both sectors but the supplier-customer relationship itself is fundamentally different.

During last ten decades both public and private organizations have faced changes such as the increased use of technology and the rise of customer expectations. Management in the public sector, however, doesn't always take the same form as it does in the private sector. For example Peter Drucker, father of modern business management thinking, criticizes government for its regulatory function and never acknowledges what it has done to provide, for example, job security and family leave (Guy & Hitchcock 2000, 38; see also Hay & Russ-Sellers 2000). Drucker used often government and bureaucracy as negative examples in his business management writings. For example, he claimed that continuous improvement and benchmarking are unknown in the public sector of the USA (Drucker 1995, 52). He ignored all the changes in the public sector and failed to understand that we are all customers and we all want something different from government and public organizations. This differs substantially from business perspective. For this reason Drucker's writings on good management should not be directly applied to public management.

Differences between public and private organizations have blurred. According to a Swedish quality management researcher, Evert Gummesson, three paradigms can be used to describe differences in managing organizations. The *manufacturing paradigm* is taken from manufacturing industry and it focuses on goods and production. Taylor's ideas of scientific management are examples of a cost-and capital-oriented paradigm. In the *bureaucratic-legal paradigm* regulations and rituals are often more important than the end result. This paradigm is linked with monopoly or monopoly-like situations, and services are seen as administrative routines. The idea is to win against one's customers and to protect oneself from demands. The customer is seen as the other party,

even an adversary. In *the service paradigm* the interest is in the customer, the provider's personnel, interaction, and experiences, and a balance between human input and technology, between costs and income, and finally between quality and productivity. The customer is a partner, an ally. It is important to keep the customer satisfied and positive to create long-term relations. (Gummesson 1993, 40-42.)

These paradigms emphasize the different aspects of the management of service organizations. They should not be confused with the type of organization. According to Gummesson (1993, 42) the service paradigm has been neglected and the others allowed to dominate.

From the viewpoint of this study is important to find out on what paradigm public consumer information is based. Are consumers and business managers the other party or a partner in a decision making? This question is answered at the end of this study.

3.6 Communication Principles of Public Organizations

The aim of communication of the public administration in Finland is to create conditions in which the principles of democracy and the rights of citizens can be realized. It also should create conditions in which public and private organizations can operate. Communication functions are needed to give information about the operations and services of the public administration. They are needed when the public administration gives advices to the citizens. Communication functions should enable citizens to participate to decision making. Public organizations, however, differ and the focus of communication between them also differs. According to the recommendations of the Prime Minister's Office the public administration should co-operate and communicate. It is important that communication of public organizations is reliable and impartial, and comes well-timed. (Valtioneuvoston kanslia 2002, 4-5.)

3.6.1 Communication Between Citizens and Public Organizations

A Swedish scholar Kenneth Abrahamsson has researched communication between citizens and public organizations. He finds three different communication principles (see table 3).

In the Abrahamsson's model the flow of information between public authority and citizen is simplified. The *publicity principle* is based on the citizen's access to information, but citizens' have to be unprompted and able to ask for information. According to the *information principle* the distribution of information is under the control of the authorities. This can be said to be a way to control and manipulate citizens. According to the *communication principle* it is

possible to give feedback to authority. Citizens are able to participate in the decision-making. (Abrahamsson 1974, 192-208.)

TABLE 3 Publicity, Information and Communication Principles (Abrahamsson 1974, 190; Hakala 1994, 37; Hakala 2000, 90)

	Publicity Principle	Information Principle	Communication Principle
Role of Authority	Authority is passive sender and citizen is active receiver.	Authority sends information and citizen is active receiver.	Both authority and citizen take part in the communication process.
Actor	Citizen has to search for information.	Citizen has to search for information. Information is given by the authority.	Authority and citizen exchange information.
Relationship to Citizens	Citizen is subservient.	Citizen is customer.	Citizen is equal.
Limits	Authority adjusts the limits of publicity.	Authority choose the time, way, content and emphasis of public information.	Citizen's need of information is the basis of implementation of communication.
Function of Communication	To control.	To control and serve.	To activate.
Need of Resources	No special resources needed.	Communication needs extra resources.	Communication needs a lot of resources but is a resource by itself.
Function of Communication	System does not necessarily need communication.	Systems have a need to be in the public eye (legitimacy, persuasion).	Communication is part of the change process.
Goal	Merely to perform the authorities duties.	To affect the citizen.	To activate the citizen.
Character	Laitez faire.	Authoritarian.	Democratic.
Content	Shared information.	Information is based on individualized needs.	Information deals with shared and special issues.

Abrahamsson's ideal is a social communication in which the interaction between the authorities and the citizens is based on two-way communication. Both the authority and the citizen act as a sender and as a receiver and both of them can be initiators. (Hakala 2000, 96.)

According to Abrahamsson (1974, 28-29), the essential questions in the flow of information between authorities and citizens are connected to the contents of the communication, in other words to the question whether the information can reach the receivers and whether it is relevant to the receiver. If

a citizen has to look for the information, then it is not easy to access. If he has received information but doesn't understand it, the information should be made low-content. The citizen's need of information affects greatly its relevance. It makes greater demands on the receiver if the information is poorly available or irrelevant to the receiver.

From the viewpoint of this study is important to know on what principle the public consumer information in question is based. It is also interesting to know on what principle the citizens want it to be based. Is it enough if the function of communication is to serve or to control? Or do citizens want to exchange information and to be encouraged to take part in public discussion? Does the consumer administration even want the citizens to be in a direct dialogue in which their reactions may have an immediate impact on the situation? It is also interesting to know what private organizations think about public consumer information. Do they want to educate consumers or must only consumer administration take care of them? These questions as well are answered at the end of this study from the viewpoint of public consumer information.

3.6.2 Public Participation

The evolution of the public management has increased pressure on the public organizations to become more responsive to citizens as clients and engage in effective collaboration with them as partners. *Responsiveness* implies a passive, unidirectional reaction to citizens' needs and demands. *Collaboration* is a more active, bidirectional act of participation between two (or more) parties. (Vidoga 2002, 527.) The new public service means the kind of collaboration where citizens are treated as partners. It means taking one step beyond responsiveness. (Vidoga 2002, 529.)

Public participation is the involvement of the public in the process of decision-making (Stewart & Claker 1987, 172). Arnstein (1969) was the first to identify different levels of public participation (see figure 5). She calls the first two levels (*manipulation* and *therapy*) non-participation, and the three middle levels (*informing*, *consultation* and *placation*) degrees of tokenism, and the three highest levels of public participation (*partnership*, *delegated power* and *citizen control*) degrees of citizen power. According to her (1969, 217) the real objective was not to enable citizens to participate but to enable power holders to educate or cure the participants.



FIGURE 5 Ladder of Citizen Participation (Arnstein 1969)

Dorcey et al. (1994) describe eight levels of public involvement (see figure 6). They don't, as Arnstein does, criticize the lower levels of involvement as being manipulative or less effective. They point out that each level may be appropriate depending on the decision to be made. They also suggest that as when the higher levels of involvement are employed, all the lower levels should also be activated simultaneously to keep all the stakeholders involved and informed. (Jackson 2001, 138.)

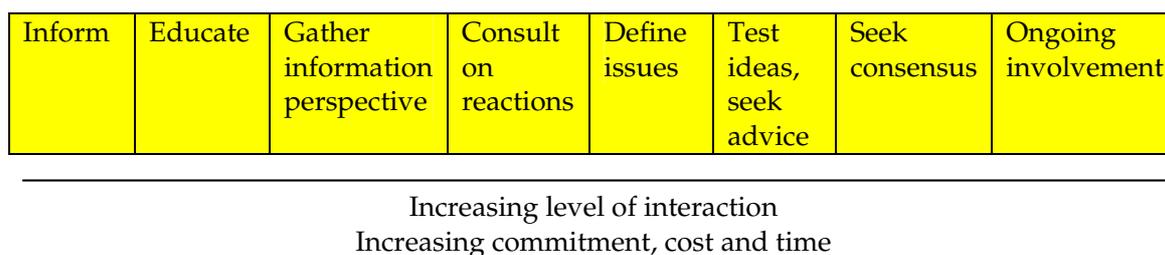


FIGURE 6 The Spectrum of Public Involvement (Dorcey et al. 1994)

Jackson (2001, 139) argues that all the levels shown in figure 6 may be appropriate under certain circumstances. She also point out that each stakeholder should be asked what level of knowledge of and what degree of commitment they have for. After this analysis appropriate objectives are then set for each stakeholder. The objectives (ibid.) can be *to inform, public education, testing reactions, seeking ideas and alternative solutions, and seeking consensus.*

TABLE 4 Stages of Public Participation (Jackson 2001, 145)

Objective	Stakeholder Analysis
To inform	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'General public' or • Specific stakeholder group which is unaware of the issue or project
Public education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General public or stakeholder group is aware of the issue or initiative, but requires background information in order to make an informed choice
Test Reactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must already be aware of the issue • Must have some background knowledge • Should be representative of some wider group
Seek ideas and alternative solutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An 'expert panel' • Stakeholders should be well informed and have expertise or special knowledge • Should have the commitment for this level of involvement
Shared decision making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well informed and knowledgeable • High level of commitment • Belief in the process • Willingness to share information • Trust in the organization and other stakeholders (or willing to build)

Lehtonen's (2002a, 36) model shows seven stages regarding communication with civic organizations. On the first level an organization is not communicating with a civic organization, on second level the organization makes public statements but does not target them at any civic organizations, and on the third level and organization informs a specific civic organization. On the fourth level the organization hears what a civic organization says but does not really listen what it says. In all four levels communication is based on monologue. On the fifth level communication is based on dialogue because the organization is listening to a civic organization in order to obtain information it needs. On the sixth level both parties are solving problems together and on the seventh level a civic organization holds a position in the organization's decision making process. In last levels communication is based on participation.

From the viewpoint of this study is important to find out what are the stages of public participation in the case of public consumer information in Finland. Different stages of public participation also arises a question about citizens' competence. Citizens need much more competence, for example, in the case of shared decision making than in the case of one-way informing. How it is possible to increase citizens' competence?

3.6.3 Media Relations

Publicity can be defined as the publication of news about an organization or person for which time or space has not been purchased (Baskin & Aronoff 1992, 486). The need for public relations and publicity efforts in Finland has grown in

recent years. This is to a large extent due to the still present state of crisis in the funding of public institutions. Results-oriented management and new systems of administration have also created a growing need for publicity. The Finnish Consumer Agency's operations are also in need of good publicity.

According to Nordenstreng (2002, 91) the role of the media in a democracy is to inform the citizens, to control those in power, and to maintain a diversity of opinion. In Finland this means that the media provides a forum for dialogue. In this study is important to find out whether the public discussion increases the level of involvement towards public consumer information.

The mass media follows the actions of public organizations actively and critically. Thus media relations are a central part of the public relations of public organizations and the primary task has been to answer as fast as possible the needs of the mass media. It is not wonder therefore that the communication of public organizations has traditionally been based on a one-way flow of information and that journalists have been considered as the most important target group of organizational communication (see Roos 1999). Directly informing the citizens, or vice versa, has been rare.

The effect and success of the communication of public organizations have been measured based on how often their news releases have been published and whether they have been reported according to the organization's wishes. (Nieminen 2000, 126.) However, this says nothing about how the information given out by the public organization affects the behavior of citizens.

Because the communication of public organizations has emphasized information disseminated through the media, public discussion is also often focused on public authorities. This is partly due to the fact that the matters and documents in preparation may be secret or discretionarily published by at the discrediting of the authority. Then public organizations can choose the time, contents and way of publishing of the information. The initiative also stays with public organizations. Such a reporting is likely to alienate the citizen from social decision-making. (Hakala 2000.)

The tools and channels for direct contacts with citizens have been missing. It can be argued that because of the Internet public organizations have entered a new era of interaction. It is easy and quick to distribute information to citizens as well as the media through the Internet. Public organizations are no longer dependent on the media. On the other hand it must be remembered that all citizens do not yet have the opportunity or will to use of the Internet. They also trust the mass media more.

To increase the interaction between the citizens and public authorities by means of the new communication technology was one of ideas behind the new publicity law. The significance of the Internet as a channel for the dissemination of information is increasing all the time but it will not attain the significance of the mass media as the citizens' information channel in the near future.

The existence of the Internet has led for to the fact that the communication professionals in public organizations must increasingly take on tasks of the journalists. They must try to draft their message in a way which every person

searching for information understands. This can create tension between public organizations and the mass media, but at the same time it also creates competition (Nieminen 2000, 127).

In a summary one can say that the mass media is nowadays only one of the most important subjects of the communication of public organizations. Communication means more than writing news releases. Communication is part of the constant process of social dialogue, the forming of public opinion, decision-making and the execution of decisions. An attempt is being made to increase dialogic between public organizations and citizen as well as between citizens. (see Nieminen 2000, 127-128.) This could mean a movement towards two-way symmetrical communication.

From the viewpoint of this study is important to find out from what communication channel is preferred by citizens for acquiring public consumer information. I assume that the mass media is still an essential channel, but how significant is it compared to personal service and internet? It is also interesting to find out how the level of citizen involvement relates to those communication channels. This study will also seek to determine whether there is a connection between attitudes and communication channels.

3.7 Ethics of Communication and Public Relations

The public sector operates in a changed and changing environment. Public authorities are subject to greater public scrutiny and increased demands from citizen and other stakeholders, yet they also face stricter constraints on their resources. Decentralization, increased commercialization of the public sector, a changing public/private sector interface and changing accountability arrangements are some of the reasons why public authorities have been adopting new ways of carrying out the business of government. While public management reforms have brought important returns in terms of efficiency and effectiveness, some of these adjustments may have had unintended impacts on ethics and standards of conduct. (see OECD 1996, 5.)

The "*ethics*" comes from the Greek work "*ethos*", which means "character" or "custom". Western ethical thinking is largely based on Aristotelian and Christian ethics. Ethics is the systematic attempt to answer questions about good, right and wrong and moral obligation (see e.g. Hall 1997, 16). There are many ethical schools of thought and large disagreements between them, but there are some general rules to which most moral philosophers would subscribe. For example lying, stealing, cheating and killing are wrong. Legitimacy issues like abortion or euthanasia are much disputed.

Ethics has been a growing interest in the domain of business. Three types of management orientations have been found. Immoral management exploits stakeholders, e.g. the customer might be cheated or misled. Amoral management gives little thought to ethics. It bases its actions on profit making

and abiding by the law. Moral management, instead, views stakeholders as equal partners and all stakeholders are treated fairly. (Carroll 1993.)

Business ethics is, however, a controversial issue. Some people ask why business ethics should bother anybody and others see it as a vital part of everyday business life. In spite of that, the ethics of public life has become an important public and political issue. In my opinion ethical behavior serves interests of both the organization and public.

Ethics is one of the important checks and balances against the arbitrary use of public power. It is a vital factor in creating and maintaining confidence in the public sector. (OECD 1996, 13.) Public confidence in the impartiality and objectivity of the government and its institutions remains strong in Finland. There is no sign that civil servants are failing to observe the rules and regulations guiding their action and behavior as scrupulously as they did before. (Äijälä & Hyvönen 1995.) Although the public sectors of different counties have different cultural, political and administrative environments, they often confront similar ethical challenges, and the responses in their ethics management show common characteristics. In this study ethics is examined only from the viewpoint of communication.

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is closely connected to the stakeholder model. It means, in brief, that “business is conducted in a manner that meets or exceeds the ethical, legal, commercial and public expectations that society has of business” (Lehtonen 2004, 151). The demand of CSR started at the end of the 1990s and has increased dramatically since then. In their CSR reports companies seek to show their responsibility in economic, environmental and social matters (so called three bottom-line matters). Those elements are shown more detail in table 5, drawn up by the Confederation of Finnish Industry and Employers.

TABLE 5 Components of the CSR (Teollisuus ja työnantajat 2001)

Economic Responsibility	Environmental Responsibility	Social Responsibility
Productivity, competitiveness, efficiency	Sound management of natural resources and the environment	Implementation of good working practices
Shareholder value	Protection of water, air and soil	Well-being and competence of personnel
Contribution towards the well-being of society	Combating climate change	Product safety and consumer protection
Base for environmental and social responsibility	Using natural resources in a sustainable way	Fluid teamwork within corporate networks Collaboration with local community, philanthropy

Corporate social responsibility is good if an organization really act as it claims to act. There are unfortunately many examples (like Enron) which show that organizations' CSR motives are not always ethical and responsible. They merely seek to keep their customers satisfied, to gain public approval or to interfere in public decision making (Lehtonen 2004, 152).

From the viewpoint of this study is interesting to find out what components of the CRS appear when asking citizens attitudes towards public consumer information and the Finnish Consumer Agency. Is it social responsibility what matters, or maybe economic or environmental responsibility?

3.7.1 Ethics and Four Models of Public Relations

Public Relations "is the (maintenance of) relationships (with) publics (by) communication (in order to) establish mutual understanding" (van Ruler & Vercic 2002, 13). There will always be ethical discussions about the use of communication, since it is based on the tension between organization and environment. Ethics in communication for an organization is closely related to the ethics of the organization as a whole. (see Vos & Schoemaker 1999, 22; Carroll 1993.) The main problem of organizational communication and public relations is its history. Publics and media have been suspicious of its motives even through many codes of ethics have been published by public relations associations and many member associations of the field have committed to them. (Nordenstreng & Lehtonen 1998, 266-267.) These codes are, however, too general serving as a simple declaration of good will rather than guidelines for the in-depth ethical analysis the profession demands (Bowen 2004, 68). In everyday life public relations practitioners have to make decisions that satisfy the public interest, the employer, the professional organization's code of ethics and their personal values. These are often in conflict. (Skinner et al. 2003,17.)

In mid 1980s J. Grunig and his colleagues proposed four models of public relations (see table 6). In them communication is divided into symmetrical and asymmetrical models. The two-way symmetrical model is the only symmetrical model, whereas the press agency, public information, and two-way asymmetrical models of public relations are asymmetrical models. Communication is only one-way in the press agency and public information models and two-way in other models. *The two-way symmetrical model* uses research and dialogue to manage conflict, improve understanding, and build relationships with publics. Using this model both the organization and publics can be persuaded and both of them may change their behavior. *Asymmetrical models*, in contrast, attempt to change the behavior of publics without changing the behavior of the organization. Under the *press agency model*, public relations strive for media publicity in almost any way possible. In the *public information model*, public relations use journalists in residence to disseminate objective but only favorable information about the organization. Using the two-way asymmetrical model, the organization uses research to develop the kinds of

messages that are most likely to persuade publics to behave in the way the organization wants. (Grunig & White 1992, 39.)

TABLE 6 Four Models of Public Relations (Grunig & Hunt 1984)

Characteristic	Model			
	Press agency/Publicity	Public Information	Two-Way Asymmetric	Two-Way Symmetric
Purpose	Propaganda	Dissemination of information	Scientific persuasion	Mutual understanding
Nature of communication	One-way; complete truth not essential	One-Way; truth important	Two-way; imbalanced effects	Two-way; balanced effects
Communication model	Source → Rec.	Source → Rec.	Source → Rec. ← Feedback	Group → Group ←
Nature of Research	Little; "counting house"	Little; readability, readership	Formative; evaluative of attitudes	Formative; evaluative of understanding
Leading Historical Figures	P.T. Barnum	Ivy Lee	Edward L. Bernays	Bernays, educators, professional leaders
Where practised Today	Sports, theatre, product promotion	Government, nonprofit associations, business	Competitive business; agencies	Regulated business; agencies
Estimated % of organizations practising today	15 %	50 %	20 %	15 %

According to Grunig (1992a, 10) symmetrical communication is more ethical, socially responsible and more successful than asymmetrical communication. Symmetrical communication takes place through dialogue, negotiation, listening, and conflict management rather than through persuasion, manipulation, and the giving of orders (Grunig 1992b, 231). It is also more effective than asymmetrical communication in a long run. It is also inherently ethical whereas asymmetrical communication requires disclosure if it is to be considered ethical (Grunig & Grunig 1996, 44-45).

The concept of two-way symmetrical communication has also been criticized. According to Karlberg (1996) it concentrates on the communication strategies and behavior, but not at all on the needs, means and barriers of communication of different groups of citizens. According to him this model is adapted to function in an asymmetrical way. Governmental agencies are more likely to practice the public information model than other types of organizations (Grunig & Jaatinen 1999, 219). It is not always easy for public organizations to adopt the idea of dialogue because they have got used to

simply inform citizens. The public sector doesn't always have the willingness to be open or the ability to use the two-way symmetrical model.

After the public information model the public sector uses mostly the two-way symmetrical model (Grunig & Jaatinen 1999, 219). Symmetrical communication is sometimes hard to apply in situations where there is a big difference between the parties or when the views of the parties involved are far apart; interest and actions groups are not always inclined to opt for symmetrical communication and it should be wanted by both parties. Organizations use different styles of communication depending on the situation, the issues and the parties involved. (Vos & Schoemaker 1999, 23.)

