

# Basic Instinct

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**This paper addresses the challenge of cross – cultural positioning of brands. It is based on the premise that consumer behaviour is driven by deep-seated needs and basic values that are primal in nature and part of the genetic imprint. These do not change across cultures. Positioning a brand on these basic values strikes a universal chord, making it possible to manage differences that arise out of different social and cultural influences, while keeping the core or the soul of the brand unchanged.**

## **A Unipolar World**

What do Luke Skywalker, John F. Kennedy, Princess Diana, Marilyn Monroe, Amitabh Bachchan (a superstar in India) and the Cui Jian (the father of Rock 'n' Roll in China) have in common – they are all larger than life, all stir the emotions, reach out and touch something deep within us. They stimulate our senses and sometimes can even change our lives. There is a book titled 'The Complete Writer's guide to Heroes and Heroines' – the purpose of which is to help writers in character development. It is built around the premise that there are certain identifiable archetypal characters that bond deeply with **everyone**, that travel **across cultures**, that transcend **time, place, gender and age**. These characters express something powerful that all humans seek deep down at the most basic level.

It is at the same level that powerful brands connect with the consumer. Scott Bedbury, as head of Nike and Starbucks described a brand as a metaphorical story – a fundamental human appreciation of mythology. Brands that manifest this sensibility invoke something very potent. Nike symbolizes the Hero – it is about Winning, Being the Best. Virgin on the other hand expresses the Outlaw archetype, the classic David and Goliath or Robin Hood Story, which has at its heart disruption and challenge of the status quo. Brands that understand and apply archetypes create their own promised lands, places where they thrive. And these values cross borders, touch needs that are universal.

In developing an international brand, it is clearly important to create a powerful holistic entity. This requires building brand values and consumer-brand relationships in a consistent direction, whatever the market. This not only creates international equity but also brings about economies of scale when applying tools of the marketing mix on a multi-national basis. And yet, it is important to understand what consumers in each market seek. Consumers do not buy transnational brands because they are available in lots of countries; they buy them because they are relevant, meet real needs and deliver desired benefits. How then does a brand deliver in diverse markets? By building it's offering and benefits on **basic instincts and drives**, which are relevant to all humankind. When consumers encounter these, they resonate in a powerful and even more importantly, enduring way everywhere.

## **What Men Want**

What are these universal needs that rise above race, colour, gender and geographical borders. This paper puts forth the thought that all behaviour is an expression of a life force, an inner dynamic energy that is inherent and common to all human organisms. It is expressed in everything that people do, whether as individuals or as part of a group.

Man's basic instinct is to survive and to procreate. In a primitive system, this meant hunting and gathering. In modern society, with a food surplus, this is manifested by buying an expensive car (if you are a man!). In a primitive society, a successful hunter had more meat. In a modern one, he has a more expensive

watch. Ultimately, it is all for the same thing and purpose. Whether it is more meat or expensive cars, it is all about genetic 'success'. One million years ago, to be immortal, you would have had many offspring all carrying your genes. Chinese and Indian emperors had harems with hundreds of wives and literally thousands of children – that was their key to immortality. Now with literacy, immortality is achievable without any offspring at all. Karl Marx had eight children, Freud had six – but that is not the reason they are immortal. Different strategies that's all!

The 'proof' that human beings are the same is evolutionary and has been established. Indians are the same species as the Chinese or the English people. We have inherited the same primal brain and the same primal language structures; our sense of morality is the same (Buddhism and Christianity have similar moral tales). Archetypes of beauty are the same everywhere (long hair, light skin – whitening products dominate the skin products market in the non-white markets) as are rituals and processes related to food. Our brains function in much the same way regardless of where we are or what we look like. Several books have now been written on socio-biology and genetic theory that tend to show how similar we are, and how much of our behaviour is determined by nature rather than nurture.

What we are saying is that, now and then, all humans, everywhere, irrespective of their color, religion, and level of affluence are driven by the same dynamic life force.

### **The Stone Age in us**

This dynamic force is part of our genetic imprint – it is what helps the individual to survive and to function. A newborn baby does not have to learn to suck. It searches for warmth and food, instinctively. These are needs that originate in the reptilian and limbic brain, rather than the neo-cortical brain. The reptilian brain is common not only across all homo sapiens, but whose characteristics we even share with the animal kingdom. This is the part that drives survival and is the seat of our most basic instincts.

