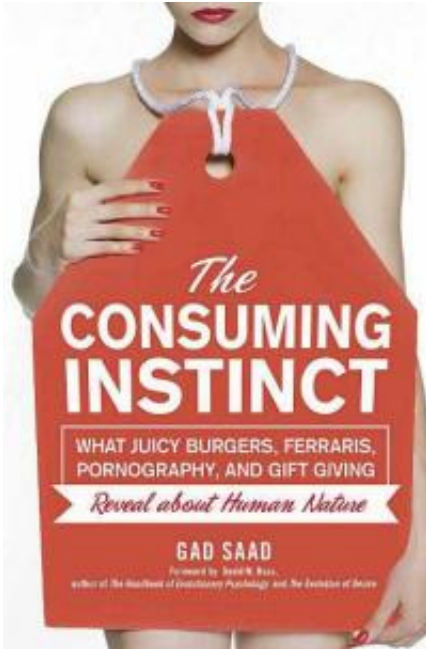


Natural-born consumers

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Concordia Professor Gad Saad's new book, "The Consuming Instinct: What Juicy Burgers, Ferraris, Pornography, and Gift Giving Reveal about Human Nature," (Prometheus Books 2011; 340 pages), argues that numerous consumer behaviors are rooted in evolution. Credit: Prometheus Books

What do fast-food restaurants have in common? Why are women more likely to become compulsive shoppers and men more likely to become addicted to pornography? Why do men's testosterone levels rise when they drive expensive sports cars? How does the fashion industry play on our innate need to belong? How do religions, cosmetic companies, and self-help gurus cater to consumers' Darwinian-based insecurities?

How might a company determine which elements of an advertisement are universally valid and which are culture-specific? These are some of the questions Gad Saad explores in his interdisciplinary book, *The Consuming Instinct: What Juicy Burgers, Ferraris, Pornography, and Gift Giving Reveal about Human Nature* (Prometheus Books 2011; 340 pages).

Saad argues that numerous consumer behaviours are rooted in evolution. Simply put, our biological heritage influences our choices: What we eat, what we wear, what entertains us (e.g. songs, movies, literature, art, religious narratives, advertising, television shows, self-help books). Saad adds that all entrepreneurs, financial traders or personnel managers are deeply influenced by innate evolutionary forces in similar ways.

"Many consumer choices are vestiges of our evolutionary past. For example, the universal penchant for fatty foods is an adaptation to a recurring survival challenge, namely caloric scarcity and caloric uncertainty as faced by our ancestors," says Saad, Concordia University Research Chair in Evolutionary Behavioral Sciences and Darwinian Consumption and a marketing professor at the John Molson School of Business. "It's not surprising that the world's most popular fast food chains, from McDonald's to Dunkin' Donuts, share one common element: They all offer highly caloric and tasty foods that are consistent with our evolved taste buds."

According to Saad, most acts of consumption are rooted in four key Darwinian drives: survival (we prefer foods high in calories); reproduction (we use products as sexual signals); kin selection (we naturally exchange gifts with family members); and reciprocal altruism (we enjoy offering gifts to close friends). His book also examines the similarities between animal and human consumer behaviours.

"Successful marketers capitalize on shared biological features that unite

consumers within the proverbial global village," he says. "Marketers might not know the evolutionary reasons that drive commercial realities, but they are well aware that consumers possess universal commonalities."

Provided by Concordia University

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