Grunig's model was said to be idealistic because public relations practitioners often play a "mixed-motive" game. He modified his model to take account of the mixed-motive paradigm, in which organizations and publics try to find a "win-win" zone for their separate and conflicting interests. In it both parties have an acceptable level of both comfort and discomfort. (see Dozier et al. 1995.)

James Grunig's (2000) recent studies have moved toward the development and maintenance of relationships as the central goal of public relations. Instead of placing public relations strategies into one of the "four boxes", we can begin to think the dimensions or strategies that underlie the models. These dimensions include a) symmetrical and asymmetrical, b) one-way or two-way, c) mediated and interpersonal, and d) ethical and unethical public relations strategies.

Communitarianism also can be seen in the light of J. Grunig's approach. There are major similarities between the communitarian worldview and the symmetrical model of communication, and between the liberal worldview and the asymmetrical model. Both communitarianism and symmetrical communication sees dialogue as the most ethical way to communicate. The philosophy of communitarianism asserts that the provision of individual rights requires responsibility on the parts of all members of the community (Wilson 2001, 523).

3.7.2 Public Relations and Perspectives of Ethics

Ethical theories in the case of public relations can be divided into two philosophical schools (Grunig & Grunig 1996). The first school comprises *teleological theories*, which emphasize the consequence of one's behavior on others (the consequentialist perspective). The term "teleology" comes from the Greek word "teleos", which means "brought to an end" (Gregory 2003, 87). *Utilitarianism*, originally proposed in the 18th century by Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, is a classic consequentialist theory. According to utilitarianism an action is right only to the extent that it produces more good than ill. This would, for example, allow telling lies to protect the reputation of the organization and save jobs. (Sommerville 2001, 108-111.) Other consequentialist theories are *egoistic* theories. They state that we act morally if we promote our own long-term interests. Egoistic theories are problematic

because they don't tell us what to do when different persons or stakeholder groups' interests conflict. (Grunig & Grunig 1996.) According to Bowen (2004, 76) the consequentialist theory requires too much prediction of the impact of and reaction to the decision. I also would like to point out that it might be at short-sighted to look only short-term consequences.

The second group consists of *deontological theories* (the non-consequentialist perspective). The term "deontology" comes from the Greek word "deontos", which means "duty" or "obligation" (Gregory 2003, 86). The non-consequentialist ethical doctrine is primarily associated with Immanuel Kant. This position argues that it is motivation rather than consequences which is the determining factor in deciding whether actions are ethical or not. In the earlier case lying, even to save jobs, isn't allowed. (Sommerville 2001, 108-109; Bowen 2004, 70.) This is why sometimes correct actions can have bad consequences. Deontology is inherently difficult to apply. It often results in *ethical relativism*, where each situation is approached individually and no consistent guidelines are applied.

Pearson (1989a, 82-84; see also Pearson 1989b; Grunig & Grunig 1996) has developed a deontological theory of public relations ethics based on the ideas of Jürgen Habermas. He proposed two rules of ethical public relations:

- It is a moral imperative to establish and maintain communication relationships with all publics affected by organizational action.
- It is a moral imperative to improve the quality of these communication relationships, that is, to make them increasingly dialogical (symmetrical).

According to first rule it is necessary for an organization to take the consequences on the public into account when it makes strategic decisions. The second rule states that organizations have the moral obligation to communicate with those publics even though the organization cannot always accommodate them.

According to Grunig & Grunig (1996) the literature suggests six recurring and central ethical questions in public relations: personal ethical decisions, relationships with clients and other practitioners, to whom to be loyal, choice of client or organization, advocate or counselor, and secrecy and openness.

Grunig & Grunig (1996) proposed that Pearson's two moral imperatives can be translated into an ethical theory of public relations that incorporates both a teleological and a deontological perspective. In teleological public relations professionals ask what consequences potential organizational decisions have on their publics. In deontological public relations professionals then have the moral obligation to disclose these consequences to the affected publics and to engage them in dialogue about the potential decisions.

Habermas (1984) refused to accept the idea that ethical theories can be both teleological and deontological. According to him the basis for ethical rules is the ideal communication situation, which means "a situation in which all participants have an equal opportunity to assume dialogue roles". Some scholars have criticized Habermas's theory for being unrealistic and impractical

because the ideal communication situation never occurs in reality. (Grunig & Grunig 1996.) An ideal speech situation can occur if the given below rules are followed (Habermas 1980, 86):

1. Every subject with the competence to speak and act is allowed to take part in the discourse.
- 2a. Everyone is allowed to question any assertion whatever.
- 2b. Everyone is allowed to introduce any assertion whatever into the discourse.
- 2c. Everyone is allowed to express his attitudes, desires and needs.
3. No speaker may be prevented, by internal or external coercion, from exercising his rights as laid down in (1) and (2).

The ideal speech situation can be said to apply in the Internet, where the rapid exchange of dialogue and production of information take place unchecked. Indeed, government regulation provokes an enormous outcry from those who claim that free speech is the essential component of democracy. Is open discourse itself the sign of pure democracy? If the rules of Habermas' ideal speech situation can be transferred to current electronic networks, the possibility arises for a democracy which can truly represent both citizen and community interests.

Habermas's *discourse ethics* is important to public relations because it directs attention to the process, rather than the substance, of the interaction between an organization and its publics (Pearson 1989a). The word "*discourse*" comes from Latin and its original meaning is "distracting, dispersing, and rushing to and from, as well as being carried away with something and, in this vein, information about something". Today it has different meanings in different languages, but discourse still encompasses only a part of the concept of dialogue. (Geissner 2001, 32.)

Discourse ethics requires social institutions in which norms and practices are legitimated by dialogue. Citizens' opportunity to access information and consider different solutions to social questions is a requirement of discourse ethics. Legitimation is a central concern of discourse ethics. According to Habermas (1990) social norms are legitimated if they are or could have been the product of a reasoned discussion achieved under an ideal speech situation.

From the viewpoint of this study is important to find out how far public consumer information is seen as ethical. Also of interest is whether differences exist between consumers and business managers. With respect to the latter the Finnish Consumer Agency controls many areas of business and might thus experience some extra tensions with this particular group.

4 ATTITUDES – FROM AWARENESS TO ACTION

One aim of this study is to find out what kind of attitudes the citizens have towards public consumer information. *Attitude* is defined in this study as a lasting, general evaluation of people, objects, or issues (see e.g. Baron & Byrne 1997, 112). It is lasting because it tends to persist over time. Attitude is general because it applies to more than a momentary event (Solomon 1996, 157-158.) Attitude helps citizens to choose who to believe, what products and services to use, whether to recycle etc. According to *the functional theory of attitudes* (Katz 1960), attitudes exist because, for the individual, they serve utilitarian (principle of reward or punishment), value-expressive (central values or self-concept), ego-defensive (protect against external threats or internal feelings) and knowledge functions (a need for order, structure, or meaning). Usually one of these is dominant, but all of them can occur at the same time. It can be important to public organizations to know why attitudes are held before attempting to change them.

4.1 Cognitive, Affective and Conative Aspects of Attitudes

Attitudes can be seen as three aspects: cognitive, affective and behavioral (see e.g. Batra et al. 1996, 131; Kotler 2000, 554-556.). First, in this study I try to find out how much citizens know about the functions of the consumer administration. This is connected to the *cognitive* aspect of attitudes. Then I try to find out what kinds of attitudes do citizens have towards public consumer information. This is connected to the *affective* aspect, and is the following: The question about how the behavior of citizens can be affected by public consumer information is connected to the *conative* aspect of attitudes.

The *hierarchy of effects models* includes all three aspects of attitudes. The *AIDA model*, developed in the 1920s, suggests that there are four steps from attention to action: the first is to attract attention (A), the next is to gain interest (I), the third is to create desire (D), and the fourth is precipitate action (A). Lehtonen (2002, 76) suggests 0-level to be a starting point where people have attitudes, information, experiences and different kinds of motives. He suggests repeated action to be the fifth step. Palm and Windahl (1998, 24) suggests satisfaction (S) to be the fifth step.

Colley's (1961) *DAGMAR approach* suggests a series of steps starting from potential customers being unaware of an organization, through their being aware of the organization, to their comprehension and forming of an image of the organization. This fourth step is reached when attitudes are created, and the fifth step is action (like buying products or services). In the 1960s a model was also developed for predictive measurements of advertising effectiveness. According to Lavidge's and Steiner's (1961, 59-62) hierarchy-of-effects model there are six stages: awareness, knowledge, liking, preference, conviction, and purchase. The first two are cognitive components, liking and preference are affective components, and last two are conative (behavioral) components. (see e.g. Batra et al. 1996, 131; Kotler 2000, 554-556.) All these components, however, are based on linear thinking. I would argue that there are no "steps from attention to action". During action knowledge increases, attitudes are formed etc. I would like to point out that persuasion occurs all the time.

There are confusing research results on the attitude-behavior relationship. Carl Hovland has investigated the relationship of communication to attitude assessment. He started with the assumption that attitudes could predict behaviors. Hovland and his colleagues assumed that people need motivation to process information that can change their existing attitudes. (see e.g. Larson 2004, 80.)

According to Larson (2004, 90) the *theory of reasoned action* by Fishbein and Ajzen can predict behavior better than other theories. Fishbein and Ajzen (1981) argue that both attitudes and behavioral intentions should be measured. In practice this means measuring (1) a person's attitudes toward a behavior, and how important that is to that person, and (2) the normative influence on an individual, and how important that influence is to the person. Normative influence is a person's belief that important individuals or groups think that it is advisable to perform or not to perform those behaviors. (Larson 2004, 90.)

In the present study actual behavior was not researched. The hypothesis, however, is that attitudes can influence the behavior of a citizen, although the link between attitudes and behavior is complex. Fishbein and Ajzen (1975, 14) argue that the more positive a person's past experience about an object is, the more positive beliefs he or she will hold about that object. As a result, the more positive beliefs a person has, the more positive an attitude will be created. Hence I assume that if a citizen has basic knowledge about and a positive attitude toward the Finnish Consumer Agency, the more likely this citizen will be to act and use its services.

Next cognitive and affective components of attitudes are discussed and studied from the viewpoint of public consumer information. First, however, the focus is on consumerism.

4.2 Awareness and Knowledge

4.2.1 Consumerism: The Public's Awareness of Their Rights

This study is closely related to *consumerism*, which is defined as the public's awareness of their rights. Consumerism has increased consumers criticism of many questionable business practices. It has also caused increased regulation of business organizations. According to Quazi (2002, 38) the business response to consumerism has ranged from inaction to adaptation. It has also varied in different cultures and societies. Most of the research on consumerism has been done in Western countries where the market economies are advanced and tend to be freer of government interference (Lysonski et al. 2003, 389).

Consumerism can be said to have increased thanks to the *consumer movement*. Kotler (2000, 152) views it as an "organized movement of citizens and government to strengthen the rights and powers of buyers in relation to sellers". Kotler (1972) identified six factors responsible for the development of consumerism (Quazi 2002, 36-37):

1. *Structural conduciveness*: Basic development in the society resulting in potent contradictions (growing consciousness of quality of life, increasing complexity of marketing and technology and environmental pollution);
2. *Structural strain*: Discontent with the economic (inflation), social (poverty, racism), ecological (pollution, population explosion), and market system (questionable products, deceptive advertising);
3. *Growth of generalized belief*: A growing consensus as to the cause of social malaise. The major impetus came from critical writings, government initiatives and consumer organizations;
4. *Precipitating factors*: Acceleration of consumer discontent as a result of consumers exposure to business practices detrimental to their interests;
5. *Mobilizing factors*: The support of the media, labor unions, consumer organizations in mobilizing the movement; and
6. *Social control*: Improper response from the agents of social control in relation to business resistance and inadequate support from legislative bodies led to direct actions by consumers.

Rao (1998, 921) asserts that there have been three consumer movement era in the United States: an antiadulteration movement, the rise of nonprofit consumer watchdog organizations, and an era of legal activism. For example Kaufman and Channon (1973) and Straver (1977) found four stages in the life cycle of consumerism: (1) crusading, (2) popular movement, (3) organizational/managerial and (4) bureaucratic (Quazi 2002, 37). According to

Varadarajan et al. (1990, 8-9) different countries can be positioned along the cycle on the basis of the quantity and quality of information supplied to consumers, the extent of protective legislation, the authority of government consumer agencies, and the public funding of consumer education programs. For example, in the 1990s India and Israel were in the crusading stage, Great Britain and Australia in the popular movement stage, the United States and Canada in the organizational managerial stage, and Norway was already in the bureaucratic stage in the 1980s.

In Finland consumers are said to require social responsibility from organizations. For example, ethical trade is discussed and debated widely but ethical consumption and the purchase of ethical products has not, however, become a common practice. The reasons for this gap between attitudes and behavior are the lack of reliable information, the availability of ethical products, and the high prices of these products. Consumers are also skeptical of and cynical about ethical claims. (Uusitalo & Oksanen 2004, 214, 219-220; see also Carrigan & Attala 2001.)

4.2.2 Attitudes Toward Consumerism

Attitudes toward consumerism have been measured by examining the perceptions of consumers to marketing activities such as pricing, advertising and product quality. Gaski and Etzel (1986, 78-81) have developed an instrument to measure consumers' general attitudes and sentiment toward marketing and consumerism. This instrument consists of four parts: quality of products, prices, advertising, and selling conditions/stores.

The instrument contains many components of the instrument devised by Barksdale and Darden (1972). It also contains the components important to this study. The instrument contains 39 items measured on a Likert scale ranging from strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (5). These 39 items are related to several areas of consumer perceptions: (1) product quality, (2) advertising, (3) pricing issues, (4) government regulation, (5) customer orientation, (6) consumer problems and responsibilities, and (7) consumerism. For example, Lysonsky et al. (2003, 401) have used this method and found that consumerism and marketing issues are less problematic in New Zealand nowadays than they were 15 years ago.

In this study neither instrument was used but many components of them were discussed during the interviews. On the basis of this study it seems that both consumers' and business managers' attitudes toward product quality are quite positive. Manufacturers said that they were trying to produce as high quality products as possible. Product development work is done all the time. Some consumers, however, mentioned that many machines manufactured today are not as durable as similar machines manufactured decades ago. Some consumers complained about the non-availability of instructions in Finnish.

"I am satisfied with the products I have bought." (C)²

"We can't be satisfied with our products. If we are, our competitors will be able to match our competitive advantage."(B)

"My last washing machine worked for more than twenty years. The new one was full of wondrous features but it lasted less than five years." (C)

"I bought a mobile phone. The phone was made in Finland but I didn't find instructions in Finnish. I asked the seller and he promised to send them to me. I never got them." (C)

Consumers are not satisfied with advertisements as a source of information. They are not reliable because they only state positive facts about products. According to both consumers and business managers it is important that the Finnish Consumer Agency, among others, performs product tests.

"Advantage is two-fold (in product tests). We can use this information in our advertising and customers get reliable information." (B)

"Unfortunately we can't trust them (=advertisements). If some wrinkle removing cream is said to be tested, it may mean only a couple of women." (C)

"It is better to get this information from the Finnish Consumer Agency than from ads." (C)

Not all business managers are happy that the Consumer Ombudsman controls advertising. One third of business managers argued that control over advertising is not needed. Most also believed that market forces keep prices at a fair level. Consumers are less certain about this and most business managers stated that government control is needed but on an appropriate level.

"The consumer ombudsman should have better things to do. All control is bad." (B)

"If the level of prices is too high, competitors will sell their products more easily and we will have to lower our prices." (B)

"I believe it is good to have some control. It is not difficult to notice price cartels in the case of gas stations." (B)

Almost half the consumers interviewed in this study stated that in the long-run business organizations are more profit-oriented than consumer-oriented. On the other hand many of them asserted that the private sector is nowadays much more customer-oriented than before. They felt that most companies take consumer complaints seriously.

"I don't understand why he (=the Consumer Ombudsman) uses his time to complain about advertisements. If these are inappropriate, consumers don't buy our products." (B)

"We still remember what happened in the early 1990s. It is profit that matters." (C)

Interviews were also done on matters connected with social responsibility, which has started to be hot topic in Finland during the time of interviews. Most citizens said that environmental and ethical matters are important, and they are ready to pay more for environmentally friendly products. How this works in practice was not studied.

"We have to be responsible. And we want to be responsible." (B)

"Of course these are important matters." (C)

"I am ready to pay more if the product is environmentally friendly. It is important to promote green food."(C)

Gaski's and Etzel's (1986) instrument is focused on products. The Finnish Consumer Agency mainly produces services but it also, for example, controls product safety and does product tests. According to this study the services of

² Consumers' answers are marked with (C) and business managers' answers with (B).

the Finnish Consumer Agency are good but unknown, and are not always easy to access. The different services are discussed later more detailed.

"I didn't have any idea those services exist." (C)

"I have been very satisfied with their information. It helped us a lot during our house-building project." (C)

"The guidelines they gave were very good also from our viewpoint." (B)

"The Consumer Magazine is very good. There have been many interesting and informative articles in it. I am happy that I ordered it."(C)

"There should be more of these services." (C)

4.2.3 Awareness and Knowledge of the Consumer Administration

To create *awareness* is one of the basic communication tasks. It is especially important if a citizen hasn't tried the products and services in question. Awareness can be measured in three ways: top-of-mind awareness, other unaided mention, or aided awareness. (Batra et al. 1996, 125.) According to van Riel and Fombrun (2002, 297) a high degree of top-of-mind awareness has a positive impact on attitudes toward an organization if the antecedents of familiarity are positive. Negative publicity also creates a high degree of familiarity but with negative connotations. They find nine propositions surrounding top-of-mind awareness of corporate brands (ToMAC). They are the following:

1. Firms with well-known brands and whose products are purchased frequently by a large and diverse group of customers will have a higher degree of ToMAC
2. Firms with a high degree of visibility related to the location and architecture of their outlets will have a high degree of ToMAC
3. The higher the degree of media exposure (free and paid-for publicity), the higher the degree of ToMAC
4. The larger the firm, the higher the degree of ToMAC
5. Firms with a listing on a national stock exchange will have a higher degree of ToMAC
6. The older the firm, the higher the degree of ToMAC
7. Firms whose activities focus on 'common interest issues' have a greater chance of being appreciated by the general public, and a higher degree of ToMAC
8. National firms have a higher degree of ToMAC in their home country, compared to competitors from other countries
9. Privatized firms (previously government-owned) have a higher, but negatively flavored, ToMAC

In this study consumer and business managers filled out a form in which they were asked how well they knew the functions of twenty public organizations in Finland (this can be called an aided-awareness measurement). According to the study the Finnish Consumer Agency is one of the four best-known public organizations in both groups (see appendix 6).

The citizens were also asked why they knew some public organizations' functions better than others. The most important reason was that they have used their services or have been in other ways in contact with the authority. The second reason was that the authority deals with things that are important and

interesting from the viewpoint of the citizen. The third reason is that the organization has had wide media publicity. This is why they “feel familiar”.

“I have seen research results by the Statistics Finland very often.”(C)

“The healthiness of my family is important to me. I immediately open my ears if I hear the National Food Agency has something say.” (C)

“I always follow the test results of the Finnish Consumer Agency. They are very interesting. Especially product safety matters.”(C)

“ Yesterday I read a brochure by Stakes.”(C)

“Well, I have been in contact with the Social Insurance Institution of Finland many, many times.”(C)

“The Finnish Vehicle Administration is very familiar because I have often been in contact over there.”(C)

“I know the Finnish Consumer Agency because of the Consumer magazine.”(C)

“My husband is working for the Finnish Road Administration. I hear about these things even if I don’t want to.”(C)

“I am in contact with them because of my work.” (B)

“Our branch is very controlled. This means I know the Finnish Communications Regulatory Authority, the Finnish Competition Authority and the Consumer Ombudsman very well.” (B)

Why are some public organizations unknown? According to the citizens interviewed there are two big reasons. The first one is that they don’t get information about this organization. The other reason is that they have received some information but they haven’t needed its services.

“They do not communicate.” (B)

“Actually I really don’t know what Posiva is. Or Motiva.”(C)

“Maybe I will be in contact with the Finnish Centre for Pensions later, but at present I am under 30.”(C)

“I am not interested in the functions of public organizations. Public agencies are workplaces for those who can’t get another job.” (B)

“I do have not needed its services.”(B)

Both consumer and business managers were also asked how well they actually know the functions of the Finnish Consumer Agency. Most of them know that consumer advisors give personal consumer information. Most of them, however, do not know that the Finnish Consumer Agency provides a variety of consumer information services. They have, for example, heard about product tests but don’t connect these to the Finnish Consumer Agency. Product safety tests are the best known, and somebody even said “Christmas doesn’t come without the Finnish Consumer Agency’s list of dangerous toys”.