The limbic brain, the next evolutionary level is the seat of our emotional responses and it is here that much of the processing on brand responses takes place. Both the reptilian and limbic levels are largely non-cognitive and unconscious. The third level is the neo cortical level, the seat of our higher and more developed intelligences – this is the cognitive territory. It is the part that can judge, evaluate and reason - where we can verbalize and 'label' our experiences and behaviors.

### **How deep is your love**

Brands can be targeted at different levels of the brain, but they are processed at all three levels. If understood only at the cognitive or rational level, responses across markets are likely to be more unlike than similar – influenced by external cultural and social learning. Conventional marketing focuses on the last cognitive level – grab attention, evoke a rational need - benefit analysis and persuade action. However it is the non-cognitive interplay of feeling that is often responsible for our instant and almost automatic decision-making – responses

from the reptilian and limbic parts of the brain. These responses are instinctual potent, even compulsive.

What this implies is that if your brand can evoke a strong positive non-cognitive reaction, appeal to an instinctive archetypal pattern, the easier it will be to make a strong neurological hit. You will simply be tapping into a pre-existing pattern rather than trying to do something from the scratch. And since the reptilian and limbic brains are common to all mankind, the response will evoke something that is common across races.

The task therefore is getting beyond the physical and the functional (which can be and normally is different across cultures) to the basic needs that the brand satisfies. Understanding these implicit needs and mapping the need structure in a manner that allows for the diversity and range of responses across markets has always been a challenge for marketers.

In this paper we have focused on the most fundamental of needs – the need for food and drink. These needs are most unquestionably primitive, have existed forever, and even today are clearly triggered by internal compulsive, instinctive and uncontrollable sensations. Their gratification lies in a physical and psychological reassurance of being able to continue functioning. Expressions like *'dying of thirst'*, *'starved to death'*, *'tastes like heaven'* – all indicate the irrational and compelling nature of these needs.

The 'implicit model', developed by Heylen during the 1970s and 1980s, (See Heylen 1984, 1990 and 1990a), provides the breakthrough in understanding implicit needs and how they are expressed in the form of consumer behavior.

### **The Heylen IMPLICIT model**

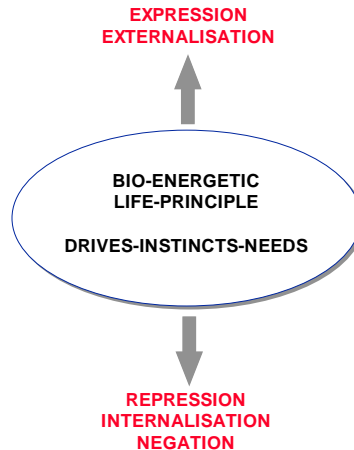
The Heylen IMPLICIT model approaches consumers, brands and behavior from a socio-biological perspective that involves human biological and sexual needs, which are a unifying platform across the world.

Freudian theory states that all behavior is driven by a life force or libido, the source of which is the sub-conscious or the id. The id is essentially instinctual and pleasure seeking (primal brain). This urge for pleasure is regulated by socio-cultural norms (neo-cortical brain) to function in a social context. The repression of these hedonistic and sexual results in the individual experiencing guilt and moral anxiety. The resulting tension from the repression and unfulfilled basic needs has to find release and resolution. To resolve the tension and protect itself from guilt, the ego develops various defense mechanisms or behaviors that resolve the tension in a socially acceptable mode. Essentially these urges are put through a socio-normative adaptive filter before being expressed or manifested in the outer world.

Our experience across many markets shows that this framework is very effective in understanding what drives consumer behaviour. Brands exist to fulfil needs and are used by consumers to resolve their tensions indifferent contexts. Consumers therefore choose brands or behavioural strategies that best resolves their tension and fulfil their needs.

Tension is resolved in two ways.