“I think here is a consumer advisor in every municipality?”(C)

“I know that consumer advisors give it (=personal consumer advice). I believe it is possible to get advice also from the Finnish Consumer Agency.” (C)

“I remember price comparisons. They come from some authority. I don’t know from whom. I believe they must be from the Consumer Agency.” (C)

“I have ordered the Consumer Magazine because it includes so many good product tests.” (C)

Those who have been in contact with consumer advisors, the Finnish Consumer Agency or even the Consumer Ombudsman more often gave the right answers. The only exception was that about half of all the citizens interviewed in this study knew that the Consumer Ombudsman supervises marketing and only a couple of citizens knew that financial and debt counseling is controlled by the Finnish Consumer Agency.

"The public authorities control that advertising does not lead us in the wrong direction, right?" (C)

"I remember that the Consumer Ombudsman have prohibited some ads." (C)

Detailed knowledge of the functions of the Finnish Consumer Agency and other parts of consumer administration in Finland were not very well known. More important than knowing all functions in detail is knowing that public consumer information is available. It would also be important for citizens to know of the existence of consumer advisors. According to business managers the consumer, especially, should be better informed. Some citizens expressed concern about situation of minority groups.

"The most important thing is that both consumers and us (=business managers) know how to get in contact with the consumer advisor if needed. He will handle the problem and take it forward if necessary." (B)

"People should get much more information about the possibilities open to them. People really don't know what their possibilities are. They don't know their rights and I have noticed that not always their duties either. Not even basic facts. A good example concerns consumers' right to return a product. People believe that they always have 14 days to change or return a product." (B)

"I'm afraid the situation of immigrants is very bad." (C)

"The situation is certainly better for Finnish-speaking people than for us (=Swedish-speaking people)." (C)

Consumers and business managers were asked how easily available consumer advisors, the Finnish Consumer Agency and the Consumer Ombudsman are. The biggest problem in obtaining of public consumer information is the citizen's level of knowledge. Many citizens did not know where to get help if they needed it. Luckily, most of them knew about the consumer advisers but the Finnish Consumer Agency and the Consumer Ombudsman were only nebulous names to many. Most consumers also reported that they were not willing to find information if it means asking information from many people in public organizations.

"It would be easier if I knew whom to make contact with." (B)

"I didn't have any idea whom to contact." (C)

"All those public authorities sound the same. There are so many of them and nobody can know all of them." (B)

"I have to admit by accident I was on the internet pages of the Finnish Consumer Agency. (C)

"I found the www-pages of the Consumer Agency by accident when I used Internet search engines." (C)

It seems difficult at times to get hold of consumer advisors. Those who reported problems with this were, however, very understanding. A couple of citizens (both consumers and business managers) had difficulties in finding the telephone number of their local consumer advisors. According to them the number should be easier to found in the telephone directory. It should not be found only under the contact information of the town you live in. It should be possible to find it under the words consumer advisor. The other problem with making contact is that the telephone line is also often busy.

"The exchange of the Finnish Consumer Agency has often been blocked." (C)

"It was quite difficult to find the number of the consumer advisor. But I found it." (C)

"It is a little problematic when people are asked to contact their consumer advisor. Then both consumers and we are trying to call at a same time." (B)

Willingness to make contact with the Finnish Consumer Agency differed a lot according to the situation. Those who had earlier been in contact with consumer advisors would call or email much easier than those who had never been in contact with them. Usually consumers complain to their friends and colleagues about problems with products or services. Some advise contacting the consumer advisor. Usually contact will be made if the matter is important enough.

"Usually somebody advises me to contact the consumer advisor." (C)

"In the first time I complained about the car I bought. The consumer advisor was on my side and since then I have been in contact with him a couple of times." (C)

Those who have been in contact with the consumer advisor before usually contact them immediately if they have a disagreement with the other party. Some of them also contact the consumer advisor before contacting, for example, the salesman of a broken mobile phone. Some consumers say that mentioning the consumer advisors, the Finnish Consumer Agency or the Consumer Ombudsman is a good way to get the other party to reconsider their opinion.

"I have tried it many times. I just say I will ask the opinion of the consumer advisor. The salesman is often in a panic and tries to solve the problem." (C)

"I haven't always been right. The consumer advisor has told me a couple of times that the other party has acted correctly. I have been disappointed but the most important thing is to know you have been treated right." (C)

"This kind of service is supreme. And also free of charge." (C)

Consumers don't contact the consumer advisors (or other parts of the consumer administration) if they don't know about this possibility, if they don't know to whom to contact, or if they feel it must be difficult. Some of them believe it is difficult to complain (a lot of paper work) or get the right person on the phone. They also believe it is more difficult to complain about services than products because it is much more difficult to show where the problem is.

"Complaining should be easier and faster. There should be forms for this on the Internet. I would rather fill out a form and send it than to try to call the consumer advisor." (C)

"It has to be a very important matter before I take the trouble to call or try to organize a personal meeting." (C)

"I believe it just means a lot of paper work. It is easier to be quiet." (C)

4.3 Forming Attitudes

Attitudes towards the Finnish Consumer Agency were investigated in this study. First, though, we need to consider where attitudes do come from. According to the consumer behavior literature, beliefs and attitudes are principally created on the basis of a person's experience of a given object. Fishbein and Ajzen (1975, 14) argue that the more positive a person's past experience of an object is, the more positive beliefs he or she will hold about it. As a result, the more positive beliefs a person has, the more positive attitude this will create. This is also one hypothesis of the present study.

According to the *principle of cognitive consistency*, people seek to reduce inconsistencies in their lives. People value harmony among their thoughts,

feelings, and behaviors, and they are motivated to maintain consistency between these elements. People will change their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors to align them with their other experiences. (see e.g. Solomon 1996, 168). This principle is connected to balance theory, cognitive dissonance theory and congruity theory. These are briefly described next.

4.3.1 Balance Theory

The German psychologist Fritz Heider's (1946; 1958) *balance theory* offers a simple explanation of the general consistency theory. Balance occurs if, for example, two persons like each other and both hold either a positive or negative attitude towards an object (or another person). Inconsistency occurs if one's attitude towards an object is negative and the other person's is positive. (see e.g. Larson 2004, 90-91; Solomon 1996, 171-173.) Figure 7 shows examples of attitudes of two people (A and B) and their attitudes towards an object (C). A + shows a positive attitude and – shows a negative attitude. In the case of an unbalanced state an inconsistency remains until perceptions are somehow changed. For example A has to become more negative about B, A has to become more negative about C, or A has to persuade B of C's merits. According to Heider's theory attitudes are a quite stable but when an inconsistency occurs, attitudes are more likely to change.

Newcomb (1953) has developed Heider's ideas further. His *A-B-X model* suggests that liking of persons and objects can be on other levels than just either positive or negative. (see e.g. Johnson-Cartee & Copeland 2004, 57; Larson 2004, 91-92.) Newcomb calls symmetry a situation in which A and B holds the same attitudes and attractions for C. Asymmetry occurs in a situation in which A and B hold different attitudes and attractions for C. If A likes B a lot and isn't really interested about matters C, then A will probably shift towards B's opinion of C. In some situations symmetry, however, is not desired. For example A have bought an expensive dress and don't want B to know about it. A feels guilty because they could have used this money for something else.

Balance theory is relevant in many areas but it explains the past much better than it predicts the future. Both balance theory and the A-B-X model also overlook the strength of feeling involved. Cognitive dissonance theory takes in account how far persons are from each other on a topic. It deals with both qualitative and quantitative differences.

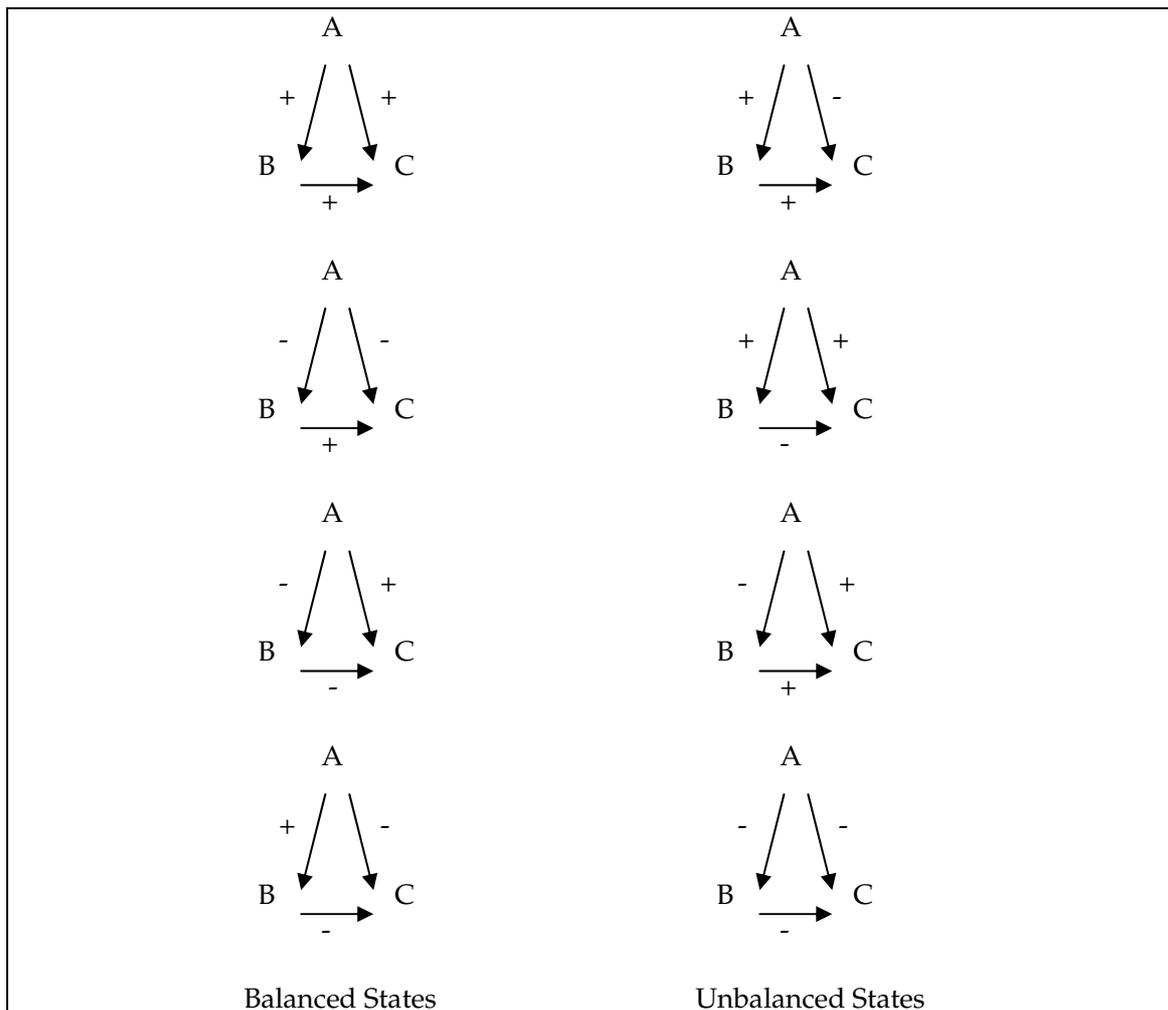


FIGURE 7 Heider's Balanced and Unbalanced States

4.3.2 Cognitive Dissonance Theory

There are similarities and differences between Heider's balance theory and Leon Festinger's (1957) *cognitive dissonance theory*. Like other cognitive consistency theories, cognitive dissonance theory suggests that "the existence of dissonance, being psychologically uncomfortable, will motivate the person to try to reduce the dissonance and achieve consonance". Festinger also argues that "when dissonance is present, in addition to trying to reduce it, the person will actively avoid situations and information which would likely increase the dissonance". (Festinger 1957, 3.)

Cognitive dissonance theory focuses on situations in which are two inconsistent cognitive elements. This element can be something a person believes about himself, a behavior he performs, or an observation about his surroundings. The magnitude of dissonance depends on the importance and number of dissonant elements. (Solomon 1996, 169.) For example, if a small

child obeys a mild request not to eat sand, he is likely to come to find the sand unattractive. However, if a child is forbidden under a strong threat of some direct punishment, he may obey, but will continue to find the sand attractive.

4.3.3 Congruity Theory

The third major consistency approach is Osgood's and Tannenbaum's (1955) *congruity theory*. Its basic idea is quite similar to the theories of Heider and Newcomb. It addresses how attitudes are affected when a person is liked to an object. It has, for example, been used to investigate a brand image or corporate image or perceptions of quality. (see e.g. Solomon 1996, 173-175.)

Balance theory sees attitudes as either positive or negative. Congruity theory is more sophisticated because in it attitudes are not so black-and-white. The semantic differential, also known as the Osgood scale, is a measurement technique in which attitudes toward an object (organization, brand, person etc.) can be measured. In practice it is a seven-point scale (often also five-point-scale) in which an object is evaluated on one pole, which represents "good", and the other, which represents "bad". This scale was used also in this study when the attitudes of consumer advisors were investigated (see Eskelinen 2002). In this study attitudes of consumers and business managers were, however, evaluated by using a qualitative technique.

On the basis of the congruity principle it is possible to predict in what direction attitude changes occur when an unbalanced state exists. The balance theory does not allow this.

4.4 Evaluating Attitudes by Using The Laddering Technique

According to the means-end chains theory a person's knowledge is hierarchically organized into attributes, consequences and values (Reynolds & Gutman 1984a, 29). Means-end chains can be formed with the help of the laddering technique. The method was originally developed by Hinkle in 1965 (Laaksonen 1994). The laddering technique has been used a lot to research values which are connected to brands. Nowadays its use has declined, also as a measure of an organization's or person's reputation.

In the laddering technique means-end chains are formed by asking 'why?'. This method can be used to find attributes, consequences and values connected to the target. Consequences can be advantages or disadvantages. Means-end chains consist of three main levels, subdivided into two sublevels each: attributes (concrete and abstract), consequences (functional and psychosocial), and values (instrumental and terminal). (Reynolds & Gutman 1984a, 29.)

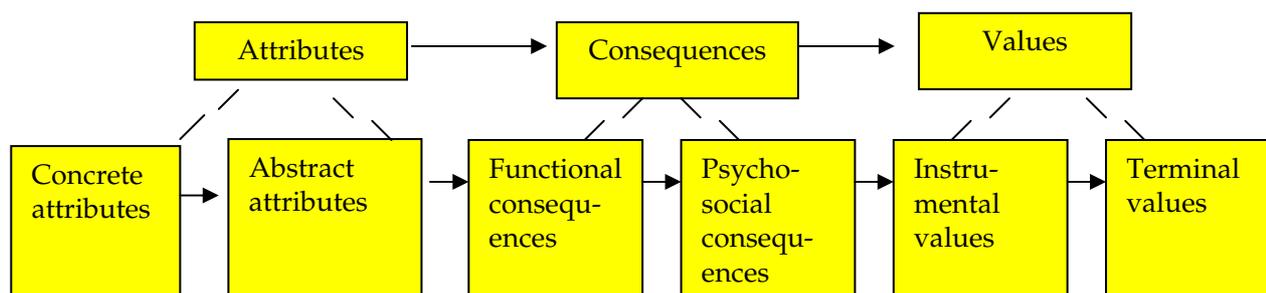


FIGURE 8 Sublevels of the Means-End Chains (Peter & Olson 1990, 79)

The laddering technique is suited to the examination of matters which are already familiar to the interviewee (Poiesz 1989). It is extremely important to find meanings at the highest level of abstraction in order that interpretative depth and understanding can be obtained. However, not all meaning chains end on the value level. The depth of the chains depends on how personally important the matter is to the interviewee. All interviewees do not achieve the value level because chains can end earlier on the attribute level or consequence level (Laaksonen & Leminen 1996, 18). According to Reynolds and Gutman (1988, 18) 25 % of interviewees will achieve the value level once only and 75 % two or three times during an interview.

The typical number of respondents in a laddering interview is 10-25 (van Riel et al. 1998, 315). Saturation occurs when adding new interviews does not produce more meanings. For example, Laaksonen (1994, 146) noticed in her study that expanding the number of interviewees from 36 to 46 created only four new meanings.

The involvement required of respondents is moderate or high compared for example to the semantic differential scale. The analysis is more difficult to do and the costs are usually higher. This method, however, gives a more profound understanding of attitudes toward an organization than many other measurement methods. (van Riel et al. 1998, 315.)

The stages of the laddering technique are the choice of the method, the performing of the interview and the analysis of results. All these stages are presented next.

4.4.1 Choice of the Method

Before the laddering interview, a specific method has to be chosen. The possible types of method are free sort, dyad sort, triadic elicitation and free elicitation. The choice of method depends on the study task. Gutman and Reynolds (1984b) propose the use of triadic elicitation for clarifying main differences. In it three alternatives are presented to the interviewee and he is asked to indicate which are alike. The explanations are then sought. The structure of the means-end chains will emerge from the attributes (Laaksonen & Leminen 1996, 17.)

On the basis of earlier studies, the free sorting and the free elicitation methods have proved especially useful when examining the differences

clarify from which attribute the advantage in question has proceeded. (for more examples see Reynolds & Gutman 1988.)

There are two problems in the use of the technique. The first is in the fact that the interviewee does not necessarily have an answer to why the matter is important to him. This may be due to the fact this matter has not been thought about earlier. This problem can be avoided by asking the interviewee, for example, 'what would happen if the Finnish Consumer Agency is not reliable?'. Answering is can be easier after this kind of questions. (Reynolds & Gutman 1988, 15-18.)

The interview may also become too personal and delicate. In that case it will be difficult for the interviewee to answer the questions. However, the situation can be eased for the moment, for example, by passing over the matter and on the fact that the interviewee may disclose something relevant by himself. (Reynolds & Gutman 1988, 15-18.)

Interviews can also be performed as a form interview (paper-and-pencil laddering). The advantage of the form interview compared to the traditional laddering interview is the fact that its costs are lower. According to Botschen et al. (1999, 55) the paper-and-pencil laddering technique has not been used enough for information about the validity and reliability of the method to be established. There should also be more research on how equivalent the results of soft-laddering and hard-laddering are.

4.4.3 Analysis of Results

After the interviews concept classes are classified. In this way the amount of meanings can be reduced to a whole which is easier to understand. Next the researcher examines how many times an attribute, consequence or value leads to a second consequence or value. The next stage is to code interview texts into three or six levels of means-end chains. These chains can be graphically represented in hierarchical value maps (HVM) (for further details see IJRM, 1995). In this way, the qualitative interview information is translated into a more quantitative form. (Reynolds & Gutman 1988, 20-25.)

4.5 Citizens' Attitudes Towards the Finnish Consumer Agency

The Finnish Consumer Agency wants citizens to perceive it as expert, up-to-date and customer-oriented (personal information from Marita Wilska, 18 April 2000). Attitudes toward the Finnish Consumer Agency were researched using the laddering technique. The interviews started with open questions designed to elicit how respondents characterised the Finnish Consumer Agency and what they required of it. In this way attributes were formed which became the basis for the laddering. The data from the laddering interviews was transcribed verbatim and coded according to three levels of cognitive-emotive categories.

Hierarchical value maps were constructed on the basis of this coding; see figure 10 and 11). Only values mentioned at least five times were included. Values mentioned at least ten times are shown bold in both figures.

4.5.1 Consumers' Attitudes

According to figure 10 consumers connect the following attributes to the Finnish Consumer Agency: expert, versatile, consumer-oriented, bureaucratic and unknown. Consumers placed special value on trustworthiness, neutrality and effectiveness with regard to the Finnish Consumer Agency. They also wish to preserve their dignity and feel safe. Some consumers valued easier living.

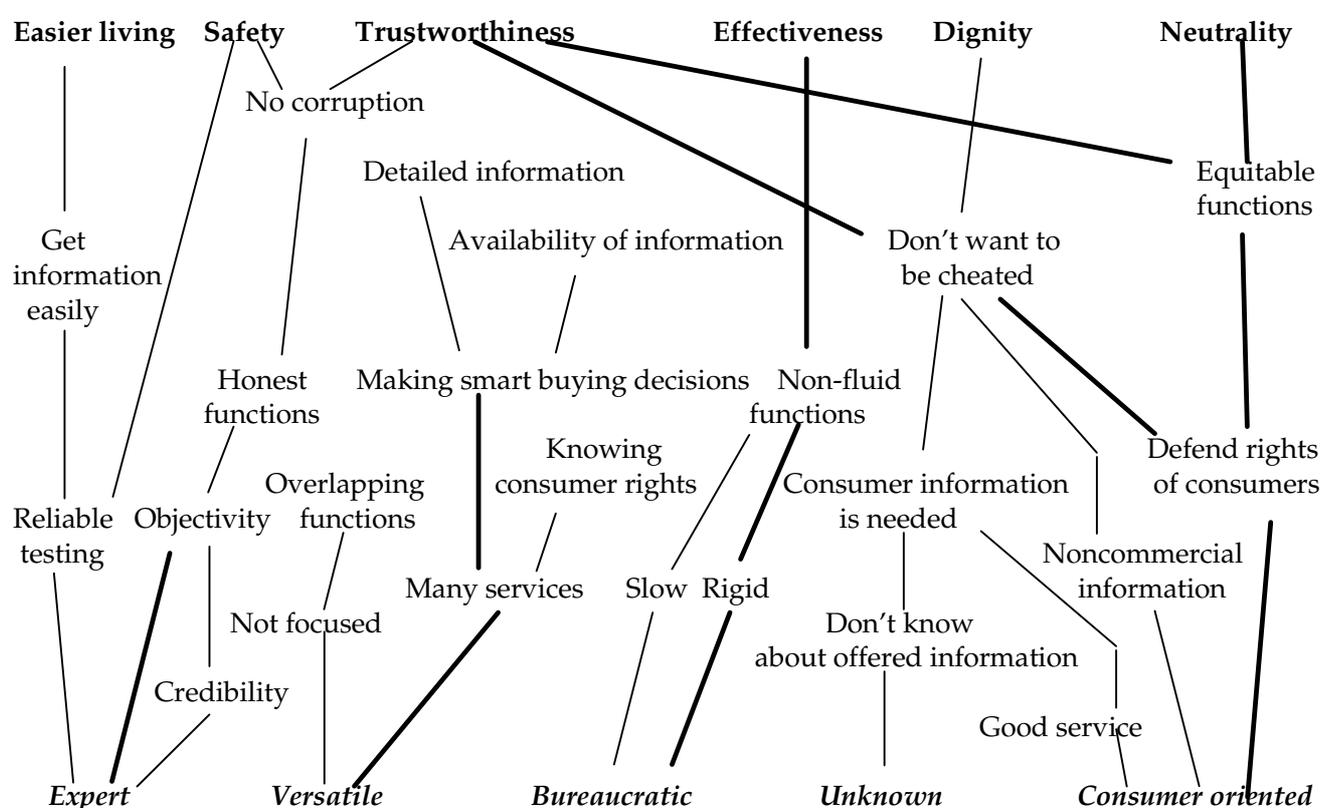


FIGURE 10 Consumers' Attitudes towards the Finnish Consumer Agency

The Finnish Consumer Agency as an *expert* was linked to product tests, objectivity and credibility. Product tests are important to consumers because they value safety and because they don't want to worry about searching of information. Other consequences of the Finnish Consumer Agency as expert are objectivity and credibility. These are connected with honest and reliable functioning. These are important because consumers value incorruptibility on the part of public authorities. This is important because consumers value safety and reliability.

The Finnish Consumer Agency was also described as *versatile*. This is because they provide so many services. Services are important to consumers

because they want to know their rights as consumers and they also want to make very important decisions on a sound information base.

The problem of versatility is that the Finnish Consumer Agency's functions are not focused. The consequence is that the agency's functions sometimes overlap with those of other public authorities and are not as effective as they might be. This is important to consumers because they value effectiveness of functioning.

Consumer orientation is one of the attributes connected with the Finnish Consumer Agency. The first two consequences of this are non-commercial information and defending the rights of consumers. Both are important because consumers don't want to be cheated and they value dignity. Good service is the third consequence of consumer orientation. It is important because consumer information is needed.

The consequences of the attribute *bureaucratic* are the slow and rigid handling of affairs. Both of these are perceived as bad because they impede the fluency of functioning. This was important to consumers because they value effectiveness.

Consumers also described the Finnish Consumer Agency with the attribute *unknown*. They would like to know what kind of information it offers. If they get the right information they feel confident about their decisions and feel that they are not being fooled. These things were important to consumers because they want to maintain their dignity.

4.5.2 Business Managers' Attitudes

According to this study business managers see the Finnish Consumer Agency as reliable, expert, consumer-oriented, bureaucratic, supervisory and unknown. Business managers also value the trustworthiness, neutrality and effectiveness with regard to the Finnish Consumer Agency. The business managers' attributes, consequences and values are shown in figure 11.

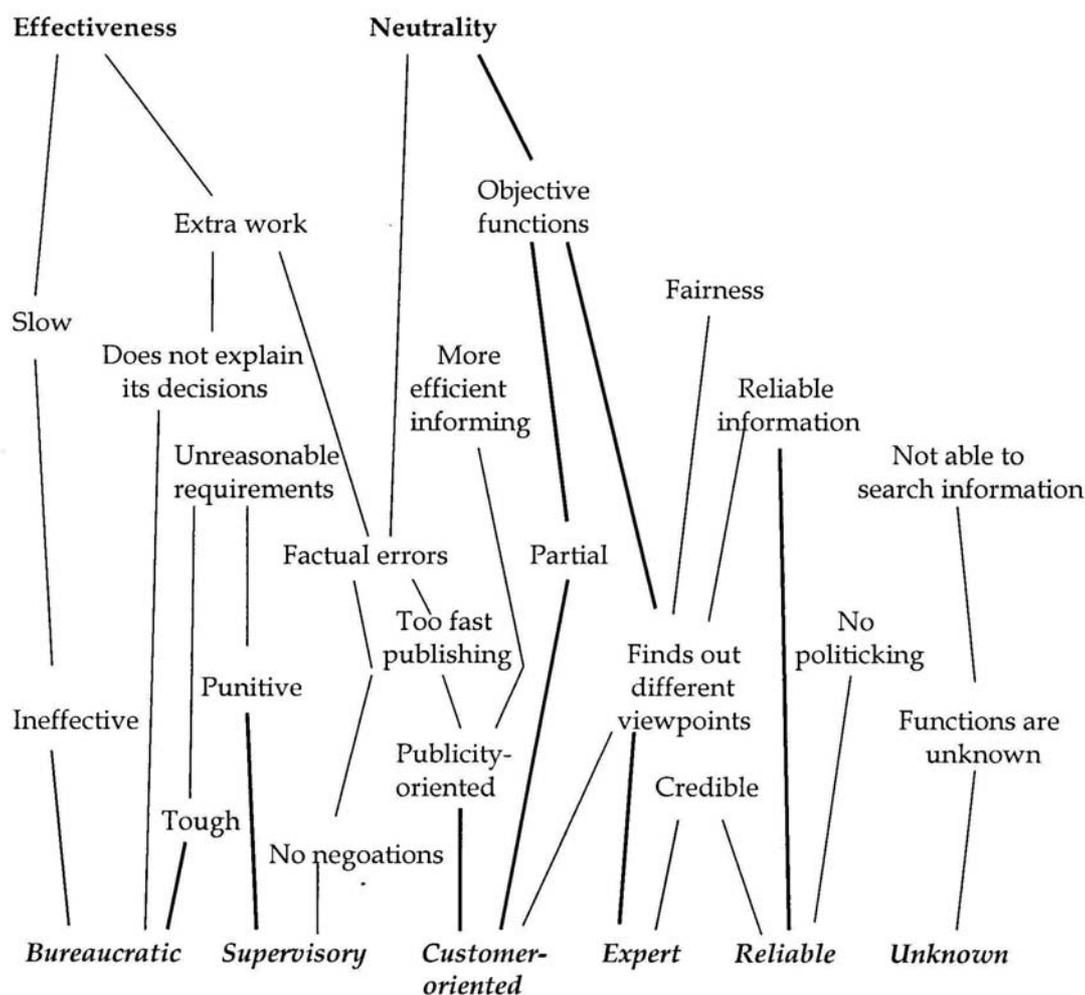


FIGURE 11 Business Managers' Attitudes towards the Finnish Consumer Agency

It was very important to business managers that the Finnish Consumer Agency is *reliable*. Then they can get information which they can count on. This increases the trustworthiness of the Finnish Consumer Agency. On the other hand business managers see it as *consumer-oriented*. This is a positive quality to those business managers who believe it clarifies the viewpoints held by different sides. This, and attribute *expert*, was very important to business managers because it leads to trustworthiness and neutrality. A consumer orientation, however, is not always a positive matter. According to some business managers the Finnish Consumer Agency is too publicity-oriented. Factual errors have happened when it has published things too fast. This means extra work for all parties. Some business managers also believe that the Finnish Consumer Agency is always on the side of consumers.

Business managers also saw the Finnish Consumer Agency as *bureaucratic*. According to them it makes the Finnish Consumer Agency too ineffective and tough. Business managers valued efficiency in its functions. Bureaucracy also means that the Finnish Consumer Agency doesn't explain its decisions and sometimes its requirements seemed unreasonable to business managers. This

problem occurs because the Finnish Consumer Agency supervises many areas of business. According to business managers it doesn't negotiate enough.

In addition the Finnish Consumer Agency was also seen as *unknown*. Business managers reported not having enough information about its functions. If they had this information they would ask and search for information from the Finnish Consumer Agency. Business managers assumed that consumers have the same problem.

5 INVOLVEMENT AND INFORMATION PROCESSING

According to Palm (1994, 201) involvement and information processing are two important components of persuasion. The concept *persuasion* comes from the Latin word “*persuasio*”. Persuasion has been studied for more than 2000 years from a rhetorical perspective and for about 60 years in the field of social psychology. These perspectives have not been confused.

Persuasion is a concept that is understood indirectly or in an intuitive way. In this study persuasion means an attempt to influence the behavior of a receiver. According to Palm (1994, 200) persuasion means often, but not always, influencing the receiver’s attitudes. Persuasion can also be seen as a single step or as a result of a communication process. It is, however, used interchangeably in the literature on *propaganda* (the word *propaganda* comes from the Latin verb “*propago*”). These concepts should not be confused. Both of them try to affect beliefs, attitudes or behavior of a person, but persuasion is meant for their own personal benefit not for someone else’s benefit (see e.g. Johnson-Cartee & Copeland 2004, 3; Lehtonen 1998b, 154; Jowett & O’Donnell 1984, 13-16).

Persuasive communication is very close to Kotler’s view of social marketing. He defines *social marketing* as “the design, implementation, and control of programmes seeking to increase the acceptability of a social idea or practice in a target group(s). It utilizes concepts of market segmentation, consumer research, idea configuration, communication, facilitation, incentives, and exchange theory to maximize target group response” (Kotler 1975, 283).

The purpose of this chapter is to find out what out how involved the citizens are toward public consumer information and also to find out whether the level of involvement has an impact on a citizen’s information processing. This knowledge is also needed to find out what kind of connection exists between involvement, information processing and different communication channels. On the basis of these research results a model of communication strategies is created for use on different levels of involvement.

5.1 Development of Involvement Research

The concept of involvement was originally investigated in the field of social psychology. Involvement is a central concept in Sherif's and Cantril's (1947) *Social Judgment Theory*. The social judgment theory deals with attitude, its organization, change and judgmental processes. According to it an individual's attitude is assumed to be reflected by latitudes of acceptance, rejection and non-commitment (Laaksonen 1994, 2). In social judgment theory, involvement is seen as a relation between the ego and an object. Later Sherif et al. (1965) referred to it as the centrality of beliefs an individual is involved with. (Aldlaigan & Buttle 2001, 232.)

In social psychology, involvement has been researched in the context of persuasive communication. For example, in the field of consumer behavior, involvement has been seen a much broader way and it includes aspects of behavior (Laaksonen 1994, 5). From the viewpoint of this study both persuasiveness and changes in citizens' behavior are important (see research questions).

There was a long period of inactivity in involvement research after the social judgment theory gained ground. Involvement research can be said to really have started during the 1960s, but it received wider attention in the late 1970s. During the 1980s a growing number of instruments measuring involvement were developed. (Laaksonen 1994, 9.) Even now researchers do not agree what involvement really is and how it should be measured.

5.2 Definition of Involvement

In this study *involvement* is defined as the level of personal importance and interest in a specific situation. A person's perceived relevance of the object based on his inherent needs, values and interest (see Zaichkowsky 1985, 342; 1984, 33). This definition was also chosen because there are valid scales to measure the level of involvement. The scale used in this study is called the RPII scale and it is presented later.

The definition was chosen mostly because it covers both affective and cognitive aspects of involvement. According to McGuire (1974) *affective involvement* describes all emotions, moods, feelings evoked by an object. *Cognitive involvement* describes an individual's information processing. In affective involvement motives are value-expressive and in cognitive involvement motives are utilitarian. According to Park & Young (1986) cognitive involvement is "the degree of personal relevance of message contents or issue based on the brand's functional performance" and affective involvement is "the degree of personal relevance of a message base on emotional or aesthetic appeals to one's motive to express an actual or ideal self-

image to the outside world". Both utilitarian and value-expressed motives can occur together but usually one of the motives is evoked, depending on the interaction of the stimulus and the person. (Zaichkowsky 1994, 60.) In case of public consumer information an example of an affective criterion could be friendliness on the part of a consumer advisor, and an example of a cognitive criterion could be the readability of brochures put out by the Finnish Consumer Agency.

Definitions of involvement vary widely. Laaksonen (1994, 26) have classified the definitions of involvement into three groups: cognitively-based, individual-state, and response-based. In the cognitive-based definitions the level of abstraction is the highest, and in the response-based definitions the level of abstraction is lowest.

The *cognitive-based* definition has been chosen for this study (see Laaksonen 1994, 27). The focal theme in this and many other cognitive-based definitions is perceived personal relevance (see Engel & Blackwell 1982, 273; Slama & Tashchian 1985, 73; Peter & Olson 1987, 127-8). The *individual-state* approach describes involvement as an individual's internal state of mind. Common to all these various definitions is the motivational state of an individual. For example, according to Mittal (1982, 64-65) involvement is "a motivational state of mind of a person with regard to an object or activity". He (1989) defines purchase decision involvement as "the extent of interest and concern that a consumer brings to bear on a purchase decision task. It reveals itself as the level of interest in that object of activity". There are not many differences between Mittal's and Zaichkowsky's definitions. Zaichkowsky emphasizes relevance, needs, values and interests, and Mittal (1989) stresses interest and concern. Interest is mentioned in both definitions. Mittal's concern dimension can be said to comprise the relevance, needs and values expressed by Zaichkowsky. The key difference is that Mittal's PIS Scale has been specifically developed to measure purchase decision involvement.

The general idea behind the *response-based* definitions is that the level of involvement changes after information processing (Laaksonen 1994, 37-38, 53). From the viewpoint of this study the impact of this kind of communication on the level of involvement is also very important.

Citizens' level of involvement can be seen as a continuum. In a case of *low involvement* a person does not process much information because the product choice is unimportant (see e.g. Aldlaigan & Buttle 2001, 233; Palm 1994). In a low level of involvement situation consumers make routine types of purchasing decisions (see Chang & Hsieh 1997, 244) because, for example, the choice of a toothbrush is unimportant and a person lacks the motivation to consider alternatives. In a case of *high involvement* citizens give more careful consideration to information that is relevant to the particular decision and the decision process is more extended. (see e.g. Krugman 1965, 349-356.) For example, the purchase of a house is highly meaningful to many citizens.

According to Krugman's (1965) classical model of television advertising, low-involvement learning, and the further work of Ray and colleagues (1973)

the purchasing decision process differs in high and low involvement situations (Batra et al. 1996, 155-156). The high-involvement hierarchy resembles the DAGMAR hierarchy but in the low-involvement hierarchy attitude formation is more diverse (see figure 12).

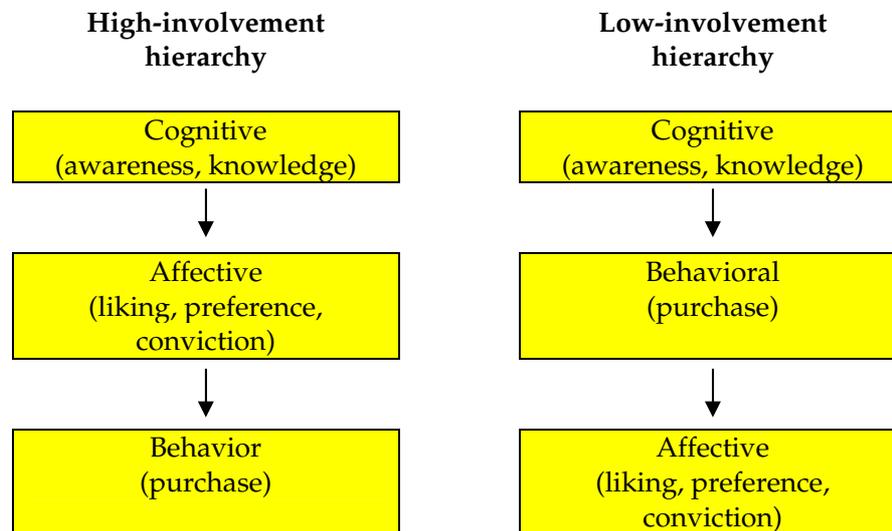


FIGURE 12 Involvement and Hierarchy Models

In the high-involvement hierarchy the citizen has, for example, become aware of the existence of public consumer information through previous experience, newspaper articles, and the influence of friends. In this kind of situation the decision-making process happens after the information search process. The citizen's attitudes and buying decisions are made after hard consideration. However, in the case of a low-involvement hierarchy, the behavior occurs before strong attitudes have developed. The citizen makes decisions out of habit because he/she has no motivation to consider alternatives (see e.g. Solomon 1996, 147).

5.3 Involvement, Problem Recognition and Constraint Recognition

J. Grunig and Childers (1988) isolated two types of involvement: *internal* (ego involvement³) and *external* (situational connections). Both of these generate active communication behavior, although individuals may not perceive both types on involvement in all situations. (Grunig & Repper 1992, 136-137.)

³ Ego-involvement, sometimes termed enduring involvement, is defined as all the objects of thought that define a person's status or give him some relative role in relation to other (see e.g. Solomon 1996, 149).

According to Houston and Rothschild (1978), together external (S) and internal (O) elicit a third type of involvement which is response-oriented (R). Thus the involvement paradigm is similar to the S-O-R paradigm in learning theory where S, O, and R represent stimulus, organism, and response. (Aldlaigan & Buttle 2001, 232.)

Most marketing and communication researchers have used the concept of involvement separately from problem recognition and constraint recognition. J. Grunig's research, however, shows that level of involvement, problem recognition and constraint recognition together explain communication behavior better than any one of these concepts alone. (Grunig & Repper 1992, 137.)

J. Grunig defines involvement as an individual's cognitive perception of a situation: it is person's perception that he or she has a connection with a situation. According to him *constraint recognition* discourages communication behavior: people don't communicate about problems or issues about which they believe that they can do little or about behaviors they don't believe they have the personal efficacy to execute (Grunig & Hunt 1984, 151-152). The concept of *problem recognition* is tied to the concept of situation. Grunig defined problem recognition as the perception that something is lacking in a situation (Grunig & Repper 1992, 135). People seek information and think when they recognize an indeterminate or problematic situation. According to Grunig (1989a) problems may arise from the situation, environment, or social system. They may arise also internally from curiosity or lack of understanding (Grunig & Childers 1988, 12-15). (Grunig & Repper 1992, 135.)

Level of involvement, problem recognition and constraint recognition are variables which can be used to identify and segment publics. They predict that active communication behavior more often results in effects of communication – cognitions, attitudes, individual and collective behaviors – than does passive communication behavior. Together they predict when people will communicate. (Grunig & Repper 1992, 137.)

Problem recognition, constraint recognition and level of involvement are factors that move latent publics to become communication active publics. Grunig tested his theory and found four types of (environmental) publics:

1. All-issue Publics are active on all issues.
 2. Apathetic Publics are inattentive and inactive on all issues.
 3. Single-Issue Publics are active on one or a limited number of issues that concern only a small part of the population.
 4. Hot-Issue Publics are active after media expose almost everyone and the issue becomes the topic of widespread social conversation.
- (Grunig & Repper 1992, 139; Cutlib et al. 1999, 268-269.)

In this study consumers and business managers are divided into four groups: active public, interested public, careless public and denier public. One subgroup of the *active public* categories are those who have "always been active". They have been more or less active during the years, but always active

in a way or another. Usually they say their parents have been active in some domains of life (work, state, civil society or private life). Another subgroup has turned active suddenly. They have started to act when they recognized that something was badly wrong in society or in their private life. This group is active in all issues, just like the all-issue public in Grunig's classification. In addition in this study, these citizens usually have very strong opinions and their attitude towards the Finnish Consumer Agency and public consumer information is usually, but not always very positive.

"I have always been active." (C)

"My father was active in politics and mother encouraged me to be an active member in the church, student organization, trade organization etc. It is impossible to me not to be involved in decisions connected to my life. I think I got it at my mother's breast!" (B)

"I have always thought economically. My parents teach me to do so. I always consider before I buy anything." (C)

"We had big problems after we bought our house. Now you can ask me anything and I will know the answer better than any public servant!" (C)

The second group, the *interested public*, are interested in all consumer information but they are not very motivated to be more active. Like Grunig's single issue publics these citizens are active only in one or two matters but not across the board. In addition, their attitude towards consumer information can be either neutral or positive.

"I'm very interested in these kinds of things. I just don't have time." (B)

"My brother died after food poisoning. Since then I have been very interested in food production and food hygiene." (C)

"My major interest is animal protection. I would like to find a job connected with it." (C)

Passive publics can be divided into "careless publics" and "deniers". *Careless publics* just don't care. Careless publics, just like Grunig's hot-issue publics, are active only after the issue becomes the topic of widespread social conversation. In addition, their attitude is more neutral than negative but their level of knowledge is usually limited. They typically don't believe their actions have any impact on society. This is why they are not interested in environmental matters etc.