- Liberate oneself from the anxiety by Expressing or Releasing it
- Control it by Repressing and Internalizing it



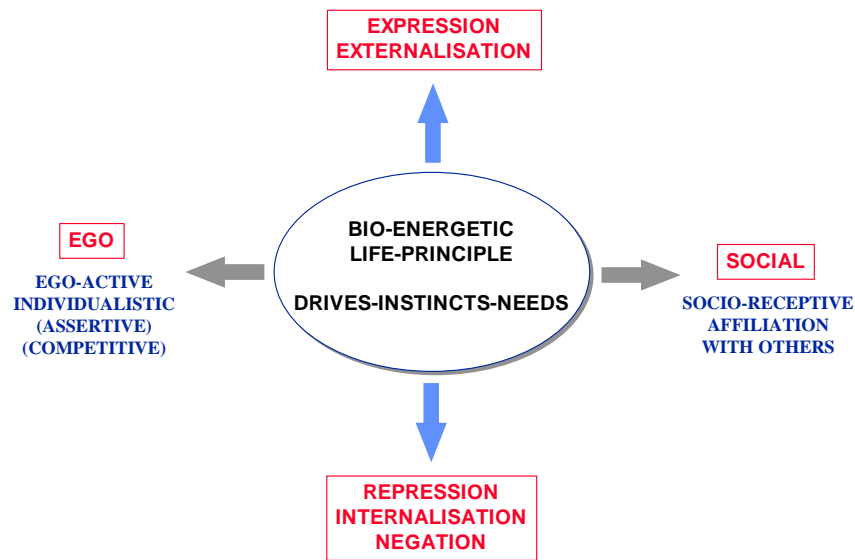
Research shows that brands help with both these strategies. There are brands that stand mainly for expressive hedonism – expressed either as a need for power (the roar of a high powered BMW, a cosmetic brand's promise of sensuality & the power to attract), or as a need for gratification of the senses – an unabashed sensorial journey, the promise of a heady experience. Consumers buying in this mode wish to feel indulged, gratified, liberated.

And then there are brands at the repressive end that address the more serious needs – alleviating anxiety about health, overcoming fear of tooth decay, ensuring security of the family, fostering a feeling of control (Dettol provides reassurance of anti-septic cleanliness and protection).

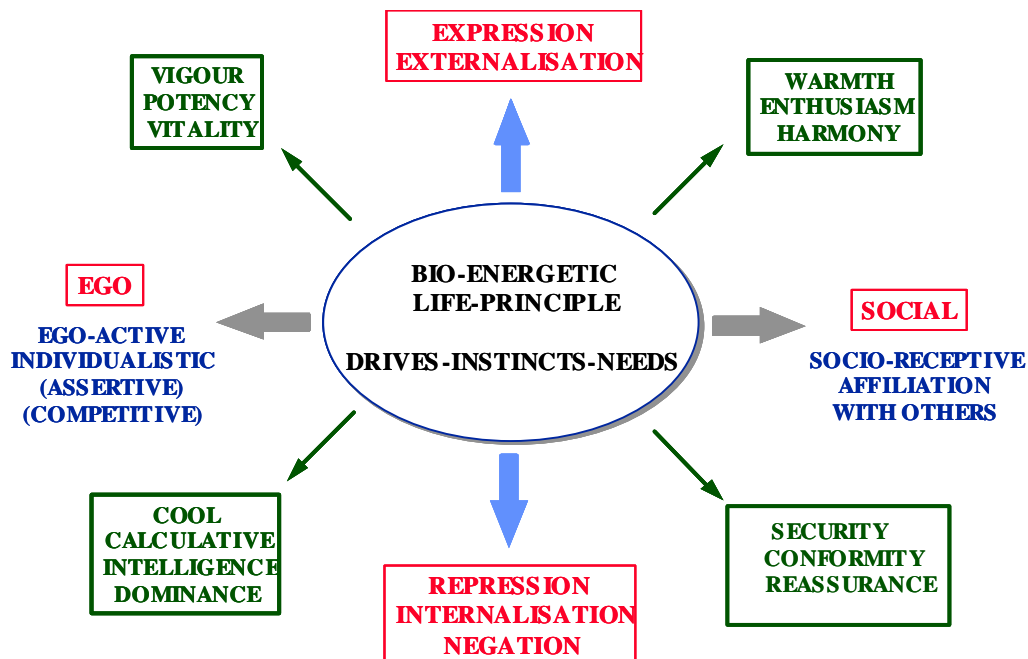
There is nothing hierarchical about either of these strategies, they are alternative behavioral routes adopted by consumers to resolve anxieties.