"Why bother?" (C)

"I don't vote, I don't recycle, I don't... Well, there is no impact." (B)

"I don't know. I don't care." (C)

Deniers resemble Grunig's apathetic publics. They are inactive in all issues. In addition, according to this study, they usually have learned this at home or have been more active but become deniers after they have in some way been mistreated by the public authorities. The attitude of this group is negative.

"My mother always said: Let the wise man decide." (B)

"After going bankrupt I decided I'm not involved in these things anymore". (C)

According to Palm (1994, 111) problem recognition is related to issue involvement, constraint recognition is related to decision involvement, level of involvement is related to position involvement. Palm (1994, 111) found seven different combinations. These are shown in the following table and described more detailed in chapter 5.4.

TABLE 7 Level of Involvement, Problem Recognition and Constraint Recognition (Palm 1994, 111)

Problem recognition	Constraint recognition	Level of involvement	Public
High	Low	High	Active public
High	High	High	Active or waiting public
Low	Low	High	Active routine action public
High	Low	Low	Waiting or active public
High	High	Low	Latent public/waiting public
Low	Low	Low	Without mental impression/latent public
Low	High	Low	Without mental impression

5.4 Issue, Decision and Position Involvement

Palm (1994, 201) summarized the debate of involvement into three concepts: position involvement, issue involvement and decision involvement. *Position involvement* occurs if a citizen is actively interested in some concrete target or some conflicting social issue. A citizen can also be position-involved if he has a clear opinion about some question. In case of *decision involvement* a citizen has to make an important decision, for example about what car to buy or who to vote for. A highly decision-involved person is willing to search for and compare information to make the final decision. In case of *issue involvement* a citizen is interested for example about environmental matters. This means that a highly issue-involved citizen is willing to process all the information connected with the matter he is interested in. (see also Lehtonen 2002b, 83.)

Let's consider coffee in relation to all three involvements. Position involvement occurs, for example, when a citizen has a negative attitude towards using child labor in coffee production. He is interested in information related to the matter and, for example, only wants to buy a coffee with the Fair-trade label. Issue involvement occurs, for example, when a citizen is interested in his own health. He is probably not interested in coffee as a product but he is interested in information about the impacts of coffee on health. Decision involvement occurs for example when a citizen notices he needs a new coffee maker. After noticing this need, he searches for test results from the web-pages of the Finnish Consumer Agency or the Consumer Magazine, and looks for special offer ads. At other times he is not interested in information about coffee makers.

In the case of public consumer information citizens can be involved in consumer matters in general (position involvement). They may not be position-involved but in spite of that are involved in certain issues (like product safety). Then the question is one of issue involvement. Decision involvement occurs when a situation changes and information is needed (e.g. need for new tires for a car).

Figure 13 shows two other examples of different involvement situations. The figure includes not only issue and decision involvement but also the level of involvement.

		Issue involvement	
		High	Low
		Buying a car	Buying an ice-cream
Decision involvement	High	Searching for test results from car magazines Visiting car sales companies	Searching for milk-free products from supermarket
	Low	Reading ads	Seeing ads Visiting a previously known ice-cream cafe

FIGURE 13 The Connection Between Issue and Decision Involvement

What happens if involvement, attitudes and action are included in the same model. Palm's (1994, 203) decision model takes all of these aspects in account. His decision model is based on four variables:

1. Position involvement: high/low.
2. Decision involvement: high/low.
3. Initial attitude of the target group to the behavior involved: positive or negative.
4. The characteristics of the aim: action /no action.

According to Palm (1994, 204) it is important, first, to know the target group's or person's cognitive condition. The matrix shown in figure 14 contains 16 initial cognitive conditions of the target group in case of public information campaigns⁴. According to Palm (ibid. 187-195) eleven of them are relevant and realistic (the other five are shown in figure 14 with a white background). Two of the conditions are ideal (number 5 and 9) and two (number 6 and 10) are temporary goals.

⁴ Other campaigns are commercial.

		Target Group's Attitude				
		Positive		Negative		
		Position Involvement				
		High	Low	Low	High	
Characteristics of the aim	Action	High	1	2	3	4
		Low	5 Ideal 1	6	7	8
	No action	High	9 Ideal 2	10	11	12
		Low	13	14	15	16
		Decision Involvement				

FIGURE 14 Palm's Decision Model

When the target group's cognitive condition is known, a path should be chosen, and then, finally, an appropriate message strategy. Message strategies are the same whether the aim is to trigger or prevent action. However, they do not have the same function when the aim is to trigger or to prevent action. The basic message strategies are how-information, what-information and why-information. (Palm 1994, 204.)

Figure 13 shows a practical example of buying an environmentally friendly washing machine. In this case a citizen is action-oriented because his old washing machine is broken and he needs to buy a new one. His decision involvement is high. However, he is not interested in environmental issues but his wife values those things highly. In such cases he should be given information that would lead him to adopt a more positive attitude towards environmentally friendly products. According to Palm (1994, 189) he should receive answers to the question why he should buy an environmentally friendly product. In that way he will move from condition number 3 to condition number 6. If his position involvement also increases then he will be in condition 5, which is ideal condition.

				Target Group's Attitude			
				Positive		Negative	
				Position Involvement			
		High	Low	Low	High		
Characteristics of the aim	Action	High	1	2	3	4	
		Low	5	6	7	8	
	Decision Involvement	High	9	10	11	12	
		Low	13	14	15	16	

Arrows in the diagram indicate transitions: a dashed arrow from cell 1 to cell 5, a solid arrow from cell 2 to cell 6, and a solid arrow from cell 3 to cell 7.

FIGURE 15 An Example of Decision Making in Case of Public Consumer Information

Palm's decision model can be used also in the case of public consumer information. An example of condition 13 would be where the Finnish Consumer Agency has made a product test according to which some toys are dangerous to children. In this case it should give how-information and tell citizens how not to act. In this case not to buy these dangerous toys before they are taken of the market.

5.5 Measuring the Level of Involvement

The many conceptualizations of involvement have led to some confusion about the best way to measure the concept. Zaichkowsky's PII and RPII scales are two widely used methods (see e.g. Solomon 1996, 149-150) of which the latter is used in this study. There are also many other scales that have been developed to measure involvement. For example, the Consumer Involvement Profile (CIP) scale (Laurent and Kapferer 1985) and Purchase-decision Involvement (PIS) scale (Mittal 1989) focus on individual-object involvement (see appendix 7 and 8). Both scales are not very relevant from the viewpoint of this study because they focus on a specific purchase or decision making situation. Zaichkowsky's scales are more common and they are compatible with definition of involvement used in this study.

5.5.1 The PII scale

Zaichkowsky (1985) constructed a context-free scale called the Personal Involvement Inventory (PII), which measures the motivational state of involvement (see table 8). Items in the PII are related to three assumed areas that affect a person's level of involvement (see e.g. Aldlaigan & Buttle 2001, 233):

1. Personal: inherent interests, values, or need that motivates the person toward the object.
2. Physical: characteristics of an object that cause differentiation and increase interest.
3. Situational: something that temporarily increases the relevance of, or interest toward, the object.

The appeal of the 20-item PII lay in its simple structure (20 pairs of adjectives, scored on a semantic differential basis) and the use of a single score to represent the degree of involvement, so that targets of research can be easily compared on a continuum. The scale has been widely used (Martin 1998, 9). According Martin and to Zaichkowsky's own research the reliability (Cronbach alpha scores of 0.97 are not unusual) and validity of the scale is very high.

TABLE 8 Personal Involvement Inventory (PII) Scale (Zaichkowsky 1985)

To me (object to be judged) is:							
Important	()	()	()	()	()	()	Unimportant*
Of no concern to me	()	()	()	()	()	()	Of concern to me
Irrelevant	()	()	()	()	()	()	Relevant
Means a lot to me	()	()	()	()	()	()	Means nothing to me*
Useless	()	()	()	()	()	()	Useful
Valuable	()	()	()	()	()	()	Worthless*
Trivial	()	()	()	()	()	()	Fundamental
Beneficial	()	()	()	()	()	()	Not beneficial*
Matters to me	()	()	()	()	()	()	Does not matter*
Uninterested	()	()	()	()	()	()	Interested
Significant	()	()	()	()	()	()	Insignificant
Vital	()	()	()	()	()	()	Superfluous*
Boring	()	()	()	()	()	()	Interesting
Unexciting	()	()	()	()	()	()	Exciting
Appealing	()	()	()	()	()	()	Unappealing
Mundane	()	()	()	()	()	()	Fascinating
Essential	()	()	()	()	()	()	Nonessential*
Undesirable	()	()	()	()	()	()	Desirable
Wanted	()	()	()	()	()	()	Unwanted*
Not needed	()	()	()	()	()	()	Needed
*indicates item is reverse scored							

Criticism of the PII arose on two counts. Park and McClung (1986) argued that some scale items were not applicable and that the scale was too long for repeated testing. Vaughn (1986) and McQuarrie and Munsen (1987) found the scale incapable of embracing the various types of involvement conceptualized by some researchers. In addition to these views that the inventory was too simple and too long, McQuarrie and Munsen (1987) were concerned with the potential attitudinal contamination of the PII: the required independence of involvement and attitudinal measures was not clear cut in the case of the PII. (Foxall & Pallister 1998, 181.)

5.5.2 The RPII Scale

Zaichkowsky's subsequent revision consists of ten items, the Revised Personal Involvement Inventory (RPII; see table 9). Several items which had invited the charge of attitudinal contamination in the first version were omitted: e.g. beneficial - not beneficial; undesirable - desirable.

TABLE 9 Revised Personal Involvement Inventory (RPII) Scale (Zaichkowsky 1994, 70)

To me (object to be judged) is:								
Important	()	()	()	()	()	()	()	Unimportant*
Boring	()	()	()	()	()	()	()	Interesting
Relevant	()	()	()	()	()	()	()	Irrelevant*
Exciting	()	()	()	()	()	()	()	Unexciting*
Means nothing	()	()	()	()	()	()	()	Means a lot to me
Appealing	()	()	()	()	()	()	()	Unappealing*
Fascinating	()	()	()	()	()	()	()	Mundane*
Worthless	()	()	()	()	()	()	()	Valuable
Involving	()	()	()	()	()	()	()	Uninvolving*
Not needed	()	()	()	()	()	()	()	Needed

*indicates item is reverse scored

The RPII scale was chosen for this study because it measures both emotions and thinking. As discussed earlier, affective (emotions) and cognitive (thinking) involvement can occur at the same time. According to Zaichkowsky (1994, 62) *interesting*, *appealing*, *fascinating*, *exciting* and *involving* are items based on relevant emotions. They represent half of the scale. The other five items are more rational and cognitive in nature: *important*, *relevant*, *valuable*, *means a lot me*, and *needed*. The RPII scale might be divided into two subscales representing a cognitive aspect and an affective aspect.

The revised and reduced scale, having apparently overcome the criticisms of its detractors, has been used in a large number of additional studies whose authors expressed satisfaction with the reliability and predictive validity of the new scale and its capacity to discriminate across products and situations. However Foxall's and Palliser's (1998, 191) recent evaluation of the validity and reliability of the scale in the context of financial services suggested that there

might be two dimensions, a dominant, rational one and a secondary emotional one.

5.6 Public Consumer Information and the Level of Position Involvement

5.6.1 The Level of Involvement

To achieve the objectives of this study, the nature of involvement in case of public consumer information was explored using Zaichkowsky's RPII scale. Some adjustments to the scale were made to make it relevant to the context (the scale was 5-tailed and translated into Finnish). Two different groups were studied: consumers and business managers.

Consumers and business managers filled out the RPII scale during the interviews. Figure 16 shows the means for both groups. These findings provide some clues about which constructs and items are more related to the public consumer information context.

According to figure 16 public consumer information is important, needed and relevant to consumers and business managers. Two items received relatively low scores across consumers and business managers. These items include fascinating/mundane and exciting/unexciting. According to the interviews public consumer information is more expected to be boring and difficult to read than to be exciting.

"Their (=public organizations) brochures are always so boring. So official." (C)

"This is funny. Of course it (=information from the Finnish Consumer Agency) is needed. But exciting. Never. I think the language in brochures of public organizations are always so difficult." (C)

"Every item of information is important. But how on earth do I find the time to read every paper I got. It is hard enough to fulfill the obligations of employers." (B)

According to figure 16 the more rational and cognitive items appear to be more relevant than the items related to emotions. This is contrary to Zaichkowsky's results (see e.g. Zaichkowsky 1994, 66); however Foxall's and Pallister's (1998) recent evaluation also suggested that the dominant dimension is rational and the secondary factor be emotional. Their context was financial services.

Consumers (mean=3,6) are a slightly more involved in public consumer information than business managers (mean=3,36). Figure 16 shows that for them consumer information is more needed, relevant and involving.

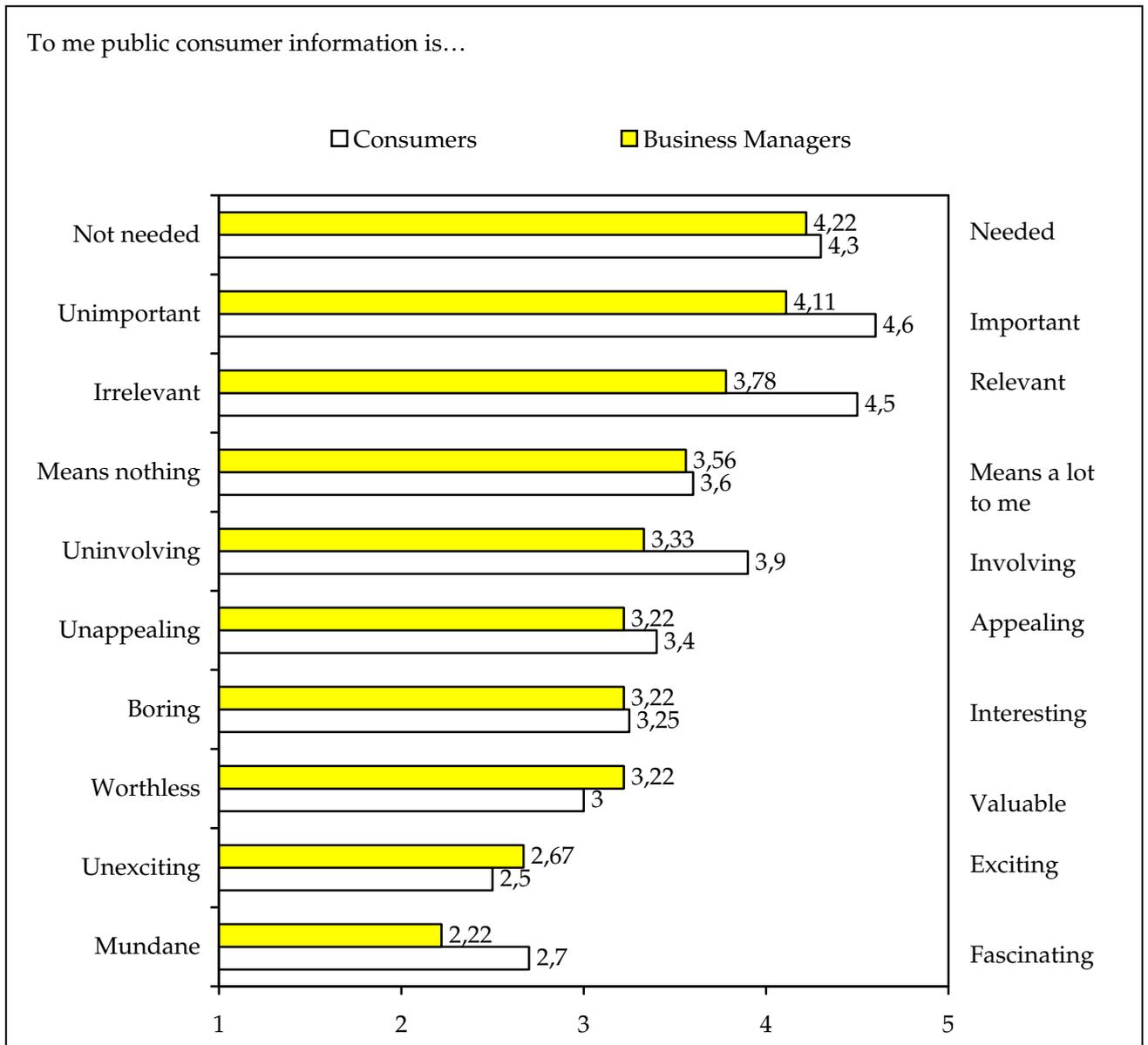


FIGURE 16 Involvement of Business Managers (N=30; mean=3,36) and Consumers (N=49; mean=3,6)

Zaichkowsky's research results are used also in this study as a guide in classifying the interviewees' involvement as high or low. Zaichkowsky (1985) argues that her research results can be used as a guide for classifying high and low involvement in the RPII measure. She suggests that scores from 20 to 69 indicate low involvement, scores 70 to 110 medium, and scores 111 to 140 high. The PII score is computed as follows: scores from 1.00×20 to 3.45×20 (20 to 69) show low involvement, scores from 3.5×20 to less 5.5×20 (70 to 110) show medium involvement, and scores from 5.55×20 to 7.0×20 (111 to 140) high involvement. The original PII scale mean is 89,55.

Also in this study Zaichkowsky's research results are used as a guide for classifying high and low involvement. In this study a 5-tailed semantic

differential scale was used instead of a 7-tailed scale. For this reason the PII score was computed as follows: for low involvement, scores from 1×20 to less $2,5 \times 1,4 \times 20$ (20 to 69); for medium involvement scores from $2,5 \times 1,4 \times 20$ to less $3,95 \times 1,4 \times 20$ (70-110); and for high involvement scores from $3,95 \times 1,4 \times 20$ to $5 \times 1,4 \times 20$ (111-140). A summary of the RPII levels is given in table 10.

The level of involvement is high in both groups for the items important and needed. The involvement level of the item relevant is high among consumers. In case of the item fascinating the level of involvement is low for business managers. The involvement level is medium for the other items. The overall mean for consumers is 100,8 and for business managers 94,08.

TABLE 10 Summary of the RPII

Consumers				Business Managers			
PII Items	N	Overall mean	Involvement Level	PII Items	N	Overall Mean	Involvement Level
Important	49	128,8	High	Important	30	115,08	High
Interesting	49	91	Medium	Interesting	30	90,16	Medium
Relevant	49	126	High	Relevant	30	105,84	Medium
Exciting	49	70	Medium	Exciting	30	74,76	Medium
Means a lot to me	49	100,8	Medium	Means a lot to me	30	99,68	Medium
Appealing	49	95,2	Medium	Appealing	30	90,16	Medium
Fascinating	49	75,6	Medium	Fascinating	30	62,16	Low
Valuable	49	84	Medium	Valuable	30	90,16	Medium
Involving	49	109,2	Medium	Involving	30	93,24	Medium
Needed	49	120,4	High	Needed	30	118,16	High

According to table 11 the level of involvement is low among 20 % of both consumers and business managers. The level of involvement is medium for slightly more than half of the consumers. The involvement level is high for 27 % of consumers. In case of business managers the level of involvement is medium for 37 % and high for 43 %.

TABLE 11 Summary of the Level of Involvement

Level of involvement	Consumers		Business Managers	
	F	%	F	%
High involvement	13	27	13	43
Medium involvement	26	53	11	37
Low involvement	10	20	6	20
Total	49	100	30	100

Most of the highly involved consumers were those who had ordered the Consumer Magazine or who had been in contact with consumer advisors or the Finnish Consumer Agency. In case of medium involvement consumers only a part of consumers had ordered the Consumer Magazine. None of those who were classified as low involvement consumers had ordered the magazine. None of them had been in direct contact with consumer advisors or other part of the consumer administration.

A third of the interviewed business managers had been in contact with the consumer administration. None of them was classified as low involved. About half of the highly involved and about half of the medium involved had in some way been in contact with the consumer administration.

5.6.2 Communication Channels and Level of Involvement

Public organizations have many communication channels to choose from, according to the need of their stakeholder groups. Such channels are, for example, newsletters, briefings, and other discussions, customer services, Internet and e-mail, brochures and other publications, campaigns and fairs and exhibitions. Communication channels can be direct (like telephone conversations) or indirect (like television). Sending a letter or a brochure to citizens is usually the most effective way to reach them, but the news media can spread information very fast and widely. According to Palm & Sandberg (2004, 23), cost-effectiveness is higher in case of those communication channels that require citizens own activity (e.g. telephone conversations, meetings and interactive web-pages) than in those where level of interactivity is low. I, however, would like to point out that if communication of public organizations is based only on these kinds of need-oriented communication channels, it increases the responsibility of citizens and decreases the responsibility of public organizations. Is a sign of responsabilization.

According to the memo from the Prime Minister Office (Valtioneuvoston kanslia 2002), the Internet is one way to improve the availability of public information. It is very important that citizens can trust the information on the www pages of public organizations. According to the same memo advertising is acceptable if it is the only way to contact citizens who would otherwise be difficult to reach. Public organizations can't sponsor other organizations but they can co-operate in various matters.

According to this study consumers report mailed letters and brochures the best way to obtain public consumer information. Business managers did not agree, but all of them expressed the hope that brochures are mailed in an envelope as otherwise they are likely not to be noticed among advertising mail. They also wanted that the text to be easy to understand and that it should be easy to find the right person or contact number who would be able to give more information.

"If there is the name of an authority (in an envelope), I will definitely open it." (C)

"The best way is definitely to send a letter to me." (C)

"Brochures get mix up with advertising mail." (C)

Citizens understand that it is very expensive for the Finnish Consumer Agency to post letters and brochures to all. Sometimes, however, it is very important to get the message to every one. Hence the mass media is a very important channel. The citizens interviewed specially valued television and newspapers, but were worried about people who don't follow current issues. Many consumers considered themselves too passive in a role of both searcher and receiver of information.

"It is too expensive to post material to everybody. It is free to inform via the media and it covers a lot of people." (C)

"I get a lot of information from the mass media." (B)

"It must be enough if the consumer ombudsman is in television. It would be very weird to get a letter from the consumer ombudsman if I haven't been in contact with him." (C)

"Nobody is aware of all the information disseminated by the media. I get the information if it concerns our line of business. If not through the media then colleagues tell me about it." (B)

"I don't follow consumer matters very carefully. Unfortunately they (=the Finnish Consumer Agency and the Consumer Ombudsman) have only negative things to say about our line of business. My company hasn't but many others have been in trouble with them and somehow I hear about those matters." (B)

In the first two consumer focus group interviews television programs were discussed at length. Programs relating to consumer matters are too provocative, which is why many of the interviewees didn't watch such programs, even if they were otherwise interested in them. In the other three group discussions this issue didn't occur and the programs were regarded in a positive way. They did, however, point out that it is not good to be too paternalist towards consumers.

"Those programs use the style of Hannu Karpo. I hate it. There is always a big bad insurance company or something else and an innocent citizen." (C)

"There should be more consumer matters on television." (C)

"I have obtained information from newspapers. The consumer ombudsman is often on television and he is also interviewed often on the radio." (C)

Some consumers and business managers subscribed the Consumer and the Consumer Protection magazines. To them they were important but to all the others they were not a very significant source of information. In addition some of these business managers who were familiar with the Consumer Protection magazine saw it as boring. The Consumer magazine had been ordered for a couple of business managers for either home or office.

Citizens' feelings about the telephone as a communication channel were discussed earlier. It seems that it is not always easy to find the right number and get through. Those who have earlier been in contact with consumer advisors will find it easier to call or email next time. In the case of business managers the first contact also often comes from consumer advisors or other parts of the consumer administration. Usually this means trouble from the viewpoint of a company.

Both consumers and business managers praised the web-pages of the Finnish Consumer Agency. This was especially because of the amount of information on many topics and the contact numbers of consumer advisors are given. Citizens, however, seemed to think people are not aware of the web-

pages. They wanted the internet address to be mentioned, for example, in every newspaper story and television program on consumer matters.

"People don't go to the web-pages of the Consumer Agency if you haven't even heard of it."

(C)

"The pages are good. There is a lot of information." (B)

"There should be a search engine." (B)

"All decisions and recommendations should be available. They should also be able to search in some logical way. Now they are in chronological order from the year x and there isn't any kind of classification." (B)

"The pages are quite typical. A little bit boring but very informative." (C)

"There is a lot of information! All the test results should be there."(C)

"All the articles of the Consumer Magazine should be on the Internet. This information should be available to all not only to subscribers." (B)

"There should be a possibility to give feedback (=in the web-pages of the Finnish Consumer Agency)."(B)

"Citizen must be able to access information. It is the most important skill in the modern world."(C)

Some of the most active consumers and business managers had sent an email to the consumer advisors. They reported very positive experiences. They had got an answer and usually very quickly. According to them this is the opposite of the most of public organizations. The best thing about email was that both parties have time to think over what to write. It is also very important to be able to return to the message.

"I tried it once and got an email faster than I ever dreamed."(C)

"It is a very good communication channel. I get personal service and I don't have to queue in a phone line." (C)

"If I call (to the authority) and get an answer I can't prove what has been told to me. If I send an email I can show it later." (C)

Consumers had a couple of ideas for improving communication channels. They hoped that they would be able to get all the consumer information from the same place or only public authority. They also wanted help and search information to be available e.g. from information desks located in a central place. In addition, most of the persons interviewed would like private companies to deliver brochures put out by the consumer administration or other neutral sources.

"They (=the whole consumer administration) should be under the same roof."(C)

"Why there isn't the one and the same place to deal with those matters. It is so annoying because somebody asks to contact the Revenue Office, the other says call the bank, and the third one says contact somebody else." (C)

"There should be one and only one place to handle these kinds of things."(C)

"They (=consumer advisors) should be where people are. They should not just stay in their office. There should be information desks or something else located centrally where people are." (C)

Both consumer and business managers would like to see a national access number to reach consumer advisors. It should be also widely advertised. As said earlier, it is sometimes difficult to find the contact information to one's own local consumer advisor. Nobody wants to queue when they call to consumer advisors or the Finnish Consumer Agency.

"It was difficult to find the number of our consumer advisor. Luckily I found it. Why is there no national customer service number?"(C)

"I first called the consumer advisor of the city of Kuopio. Then I was told that we have our own advisor in our municipality. I didn't have any idea."(C)

"This system is confused. I believe people contact to it (=The Finnish Consumer Agency) instead of their own consumer advisor. People should know they should contact the consumer advisor."(C)

"The Finnish Consumer Agency exchange is often overloaded."(C)

I need to point out that especially in the case of business managers the communication has in many cases been initiated by the public authority. This means that business managers are always not so willing to communicate with consumer advisors, the consumer ombudsman etc. but they have to. This is because the Finnish Consumer Agency and the Consumer Ombudsman for example control product safety and supervise advertising to protect consumer rights. As a couple of business managers said, "control is good as far as it does not have an effect on our business". Next I will shortly discuss the ethical problems which seem to be associated with situations where the Finnish Consumer Agency controls a specific field of business.

5.6.3 Ethics of Communication

Ethical theories have had a significant impact on business ethics and especially on the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR). Ethics can also be measured by different quantitative instruments (the most well-known of them are Rokeach's (1973) terminal and instrumental value scale, and Reidenbach & Robin's (1990) Multidimensional Ethics Scale). It wasn't originally planned to consider the ethics of the Finnish Consumer Agency's communication in this study, but it has been included because two stakeholder groups (business managers and representative organizations of entrepreneurs) in particular mentioned it many times in their interviews.

According to this study the Finnish Consumer Agency uses Grunig's and Hunt's (1984) public information model. It uses the media in residence to disseminate objective information but at the same time the information is favorable to itself. According to the results of this study the Finnish Consumer Agency rather should use Grunig's and Hunt's (1984) two-way symmetrical model. Many researchers think it is a more ethical as well as better way to communicate. I would like to point out that in a long run it would be also more efficient way to communicate. Two-way communication would also help to build understanding and better relations with different stakeholder groups.

J. Grunig's (2000) recent dimensions can be used also in the case of the Finnish Consumer Agency. The most active citizens, especially, expressed the hope that it would use a symmetrical, two-way communication strategy. They would like more interpersonal contacts, and business managers would like a more open consumer information process.

"Meetings are a good channel." (B)

"We do have very good relations with them." (B)

"Well, I could say that co-operation has always been very successful."(B)

This study found that public consumer information was thought to be ethical. The Finnish Consumer Agency (and especially the Consumer

Ombudsman⁵) was, however, criticized a lot for using the media to get its messages to consumers. It should negotiate with organizations first. This would also be a more ethical way. The wrong information might harm some organization's reputation. Corrections can be made but the damage has already been done in such cases. (see Hoeken & Renkema 1998, 58-59.)

"We should get information before an ad is prohibited and this information is published. If something happens we should have time to sort things out rather than answer the calls of customers and journalists." (B)

"They suddenly pay attention to our business from time to time. This doesn't increase our respect for them." (B)

"The worst thing is that they threatening us with negative publicity." (B)

Many business managers and also the representative organizations of entrepreneurs reported that they would like to have more cooperation. Some of the persons interviewed suspected that the Finnish Consumer Agency sees them as an opponent, who only has bad intentions and who can't be trusted. The interviewees felt that the Finnish Consumer Agency should be more customer-oriented and not just seek to punish the entrepreneurs. The role of the Consumer Agency should be co-operative, not watchful.

"It is good that we have meetings. I could say we are opponents but they are good channel through which to talk about things and also to make them see our view". (B)

"We just get a letter and we have to a short time to act on their demands. Sometimes it is difficult. For example when it is July and here is nobody here." (B)

"The situation is problematic. We can't always tell them. It is just like it is with our competitors."(B)

"How they can even imagine us being open if our coffee table conversations with them end up in their publication." (B)

5.7 Issue Involvement in Public Consumer Information

5.7.1 Issue Involvement of Consumers

Consumers reported that they would like to receive more public consumer information. They think the Finnish Consumer Agency should give out more information. They want this because they consider the public consumer information much more reliable than the information put out by private companies.

"I can't trust companies. Their purpose is to increase sales."

"I really can't trust their (=private companies) information at all. They use numbers in their tables in a way that makes their product look cheaper than their competitors'. Consumers should be very attentive to avoid being misled."(C)

⁵ The Consumer Ombudsman was mentioned often in interviews and especially in the case of business managers. He was said to be too keen on publicity. However, the situation might have changed since this study because the Consumer Ombudsman also changed during this research process. Nowadays Marita Wilska, previous leader of the Finnish Consumer Agency, serves as the Consumer Ombudsman.

"They have to be neutral. The information used for marketing purposes is not reliable. There are those "Research shows us to be the cheapest" headlines." (C)

"I don't count the tests in commercial magazines." (C)

"Have I been too blue-eyed? I have counted on all the information I have reserved." (C)

According to the consumers the topics dealt with by the public consumer information were good. They hoped, however, for more detailed information on the functions and services of the consumer administration. Regarding individual topics, they wanted more information on housing-related matters (selling of houses, renovation and problems connected to damp). They also wanted more information about Internet trade, household appliances, ADP devices, and bank and insurance services.

"More information about the functions (of the Finnish Consumer Agency)." (C)

"This is what I mean about overlapping functions. So many other parties are given information about the same thing. The Finnish Consumer Agency should focus on specific areas instead of trying to cover all of them." (C)

Product safety is very important matter and it is important that the public authorities control it more than they do at present. They need more resources to be able to give more information to consumers. This is very important matter to consumers because many of them believe they can't trust the information put out by all companies.

"Product safety is much more important than price comparisons. Prices can be compared by anyone but product safety matters often need much more expertise than ordinary consumers have." (C)

"They should have more resources. Otherwise they are not able to control as much as is needed." (C)

All safety matters are important but the consumers regarded children's toys and other child-related things as the most important product safety issue. They were also very interested about performance and the practical characteristics of different products. Most of them also said they were interested in energy consumption. Men, especially, are interested in technical information. Most of them are also interested in health and foodstuff matters. Consumers said they would like to know more about products that are advertised as impacting positively on peoples' health. They reported concern about foodstuffs coming from foreign countries.

"I am very interested in cars and things like that. The problem is that there are so many tests that I don't know what to believe." (C)

"It is difficult to compare many products without product tests." (C)

"We should get more information about imported goods!"

"It would be really nice to know whether those products really have a positive impact on my health or is it just advertising."

"I stopped eating meat as soon as I heard about mad cow disease. I had considered it already earlier but this make me do it." (C)

Information connected to the household economy (e.g. financial and debt counseling) was not personally important to consumers or they were not willing to say so in a group interview. On the ordinary level they regarded information on the household economy as a very important matter and said that they had not got enough information in this area.

Environmental matters were generally important to consumers. Most of them reported that they had got enough information on this topic. Many

consumers were worried about the environment but also believed that they could not do a lot about it. Recycling and the sorting of garbage was an everyday task for many but most consumers were not willing to give up their car etc. to protect the environment. They believed, however, that also in this matter the public authorities should be able to take control and that companies should be much more environmentally responsible.

"I really don't know how to get debt counseling." (C)

"It is the same what kind of gas I buy. I am more worried about what is coming out of the chimney pipes of industrial firms. It is also important that somebody controls what those firms put into the waterways." (C)

"Everybody can recycle if they just want to. All of us just don't care." (C)

"It will have no impact on anything if I start using the bus. None." (C)

"I believe it is easy to think that the impact of the individual is too small. It is so easy to say it is not my responsibility." (C)

"The government should control them (=companies). Otherwise they will do what they want.

The future of people is not important. Only the result of a financial period is important." (C)

Some of consumers were also interested in the problems of aging people. This seemed to be a growing interest because the population is aging.

"Let's see what happens to the old people. Right now everyone is talking about them but what will really happen after the election." (C)

The consumers considered price comparisons useful but not especially important. Information about different products and services (for example tourism and cars) are available from different sources. The Finnish Consumer Agency's information about these things is important because the information is impartial. As was said earlier, consumers do not always trust the tests and comparisons of advertisement-financed sources.

"Those topics are good. For me the price comparisons have been of the most useful." (C)

"Neutrality is the most important thing." (C)

"There should be both nationwide and local comparisons. Both should be available." (C)

"Definitely more comparisons." (C)

"They should get being new products into the comparisons. Everything from hairdressers to funeral parlors." (C)

"Price information is important." (C)

The attitudes to prices comparisons differed a lot. The majority of the consumers were interested in impartial price comparisons and they considered them as giving a good general idea of the price level of the separate products and, services and of the differences between organizations. However, a fifth of the interviewees questioned their significance very strongly.

"Product tests are more important than price comparisons. Definitely." (C)

"Price comparisons are just a waste of money." (C)

"Do they really have any significance?" (C)

Consumers remembered that they had heard about the comparisons of prices, especially between grocery shops. However, they were not able to say which comparisons of products and services were done by the Finnish Consumer Agency. A small proportion of the consumers remembered comparisons of the different loans like study loan.

"I have noticed at least many comparisons of grocery shops." (C)

"I would have been satisfied with the first rate of interest offered by the bank if I had not read the results of the comparison. I have saved thousands of marks." (C)

"I don't remember whether it was the Finnish Consumer Agency who did the comparison. I remember that some public authorities do these kinds of things. Probably the Finnish Consumer Agency too." (C)

Prices and price comparisons have been fairly well published during recent years. The media is well suited to this purpose. If somebody wants more information it should be possible to order it easily from somewhere. The Internet is not enough because everybody does not have it yet.

"Newspapers should say where I can get a whole comparison from." (C)

"More information on the Internet. It is easy to get it from there. But well, not everyone have it yet." (C)

"We should now be getting information about how increased competition between companies selling household appliance have affected prices. Now I hear everywhere that prices are increasing. What is really happening?" (C)

"I believe companies won't tell about price comparisons if they haven't won one." (C)

Consumers were also asked to state is the significance of the price comparisons to them. A fourth had used information of the results. Comparisons had affected their choice of grocery store. Most of the consumers spoke about the results of price comparisons with their spouse and in the coffee breaks at work. Many of the interviewees make their own comparisons of prices. Only two of them belonged to the group that questioned the importance of price comparisons.

"I changed the grocery shop. I had thought about it for a long time." (C)

"We talk about them at work." (C)

"I can get price information by visiting shops. It is also fun but sometimes expensive because I might buy something else." (C)

"I'm very keen to call and ask for prices. It is not such hard work. Making a couple of calls might mean saving a lot of money." (C)

According to the interviewees price comparisons are especially needed about the bank services and insurance services at the moment. Information is furthermore needed about the cost of various matters related to house building.

Consumers were supremely interested in product tests. They had obtained this information from magazines (like the Consumer magazine and TM) and television (programs like Consumer as King and the Bumper). Consumers had often received information on tests done by the Finnish Consumer Agency but they do not remember the source. This occurs, for example, when a newspaper publishes the test results but don't mention the Finnish Consumer Agency at all or consumers don't notice the source.

"These are much more important than price comparisons." (C)

"Definitely more tests." (C)

"There should be more test results in the Consumer magazine. And also on different kinds of matters." (C)

"Information spreads widely if it is on television." (C)

"I remembered that the customs administration does those test, not the Finnish Consumer Agency." (C)

"I can find this information in specialize magazines. We are not interested in cars or pushchairs." (C)

"It is very annoying that magazines meant for families with children only present products and their prices. It is not enough. They don't even announce the pros and cons. I believe they are afraid of losing advertising income if they put products in rank order. The Consumer Magazine could fill this gap better than nowadays. Or are families with children not important?" (C)

The experiences of product tests were usually positive and were said to have an impact to purchase decisions. Distinctly more tests are wanted than at present. At the same time consumers were surprised at the fact that so many organizations perform tests. Why is there not more cooperation than at present. In addition consumers criticized the fact that the test results cannot be read on the internet pages of the Finnish Consumer Agency.

"Yes, they really have an impact. It just a shame that I usually remember to read about tests but when I need this information I don't remember where I have read it and especially what the test said." (C)

"I had already decided what kind of air cleaner I would buy my mother-in-law. I changed it based on the test result." (C)

"I bought a dishwasher based on the test results of the Consumer Magazine. The machine was the test winner but it broke down soon after I bought it. Since then I have questioned all tests." (C)

"I don't think it is rational to do tests in many places. Can't they cooperate? It would save taxpayers money." (C)

5.7.2 Issue Involvement of Business Managers

Business managers considered it especially important to get information from the consumer administration regarding their own line of business. They want more information about decisions and precedents before the mass media is told about the matter. Those who have been under control of the Finnish Consumer Agency especially hoped it would communicate more active and more anticipatory. Business managers also wanted more information about consumer rights, how to state prices and what rights consumers have to return products. They were also interested in the net trade.

"Of course I am interested in matters about own line of business. I had once a very embarrassing situation when a client told me that I had in my range a toy which was under a sales ban. It was a time when I was doing accounting and didn't follow the news and the manufacturer of the toy didn't send even me a fax. I was ashamed but luckily I didn't recommend the toy to the customer." (B)

"We should get information about different decisions as soon as possible."(B)

"I got information about the change in this law too late. Also we should have time to prepare. They should not just demand a sudden change."(B)

"The net trade creates doubts today."(B)

"Everybody is talking about the net trade today. I believe it is also important for entrepreneurs to avoid problems like what happens if someone orders products for somebody else without asking and not paying for them."(B)

Business managers also considered the matters related to *product safety* important. They hoped that testing operations should continue and even be extended, and that the Finnish Consumer Agency would include a larger range of products in the tests. Most of them, however, did not see the benefits of the price comparisons. Some of them even said they only meant trouble.

"The people should seek information much more than they nowadays do. Our customers usually make a choice based on price or what feels, sees or sounds like the best choice."(B)

"The test results are useful to both consumers and to us. Customers believe the product is good if we say it came first in the test by the Finnish Consumer Agency."(B)

"There should be wider product range in the tests. More brands and more product groups."(B)

Business managers also wanted more information about functions of the Finnish Consumer Agency. They would like to know its functions, and working routines and about what issues and lines of business are under special control.

"We need information about what is the role of the Finnish Consumer Agency really." (B)

"I would like to know how we could deepen cooperation so as to be beneficial to all parties."(B)

"We need more information about decisions related to us. Or actually not more but faster."(B)

"I don't have my own experience but I have understood its communication is rather one-way. I believe they don't discuss things with us. They just tell us what to do and that's it."(B)

"We should get more information about how it functions. The consumer ombudsman is more familiar to us because he has been in contact with me a couple of times."

5.8 The Relationship Between Involvement and Information Processing

5.8.1 Information Processing and The ELM Model

According to the elaboration likelihood model (EML) developed by Petty and Cacioppo (1986), a basic dimension of information processing and attitude change is the depth or amount of information processing. Figure 17 shows how an attitude changes through either the central or peripheral route.

The central route takes place only when people are interested, or motivated, and capable of processing the information. It is important, however, to note that information processing can differ from individual to individual, and it is dependent on the situation (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986). Through the central route of persuasion an attitude is formed or changed. Because of thoughtful consideration, an attitude is relatively permanent and it predicts behavior better than attitudes formed via the peripheral route (Batra et al. 1996, 157).

The peripheral route takes place when the message is not interesting or a person does not have time to expose it. Attitude change in this case is relatively temporary and it does not predict behavior as well as an attitude formed by the central route.

On the basis of the ELM model it could be said that in the case of the central route citizens have to have the motivation to process public consumer information. They are not motivated if the information is not relevant or important. In addition, in the case of the central route, citizens must have the ability and capacity to process the public consumer information. For example, citizens might be highly motivated to process information about computers but they are not able to process the technical terms.