Expression and repression of the internal biodynamic energy can have two social modes.

- An **Assertive, ego or 'I' oriented mode** (the exclusive perfection of Mercedes Benz or L'Oreal's *'I am worth it'*– both speak to the discerning, well-informed user whose need is individualistic, a need to stand out).
- In a **Social Affiliative mode** – a need for acceptance, a need to conform – the gentle caring that Lifebuoy promises for the entire family (addressing the mother's need to do her best for the family).



This results in a two dimensional space (as in the above figure). The Y – axis is the biological axis – the means of resolving internal tension; and the X- axis is the social axis, the way we deal with the outer world (I vs. We orientation). The interaction of the two axes completes the model and defines the IMPLICIT space. The Implicit space has eight spaces. Strategies that are assertive, affiliative, expressive, defensive and those in between. Assertive expression is about Vitality and Potency; Affiliative expression is about Warmth and Harmony. Assertive internalization is about Cool, Calculated Control and Affiliative internalization is the need to Withdraw, the need for Security and Protection.

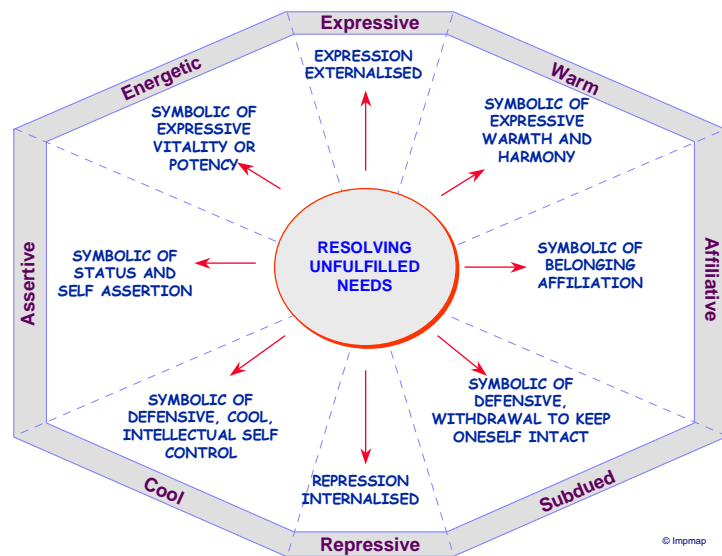


All of these strategies are subconscious and implicit – the primal drives being put through an adaptive filter to meet socio-normative requirements. The Heylen's model represents this adaptive filter - the universe of strategies that consumers employ to fulfill their needs. Understanding these strategies and using them to position brands can result in a deeper and enduring brand-consumer connection.

The Implicit space is a fixed framework that applies to all markets and all consumer groups. The fixed framework allows for comparison of diverse groups and markets, as well as of brands across categories. For example, what other personal care categories can Lux or Rexona be logically extended to? And although it is not within the scope of this paper, it must be mentioned that the Heylen Implicit system maps out need states and resulting behaviours on the IMP space quantitatively. This enables understanding of the need structure in each market in a statistically valid and objective manner. The fixed framework and use of standardized stimulus allows for valid comparisons and measurements of needs and behaviours.

## The Generic Implicit Model

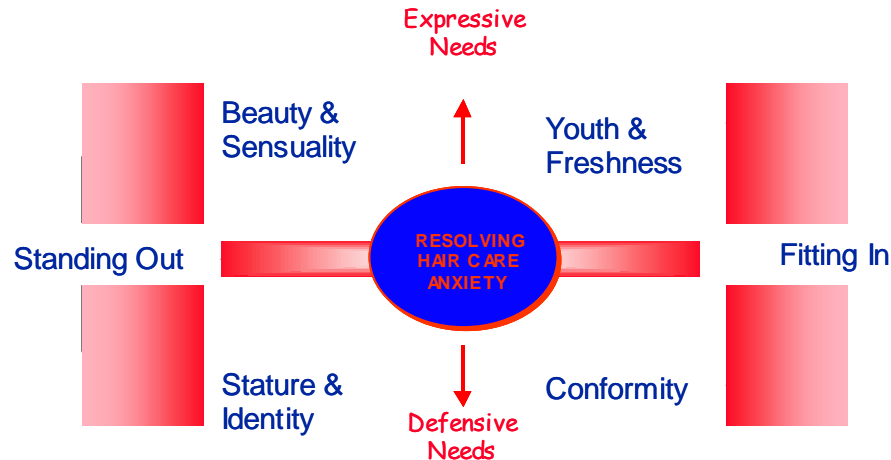
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### Heylen Implicit model – in Action

The actual materialization of these needs can alter in the consumers' interaction with different categories. For example, the assertive need from personal care products for women is about Allure and Attraction – a need to stand out, to be noticed, a desire to be desired. The Affiliative need is more about cleaning and health, looking acceptable, conforming to what is expected.