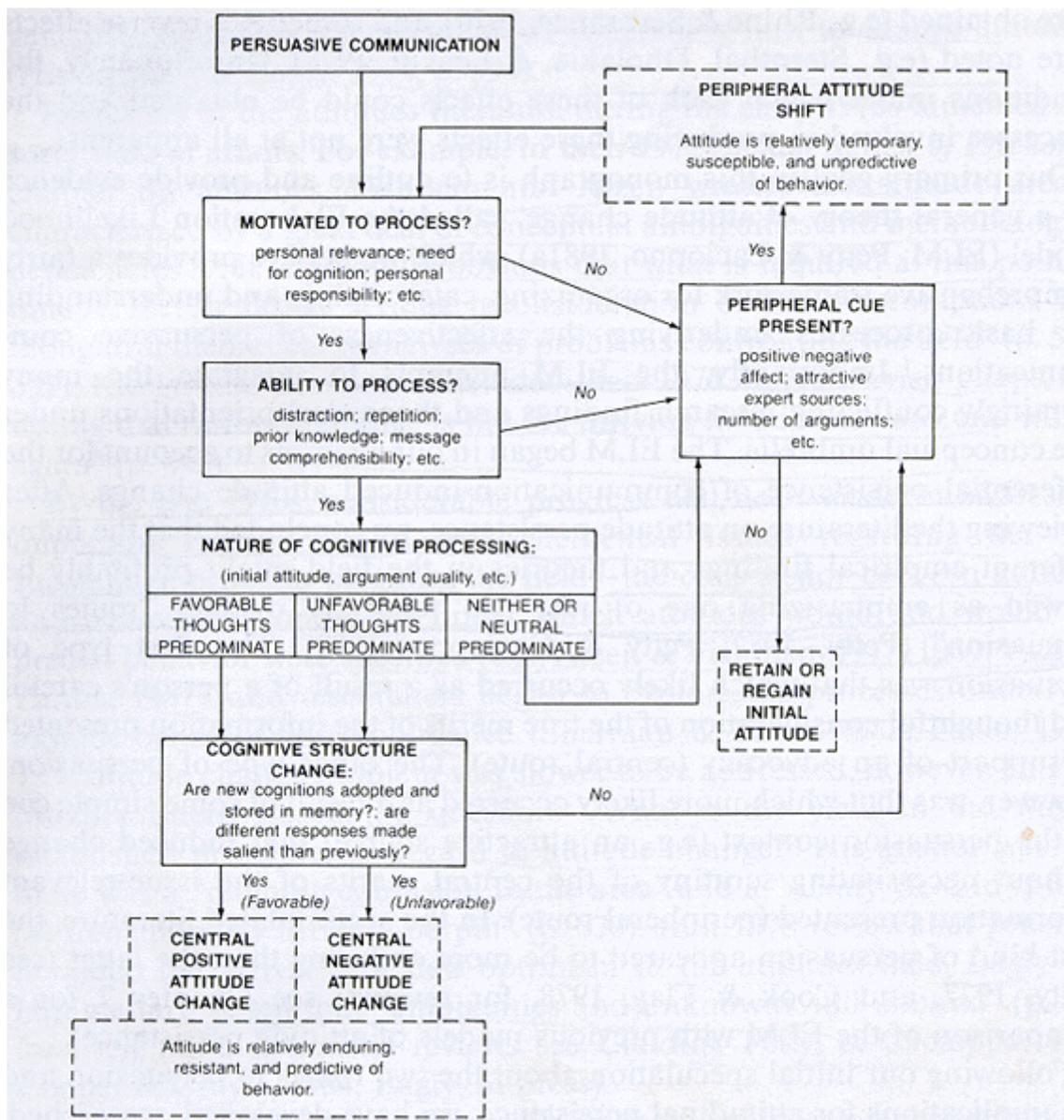


FIGURE 17 Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo 1986)

According to Batra et al. (1996, 161) information processing does not have to be either central or peripheral. It can also consist both. For example, Chaiken's (1980) systematic versus heuristic model also suggest a continuum of processing rather than an either on situation.

Batra et al. (1996, 161) also point out that information processing is dependent on communication channel, involvement, level of knowledge, comprehension, distraction, emotion, and need for cognition. In case of public consumer information their ideas mean that, for example, newspaper articles can lead to more cognitive elaboration than television advertisements, highly involved citizens will generate more total cognitive elaboration and form attitudes centrally, and more knowledgeable citizens will be able to generate more message-related thoughts than less knowledgeable citizens and form

attitudes centrally. They, however, also point out that some individuals are simply more interested about thinking about things and they generate more message-related thoughts. This means that their attitudes are more centrally based. They also argue that to use the central route citizens need to have enough knowledge and time to process the message, and also the message environment or content should not be distracting. If a message puts its receiver in a good mood, it means that the consumer is often less willing to spend energy thinking about its content. This generates fewer cognitive thoughts and form attitudes peripherally rather than centrally.

5.8.2 Information Processing Theory

McGuire's (1985) information processing theory has received less attention than the ELM. It sees persuasion as a twelve-stage learning process.

1. Exposure to the communication
2. Attending to it
3. Liking, becoming interested in it
4. Comprehending it (learning what)
5. Skill acquisition (learning how)
6. Yielding to it (attitude change)
7. Memory storage of content and/or agreement
8. Information search and retrieval
9. Deciding on basis of retrieval
10. Behaving in accord with decision
11. Reinforcement of desired acts
12. Post-behavioral consolidating

This model sees the persuasion process broadly and it separates the information processing stages in detail. The biggest problem with this theory is that it sees decision-making as a rational process and it excludes irrational elements of human behavior.

5.8.3 External and Internal Information Search

In *active information search* the citizen uses different kinds of information sources to obtain information. He might for example ask the opinion of a friend or search magazines not normally read. In *passive information search* information is sought only from sources which are exposed during the normal course of events. In *passive attention* the citizen doesn't have a need for the information and makes no efforts to obtain it. In spite of that, some information might stick in his or her mind. (Batra et al. 1996, 224.)

It is generally assumed that a final purchasing decision on a high involvement situation is a result of extensive information search. According to

Palm (1994, 202) the relationship is more complicated than that. The relationship can be bilateral, and it is dependent on the situation.

Information search is an important part of consumer decision making (Moore and Lehmann, 1980; Newman, 1977). Beales et al. (1981) provide a general framework of search which categorizes search as either internal or external. *Internal search* entails the act of retrieving previously acquired information from the memory. That is, internal search does not require any outside source. In contrast, *external search* entails the acquisition of information from outside sources, such as print advertisements, television or radio advertisements, salespeople, or personal acquaintances. (McColl-Kennedy & Fetter 2001, 84.) Both aspects are important, but this study concentrates only on external search.

In this study external search is defined as the acquisition of information from sources other than one's memory. McColl-Kennedy and Fetter (2001, 84; 1999) summarize the external search literature as follows: (1) sources (including such things as reseller information, e.g. catalogues, consultants; third party e.g. consumer report; interpersonal sources, e.g. friends or acquaintances; direct inspection of the good by the consumer e.g. comparison, inference); (2) search effort; and (3) assessing physical aspects of a search for a consumer good (such as price, size).

Measurement of external search has mostly been connected to products, not services. Search is also generally measured after purchase, not during external or internal information search. McColl-Kennedy and Fetter (2001, 85) were first who validated an external search scale for services. They (1999, 251) measured external search with a seven-item scale. They were able to provide considerable empirical evidence as to the scale's construct validity across several services. *Source of search* was measured with three items: (1) interested in reading information, (2) interested in reading consumer reports, and (3) have compared service characteristics. *Search effort* was measured with four items: (1) usually talk with other people, (2) usually seek advice from other people, (3) usually take many factors into account, and (4) usually spend a lot of time.

In this study McColl-Kennedy's and Fetter's scale was not used but the same search efforts were found. Involvement has an impact on information search, but as Palm (1994) argued, the relationship between involvement and search is complex. For example, in the case of public consumer information some citizens do little or no external search, even in the case of high involvement products or services (like a car, house, or expensive sport and stereo equipment). The interviewees were asked to tell about situations in which they searched or suddenly got information from the Finnish Consumer Agency. They were also asked to tell when they would have needed it but had not searched. The followings are examples of high involvement buying situations.

"We searched for the right house for about six months. We considered hard whether to taking a loan from the building firm, but a friend of mine said not to. He printed me a copy of a brochure form the www-pages of the Finnish Consumer Agency. After reading the brochure

we decide to take the whole loan. I was so happy about the information we got that now I always search for information from the agency.” (C)

“I tried to return the bike I bought. I was a student and used most of my savings for the bike. It was a seven-speed bike, but I could not shift the last two gears. I was surprised I did not have the right to return the bike. They just repaired the gears. I had to wait about one month. I should have called the consumer advisor.” (C)

“The car was so pretty. I just bought it. There was a sudden need for a car, I suddenly noticed the picture of the car in a newspaper ad, and when the seller told me about the financing possibilities, I just say yes. My boyfriend said I was crazy. I should at least ask his opinion.” (C)

5.8.4 Involvement and Information Processing in Public Consumer Information

One purpose of this part of the study is to find out whether the level of involvement has an impact on the citizen’s information processing. On the basis of the previous theories the following hypothesis was created: the level of involvement has an impact on the individual’s information processing.

The results of this study suggest that the level of involvement can affect information processing in many ways. According to Palm (1994, 202) the level of involvement can affect information processing in four ways. Information processing can be based on *rational thinking, the receiver’s preconceptions of the receiver or irrelevant factors*. It is also possible that the receiver *does not analyze information at all*. All four were found in this study.

Public consumer information is processed by rational thinking when a citizen handles information in a detailed and conscious way. This was typical of those citizens who had been in direct contact with consumer advisors or the Finnish Consumer Agency. The information they had been given had been processed, but it was sometimes difficult to say how much affect it had on the behavior of the citizen.

“I do information search a lot but I can make my final decisions very suddenly. I have often later remembered that I had already decided to buy a different brand.” (C)

“I read both magazines (the Consumer and the Consumer Protection Magazine) very carefully.”(B)

“In our line of business we have to know what the Finnish Consumer Agency says about it.”(B)

Public consumer information can also be unconsciously biased by the preconceptions of the receiver. Information is also then processed in detail. Preconceptions can be both positive and negative, and they occur when a citizens believes, for example, that the information stemming from all public authorities is always hard to understand. Positive preconceptions makes information search and information processing more likely to happen. If the attitude is negative then information is not sought and information is processed only if there is no choice.

“Their (=public authorities) texts are always so unfriendly and difficult to understand.” (C)

“There is always bad news or a difficult task to do when I open a letter from the tax authority.” (B)

“I know that the information (=from the www-pages of the Finnish Consumer Agency) is reliable and I can count on it.” (C)

Information processing is often based on irrelevant factors. This means that the analysis is not detailed and it is influenced unconsciously by irrelevant factors. Reasons for this vary. Sometimes it is because a citizen has a negative attitude towards all public authorities. The most important reason is that public consumer information is not economically or in another way important or interesting at that moment. The level of involvement is low and it is difficult for the Finnish Consumer Agency to affect to behavior in such cases.

"I don't have a television and I don't buy newspapers or magazines. I'm also trying to avoid consumption." (C)

"I'm trying to avoid all public authorities." (C)

There might be no analysis at all. It is hard to persuade if information is not handled. Some of citizens argued that they had not received got any information from the Finnish Consumer Agency. This was surprising because nobody claimed no to have heard about the agency. In many cases consumers had not connected the information to the Finnish Consumer Agency. They had seen, for example, a diaper test in a baby magazine but not realized the test had been done by the Finnish Consumer Agency. They connected it to the magazine although the Finnish Consumer Agency was mentioned in the article.

"We don't need information. We sell such good quality products that we don't have problems." (B)

"I haven't heard anything. Perhaps only a little... I'm not interested." (C)

"These things are not important to us. Personally I don't care if some advertisement discriminates against women or negroes. I don't mind what parts of a body are shown in ads." (B)

According to this study low-involved citizens search for information less than the highly involved. If they get information, they do not handle it as well as those to whom the information is personally relevant. The fact of receiving information does not mean that it has been handled. The amount of information received does not correlate with the level of information processing.

"I have noticed price comparisons but I'm not interested in them." (C)

"I don't watch Consumer as King. Those kinds of programs are so boring." (C)

Business managers were interested in public consumer information, especially when it is connected to their field of business. The most highly issue-involved managers were always interested in public consumer information and regarded it as highly important and needed. They had, for example, noticed the usefulness of product tests and product safety matters.

"Of course I am interested in all information connected to our field." (B)

"Our products have succeeded well in product tests. We have used this "award winning" product test result in our marketing. We would be crazy not to." (B)

7 DISCUSSION

In this study public consumer information in Finland was researched from the viewpoint of citizens. Aim of this study was to better understand citizens' attitudes, behavior and information search. Research questions were the following:

- what kind of attitudes do citizens have towards public consumer information,
- how involved are citizens towards public consumer information, and
- how can the behavior of the citizens be affected by public consumer information.

Two citizen groups, consumers and business managers, were studied. Business managers are also consumers, but here their opinions were studied from the other viewpoint. The research methods used in this study were qualitative interviews, with some quantitative data.

Public consumer information was studied on three levels: cognitive, affective and conative (see e.g. Batra et al. 1996; Kotler 2000). On the cognitive level I studied awareness of the Consumer Administration in Finland. On the affective level I studied attitudes towards the case organization, the Finnish Consumer Agency. On the conative level I didn't study actual behavior. The aim of this study was to find out how to the behavior of the citizens could be affected in a more efficient way by the public consumer information.

Awareness and Attitudes

The first research question of this study was to find out what kind of attitudes do citizens have towards public consumer information. According to literature attitudes have three aspects: cognitive, affective and behavioral (see e.g. Batra et al. 1996; Kotler 2000). First, in this study I tried to find out how much citizens know about the functions of the Finnish Consumer Agency. This is connected to

the cognitive aspect of attitudes. On the basis of this study it seems that the Finnish Consumer Agency is one of the most well-known public authorities in Finland. However, I should point out that the interviewees of this study were selected so that about one half of them had been in contact (e.g. called up consumer advisors, ordered the Consumer Magazine etc.) with the case organization. Total sample of consumers and business managers was 79. This means that those research results cannot be generalized. A more important finding is that the citizens felt that have better knowledge of the functions of public organizations if they have been in contact with them or they were involved in matters handled by these organizations. The third reason for awareness was wide media publicity.

The results suggest that the exact functions of the Finnish Consumer Agency are not very well known. I argue that more important than knowing those well is knowing how to contact to the consumer advisor when problems arise in buying products and services. The citizens said they contacted consumer advisors or the Finnish Consumer Agency if they had an important problem. It seems that once a citizen has been in contact, he will more easily make contact with the relevant authority in the future. Problems, however, were reported. Telephone lines were said often to be busy and there were problems in finding the number.

On the affective level I studied attitudes towards the Finnish Consumer Agency. As a research method I used laddering interviews to find out what attributes, and their consequences and hence what values citizens perceived the agency to have. The results showed it to be expert, consumer-oriented, bureaucratic and unknown. Business managers also felt they were under its watchful eye. Most of the citizens believed the Finnish Consumer Agency could be more efficient. The results also suggest that it seems to be very important to citizens that the Finnish Consumer Agency works in an efficient way, and is reliable and neutral. It seems that in case of public organizations social responsibility is more important to citizens than economic or environmental responsibility.

Trust emerged as a very important factor which should be maintained and increased. Trust is a concept which doesn't often receive attention until it is lost. It is generally agreed that interaction between public organizations and citizens requires trust and that trust is important part of democracy (see e.g. Fukuyama 1995; Sztompka 1997). The present study suggests that citizens can simultaneously trust and not trust the Finnish Consumer Agency. Linjander and Roos (2001, 21) have noticed the same dual perception. According to them the same person can, for example, see a person or a part of an organization as untrustworthy. This was seen in this study, especially in the case of business managers. Some of the citizens had lost their trust in a certain employee but nevertheless saw the whole organization as a more or less trustworthy. It is important to note that citizens do not simply either trust or distrust public organizations. According to Prêtre (2000) trust can be seen as continuum starting from distrust to burning trust (Luoma-aho 2005). If the trust of a

business manager was totally lost (e.g. the company would have wanted chance to modify their product before information about it as an unsafe product was given out) it would make interaction much difficult hereafter.

In this study actual behavior was not researched. The hypothesis of the study, however, was that knowledge, and especially attitudes, have a connection with the behavior of a citizen. After performing this research I believe there is a link between attitudes and behavior, but it is a complex one. Actions shape our attitudes and vice versa (see chapter 4.3.2/cognitive dissonance). For example, Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) argue that the more positive a person's past experience of an object is, the more positive beliefs he or she will hold about it. As a result, the more positive beliefs a person has, the more positive an attitude this will create. This study showed that if a citizen has a basic knowledge and positive attitude toward the Finnish Consumer Agency, the more likely this citizen will be to act and use its services.

It seems that the Finnish Consumer Agency should, however, not only give information to citizens. If it wants to affect more to citizens' behavior, public consumer information should be more connected to things citizens value. For example it is not enough just to say "don't give easily breakable plastic toys to children under the age of 3". If people do not value safety they, for example, give dangerous toys to small children and do not use helmet. On the basis of this study I also argue that it is important to know citizens' level of involvement if one is to try to affect their behavior.

Involvement

The second research question of this study was to find out how involved citizens are in relation to public consumer information. The hypotheses were that the level of involvement of citizens differs and that the level of involvement has an impact on information processing. It seems, according to the results, that the level of involvement differs widely. Those who were highly involved on a general level were those who were in many other ways active citizens. They also actively search for information. Those who are less involved look for information very passively. Thus it can be said that the level of involvement has an impact on information processing. If the Finnish Consumer Agency can influence the degree of involvement, it can in the same time influence the degree of information processing. However, I would like to argue that the relationship between involvement and information processing is dependent on the situation. This has also been found by Palm (1994).

It also emerged that the same matter might mean high-involvement for one and low-involvement for another citizen. The most interesting finding was to realize that involvement is not always on a high level even where it might be expected to be. The interviewees often described, for example, how they have bought cars and houses on impulse.

Not only are there different levels of involvement but, according to Palm (1994), there is also issue, position and decision involvement. All of these were also found in this study. Citizens can be said to be position involved when they

are interested in consumer matters. The research results obtained by applying the RPII scale showed that public consumer information was needed, important and relevant to citizens. It was also seen as unexciting and mundane.

Citizens were also more and less involved in different issues, such as environmental protection. Involvement usually increases when the citizen needs to make a certain decision. For example someone may not usually be at all interested in tires but when she needs them for her car she might read test results, ask about prices etc.

Communication Channels

In the case of the Finnish Consumer Agency the attitude to obtaining information seems to be connected with the communication channel in question. Opinions about availability of public consumer information were more positive if the citizen has obtained information directly (usually by phone) from consumer advisors. Those consumer and business managers who had obtained information indirectly (usually via television or newspapers) reported that it was more difficult to get. The problem in using direct communication channels was that, especially in case of consumers making a phone call or searching for information from the web-pages of the Finnish Consumer Agency, it requires consumers' own will. In case of business managers they were not always so willing but nevertheless have to be in contact, for example, when the Consumer Ombudsman says they don't show their prices in an acceptable way.

Is it possible to say that the level of involvement is connected with direct contact (face-to-face, telephone etc.)? I would argue that there is a connection. Both magazines (The Consumer and the Consumer Protection Magazine) and other indirect channels of communication are not so involving and the connection is not no clear.

One hypothesis of this study was that using different communication channels has an impact on attitudes towards public consumer information. The results indicate that personal relations with the Finnish Consumer Agency affected to the attitudes of the persons interviewed. If a person's organization had recently been in a negative way in contact with the Finnish Consumer Agency, the attitude was also negative towards the Finnish Consumer Agency and its communication. Attitudes were positive if the Finnish Consumer Agency had created personal relationships and was cooperative. According to this study, attitudes seem to affect how information received is handled and how easily contacts are made in the future.

Some citizens said that they would like more information. More information was required mostly from the Finnish Consumer Agency itself; its functions, its emphases and plans. The citizens wanted to know more about what it is doing, and especially why.

The most wanted communication channels, especially in case of business managers, were personal meetings and discussions. They wanted to present their own views but they didn't want to be the ones to initiate a meeting. Some

of them felt offended because the Finnish Consumer Agency didn't send information directly to them and wasn't be in direct contact.

The Finnish Consumer Agency can not be in direct contact with all stakeholders. They too have limited resources. They should, however, find a way to be in dialogue, especially with the most important stakeholder groups. This study found some representative organizations of entrepreneurs which should be part of the Finnish Consumer Agency's primary stakeholder group, not secondary group (see Carroll 1993). They didn't get as much information and attention as they would have needed (see Eskelinen 2002). Dialogue could also increase their feeling about effectiveness of communication of the Finnish Consumer Agency.

Dialogue between different parties is the pillar on which the capital of trust can be built (see Lehtonen 1999b). Most of the business managers expressed willingness to engage in discussions. If the Finnish Consumer Agency is as well, then the right channel should be found or it should at least target the information better. This would constitute the basis for dialogue and two-way trust.

Communication Channels and Level of Involvement

One hypothesis of this study was that communication channels have an impact on the level of involvement. Mendelsohn (1973, 50) argues that information targeted at different publics requires totally different kinds of communication strategies and tactics. This was also one of the results of this study. It seems that citizens can be segmented according to their level of involvement in order to better target communication. Similar results were obtained, for example, in the case of public libraries in Taiwan (see Chang & Hsieh 1997).

Private organizations can forget some segments but public organizations must communicate with all segments. In practice all public organizations should offer different kinds of information to citizens with different levels of involvement. According to this study some citizens only want basic information while others want very detailed information. Both groups felt frustrated if the information they got was either too detailed or too general. The following table shows how communication can be segmented by level of involvement.

TABLE 12 The Relationship Between Levels of Involvement and Communication Strategies

	Low-involvement citizen	Medium-involvement citizen	High-involvement citizen
Communication channel	Mass media	Publications	Personal service, personal letters, www
Message content	Low-information content	High-information content	High-information content
Message function	Create awareness	Access of services	Create positive attitudes

In case of public consumer information, citizens who are not used being in direct contact with consumer advisors or the Finnish Consumer Agency will only respond to its communication if it reaches them. Therefore creating awareness is the most important thing in case of low-involved citizens. Communication efforts should focus on increasing awareness of, and familiarity with, the resources and services offered by the Finnish Consumer Agency and its partners. The most appropriate communication channel in *low-involvement* conditions is the mass media. In this case communication is one-way because citizens only receive information. The level of interactivity is also low. Information disseminated by the media (e.g. newspapers, radio and TV stations) is, however, the best way to increase public discussion about consumer matters and to create awareness of the public consumer information services.

Communication targeted at low-involvement citizens should seek to motivate them to use services (here, using services means not only direct contact but also reading newspaper articles etc). They will become frequent users of public consumer information if they are satisfied with the information they have received.

In a low-involvement situation, citizens are likely to use very simple rules to make their decisions, and will engage only little inactive search for information. Therefore, the message communicated should be kept simple with relatively low information content, should appeal the emotions, and should be effortlessly absorbed and processed. Moreover, the emphasis should lie on the comfort of the environment and the availability of resources. (Chang & Hsieh 1997.)

Public information in Finland seems to be based on an assumption that citizens are highly motivated to search for information, carefully search for alternatives and make thoughtful decisions. On the basis of this study only *high-involvement* citizens use more effort and initiative in information gathering. In these cases the most effective communication channels are those in which the

level of interactivity is high. Examples could be personal letters and personalized services (such as individualized attention shown by consumer advisors, providing customized information to consumers, and replying to citizens' inquiries accurately, etc). Moreover, since high-involvement citizens usually interact intensively with public authorities, professional knowledge and communication skills are also important for consumer advisors and other parts of the consumer administration (see also Chang & Hsieh 1997).

It is important that high-involvement citizens are able to obtain more detailed information than is, for example, available in brochures and articles. They are willing, for example, to search on the Internet. Involvement-based segmentation does not mean that public organizations would need to produce four kinds of brochures, but more detailed material should be available. This would decrease the number of phone calls to public organizations.

At this juncture I would like to point out that public organizations might think that their obligation to inform citizens is performed if they put the information out on the Internet. If they think in this way they are increasing the responsibility of citizens and decreasing their own responsibility. I would argue that public authorities in Finland shouldn't fall in this kind of neo-liberal thinking. It is not enough if they make it possible to obtain feedback on the Internet. To increase public participation, citizens need to feel that they are being heard.

Like high involvement citizens, *medium-involvement* citizens also need detailed information. The difference is that medium-involved citizens need more information about how to access services. This is why different kinds of publications (like the Consumer Magazine) are important. If medium-involved citizens received information that has helped them they are more motivated and willing to use the service again. News in the mass media are also good reminders for medium-involved citizens.

The public consumer information should concentrate on turning low-involvement citizens into higher-involvement citizens. The consumer administration could therefore focus on the needs of current high-involvement citizens in order to improve their services by adding values which might increase consumer satisfaction. Such satisfaction results in more satisfied existing consumers, and may later be passed around by word-of-mouth to lower-involvement citizens. Eventually, the lower-involvement citizens would become higher-involvement citizens.

Attitudes and Involvement

It is argued in the literature that attitudes are positive if the level of involvement is high. One hypothesis of this study was that attitudes have an impact on the level of involvement. The results suggest that an increasing level of involvement doesn't always mean more positive attitudes. In the case of business managers, especially, the level of involvement was sometimes very high but the attitudes were very negative. It is very important to the Finnish Consumer Agency that no stakeholder sees it as an opponent. They should be

able to engage in collaboration or even seek consensus. This requires two-way trust and dialogue. This leads us to the following topic.

Level of Involvement and Public Participation

Figure 18 shows what kind of communication is needed on the different levels of involvement in the case of public consumer information in Finland. Five stages are presented. Two first (informing and education) and the last one (seeking consensus) are the same as in the models of public participation of Jackson (2001, 139) and Dorsey et al. (1994). At a low and medium level of involvement the communication strategies are the same as in the previous table. This picture goes a little bit further and suggests that very highly involved citizens would like to participate in decision making.

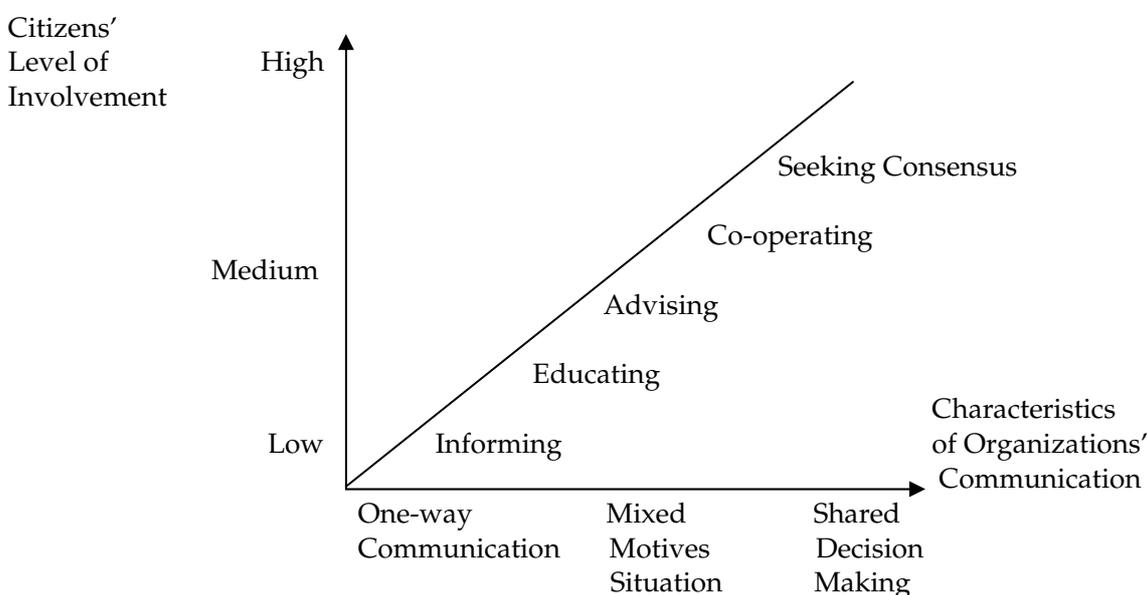


FIGURE 18 Objectives of Public Consumer Information According to Level of Involvement and Characteristics of Communication

One-way *information* is needed for low-level involved citizens who don't know about the issue. In practice it means that public consumer information should be based on raising awareness and generating interest, for example, by means of newspaper articles or advertisements. According to this study it seems that more public discussion increases the level of involvement.

Education is helpful to raise awareness and to provide background information among citizens. It can be more effectual than advertising because communication can be more interactive. Consumer education is given in schools to make young people able to know their rights and obligations as consumers. Information and education is, however, needed in all age groups.

Advice is appropriate to those citizens who need more information about the issue. In practice this means that citizens contact the consumer advisors, search for information in the www-pages of the Finnish Consumer Agency etc.

They have, however, to be aware of the possibility of getting help. This is why information is needed and why, for example, education is given in schools.

The last two levels are especially important to the organizations of entrepreneurs, consumer organizations, civic organizations etc. *Co-operation* is appropriate only for those who are well informed and have knowledge of the issue. *Consensus seeking* goes a little bit further. On this level trust between the parties is important. Both sides need to be willing to share information and take responsibility. They also have to be committed to the process.

According to the figure, the level of involvement increases when public consumer information is based on dialogue instead of one-way communication. Especially in the case of business managers it is often a question of mixed motives (see e.g. Grunig) because the interests of both sides conflict. Both sides can, however, be satisfied if they collaborate and negotiate with each other. This doesn't mean that both sides should always agree.

Public Consumer Information and Organizational Theories

In the theoretical part of this study three paradigms were offered to describe differences in managing organizations. They were the manufacturing paradigm, bureaucratic-legal paradigm and service paradigm (see Gummesson 1993). The results of this study indicate that service paradigm is neglected. Most citizens, especially business managers, feel that they are seen as an other party, not as a partner. For the Finnish Consumer Agency it is important to create long-term relationships with different stakeholders. This is possible if both sides can trust each other.

According to Uusitalo & Oksanen (2004) consumers are skeptical and cynical in Finland. Such attitudes were also found in this study. Many citizens believe that they can't trust ads and other promises made by private organizations. According to this study they also are skeptical towards politicians. This can be seen as a sign of post-modernism among citizens.

Are public organizations post-modern in Finland? According to the theoretical part of this study the post-modern public organization differs substantially from the bureaucratic public organization. The structure is decentralized, not hierarchical. Employees' tasks are formed on the basis of skills of each one's. The post-modern organizational culture makes it possible to try, to fail and to change things. Decision-making is fluent and it can meet the needs of the organization's environment very rapidly. The final task of the management in the post-modern public organizations is to keep employees and customers happy.

The differences in communication from the viewpoint of organizational communication and public relations are described in table 13. This view of the post-modern public organization is closer to the new public service than to the new public management. On the basis of this study it seems that citizens see public organizations, or at least the Finnish Consumer Agency, as a bureaucratic public organization. They, however, would like it to be post-modern.

TABLE 13 Communication in Bureaucratic and Post-modern Public Organizations

Bureaucratic Public Organization	Post-modern Public Organization
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tries to control its environment by communication • Aim is to control publicity and influence opinions • Publicity is important • Formal communication (newsletters, press releases) • One-way communication and distribution of information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication is based on citizens' need of information • Aim is to get approval and confidence • Relationships with citizens are important • Informal communication is systematic and there is constant exchange of information (meetings, discussions) • Dialogue and continuous co-operation

Proposals for Further Study

Aim of this study was to better understand citizens' attitudes, behavior and information search in the case of public consumer information in Finland. All the research questions were answered, but many new questions arose. It would be interesting to find out in what ways public consumer information affects the actual behavior of citizens. One possibility might be to evaluate the consequences of specific public campaigns on a long period. It would also be interesting to find out what kinds of differences there might be between different countries, for example between members of the European Union.

In this study public consumer information was researched on a rather general level. Next it would be interesting to research a specific area of it, such as information targeted at families with small children. It would also be interesting to research public participation more widely in Finland.

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APPENDIX 1

Reports of the Study of the Communication of the Finnish Consumer Agency

Subscriptions: Minister of Trade and Industry, tel. +358 9 160 3547

Number	Author	Research Report
1/2000	Lehtisalo, Riikka	Kuluttajaviraston ja elinkeinonharjoittajia edustavien yhteisöjen välinen viestintä (Communication between the Finnish Consumer Agency and representative organizations of entrepreneurs)
2/2000	Kivistö, Heli	Kuluttajaviraston tiedotusmateriaalin luettavuus ja ymmärrettävyys (Readability and intelligibility of public consumer information)
3/2000	Näsi, Ella	Visuaalinen ilme (Visual images of the Finnish Consumer Agency)
4/2000	Lehtisalo, Riikka	Kuluttajaviraston ja kuluttajaneuvojien välinen viestintä (Communication between the Finnish Consumer Agency and consumer advisors)
5/2001	Eskelinen, Sari	Kuluttajavalistus kuluttajien näkökulmasta (Public consumer information from the viewpoint of consumer)
6/2001	Eskelinen, Sari	Kuluttajaviraston viestintä elinkeinonharjoittajien näkökulmasta (Public consumer information from the viewpoint of business managers)

APPENDIX 2

Description of Interviewed Consumers (N=49)

	Helsinki	Jyväskylä	Kangasniemi	Vaasa	Viitasaari	Total
Age						
15-24	1	1	1	0	1	4
25-44	3	5	3	5	3	19
45-64	4	1	4	6	5	20
65+	1	0	2	2	1	6
Sex						
Male	4	3	5	7	5	24
Female	5	4	5	6	5	25
Marital status						
Single	2	2	1	1	1	7
Cohabit	3	2	2	4	3	14
Married	2	2	5	6	5	20
Divorced	1	1	1	2	1	6
Widow	1	0	1	0	0	2
Occupation						
Front-runner	2	1	0	2	0	5
Agricultural entrepreneur	0	0	2	0	2	4
Senior official	2	1	1	2	0	6
Junior official	0	1	0	2	1	3
Student	1	1	1	0	1	4
Housewife or house husband	1	1	2	0	2	6
Operative employee	1	1	1	2	1	6
Unemployed	0	0	1	1	2	3
Entrepreneur	1	1	0	2	1	5
Retiree	1	0	2	2	1	6
Native language						
Finnish	7	7	10	10	10	44
Swedish	2	0	0	3	0	5

APPENDIX 3

Description of Interviewed Business Managers (N=30)

Line of Business

Car trade (N=2)	Advertising agency (N=2)
Hotel (N=2)	Travel agency (N=2)
Shoe store (N=2)	Bank/Financing (N=2)
Land agency/vuokraus (N=2)	Grocery store (N=3)
Land agency/myynti (N=2)	Insurance (N=2)
Domestic appliance store (N=3)	Multinational company(N=2)
Toy shop(N=2)	Listed company (N=2)

Place

Helsinki (N=10)
Jyväskylä (N=5)
Kangasniemi (N=5)
Vaasa (N=5)
Viitasaari (N=5)

Age

15-24 (N=1)
25-44 (N=22)
45-64 (N=7)

Sex

Male (N=21)
Female (N=9)

Statys

Manager (N=17)
Entrepreneur (N=13)

Education

Elementary school (N=1)
Vocational school (N=2)
College-level training (N=8)
Higher vocational diploma (N=8)
Master's degree (N=11)

APPENDIX 4

Topics of the Focus Group Interviews of the Consumers (N=49)

Public Authorities

- Awareness
- Attitudes
- Communication channels
- Role in a society

The Finnish Consumer Agency

- Awareness of the consumer administration
- Awareness of the Finnish Consumer Agency
- Attitudes toward public consumer information and the Finnish Consumer Agency
- Involvement toward public consumer information
- Communication channels
- Topics of communication
- Consumerism

APPENDIX 5

Topics of the Individual Interviews of the Business Managers (N=30)

Public Authorities

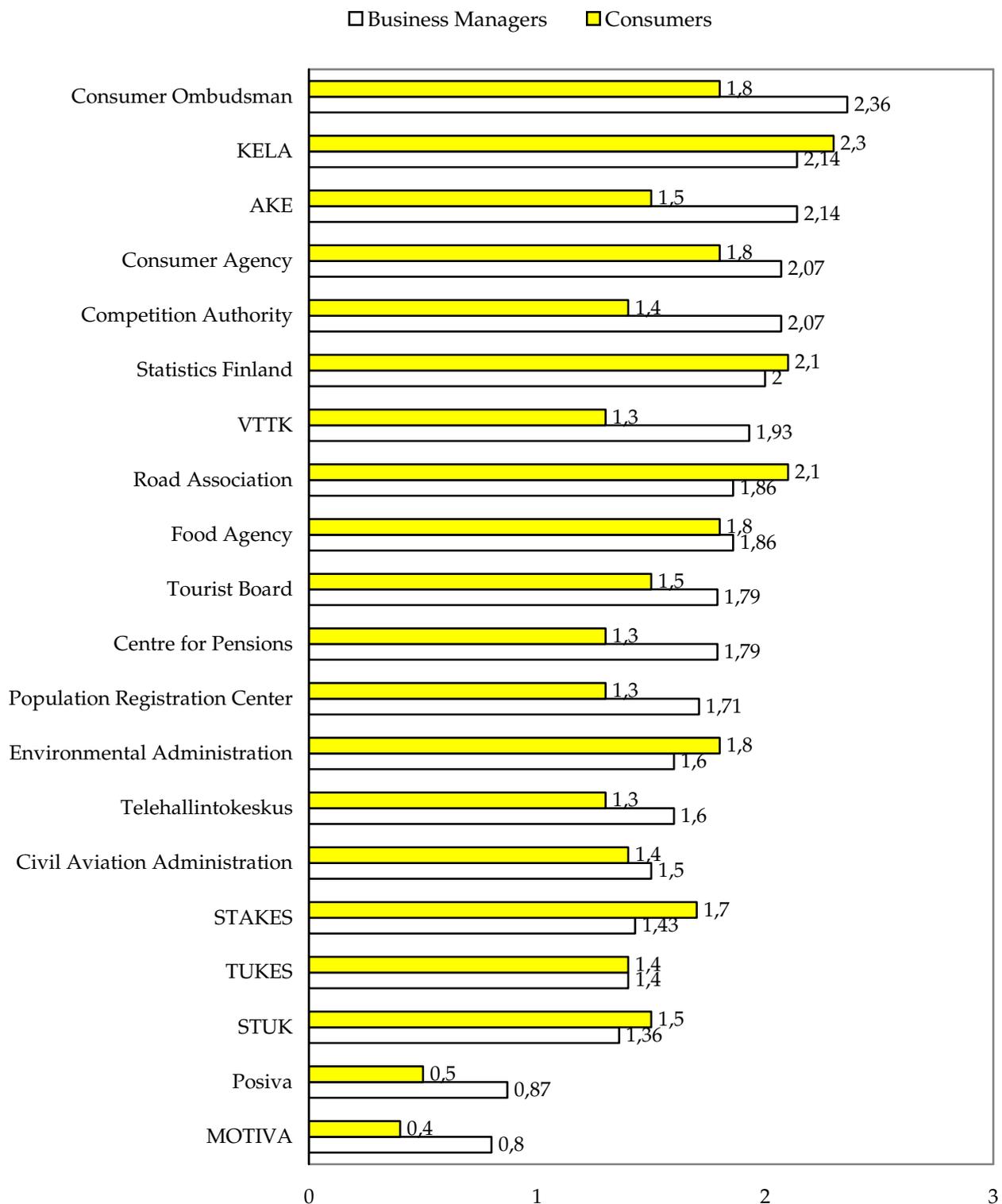
- Awareness
- Attitudes
- Communication channels
- Role in a society

The Finnish Consumer Agency

- Awareness of the consumer administration
- Awareness of the Finnish Consumer Agency
- Attitudes toward public consumer information and the Finnish Consumer Agency
- Involvement toward public consumer information
- Communication channels
- Topics of communication
- Consumerism

APPENDIX 6

Awareness of Public Organizations



APPENDIX 7

The Consumer Involvement Profile (CIP) Scale (Laurent & Kapferer 1985)

Product perceived importance (interest)

1. What I buy is extremely important to me
2. I am really very interested in
3. I could not care less about or is something which leaves me quite cold.

Hedonic value (pleasure)

1. I really enjoy buying
2. Whenever I buy, it is like giving myself a present
3. To me, is quite a pleasure or I quite enjoy

Perceived sign value

1. You can tell a lot about a person from the he or she buys
2. The a person buys, says something about who they are
3. The reflects the sort of person I am

Perceived risk importance (negative consequences of mispurchase)

1. It does not matter if one makes a mistake by buying
2. It is very irritating to buy which is not right
3. I should be annoyed with myself, if it turned out I have made the wrong choice when buying

Subjective probability of a mispurchase (probability of error)

1. When I am in front of the Section, I always feel rather unsure about what to pick
2. When you buy, you can never be quite sure it was the right choice nor not
3. Choosing a is rather difficult
4. When you buy, you can never be quite certain about your choice.

Note: Measurement: a five-point Likert scale: 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree

APPENDIX 8

Purchase-decision Involvement (PIS) scale (Mittal 1989)

1. In selecting from the many types and brands of this product available in the market, would you say that:

I would not care at all as to which one I buy 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 I would care a great deal as to which one I buy

2. Do you think that the various types and brands of this product available in the market are all very alike or are all very different?

They are alike 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 They are different

3. How important would it be to you to make a right choice of this product?

Not at all important 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely important

4. In making your selection of this product, how concerned would you be about the outcome of your choice?

Not at all concerned 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very much concerned

Also the fifth item which was initially included but subsequently dropped:

5. How important will be the purchase of this product in your life?

Not at all important 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very important

	Strongly	
Strongly	disagree	agree

- | | |
|--|---|
| 6. (Product) is very important to me | () () () () () () () () () () |
| 7. For me (product) does not matter | () () () () () () () () () () |
| 8. (Product) is an important part of my life | () () () () () () () () () () |