### The Personal Care Needs Model



Research across markets shows that this need structure is relevant across markets, ranging from the developed individualistic societies of Europe and North America to the more collectivistic mindsets in Asia and even the less affluent markets like India and Vietnam. What differs is the size or the extent of the need – for example, the assertive need or a need to stand out is greater in the more developed markets, while the developing markets are more about conformity. Understanding markets on this basis allows the marketer to compare two seemingly divergent sets of consumers and decide which need is large enough across markets and can be targeted with a global brand.

### Food and the Soul

Before placing food on the IMPLICIT model, let us briefly explore the psychology of food and drink from an evolutionary perspective. This will provide an appreciation of the meaning of food & drink at the different stages in man's evolution and contribute to explaining the behavioral strategies used in the present.

Homo sapiens as a species have existed for about a quarter of a million years. From a biological perspective, this is a very short period – only a moment in time, since the beginning of life. For example, reptiles have existed for over 300 million years and even an unsuccessful species like dinosaurs survived for 50 million years. Man is therefore still very much evolving and what we are, what we do and what drives us to do it are a composite of all the stages of our relatively short evolutionary history.

Even in our own evolutionary history, the world, as we know it has existed for only a fleeting moment in comparison to the Stone Age. In the 250,000 years of existence, as man has transitioned from being a nomad to the technological animal of today, more time has been spent in the hunting / gathering stages. The urban industrialized society is only 3-4 generations old, while 75% of the 250,000 years wares spent as Nomads.

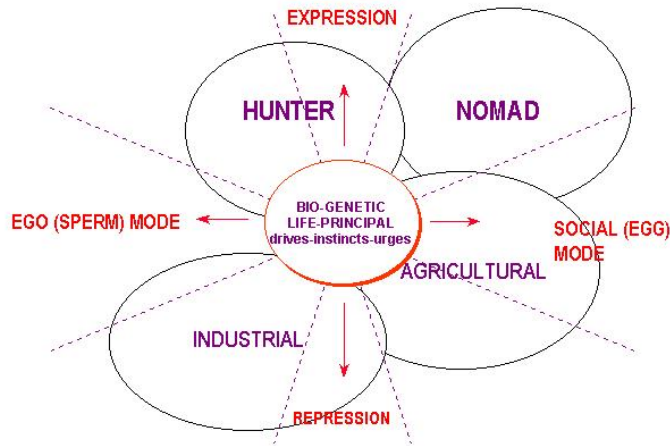
Learnings acquired over each evolutionary stage are an integral part of us and result in more powerful, instinctual reactions than learnings from the modern age. For example, stimuli that are feared are mostly ancient threats: snakes, spiders, heights, storms, thunder, lightning, darkness, strangers, leaving the home range. We rarely develop fears that were harmless in our evolutionary past, such as fears of flowers, leaves, or shallow



water. Even recent potential dangers like electrical outlets and sport utility vehicles are not feared by people, even though these kill far more people than snakes or spiders.

Likewise, the meaning of food has evolved through each of these stages. At each evolutionary stage food played a different role, satisfied different needs. All of these needs exist in some residual form and are visible in our eating and drinking behavior. Let us examine each stage.

## IMPLICIT MODEL OF SOCIETAL EVOLUTION



**The Nomadic Society** – This was tribal living, where group affiliation offered security and survival. An expressive society, where the alpha male led the tribe and everything was shared; there was no concept of ownership. Living followed the basic rules of nature – inter-individual male competition and female choice. The needs were basic – survival and procreation. Food in the nomadic society equaled internal group harmony and physical warmth. On the Implicit model, nomadic society gets positioned on the top right space (Affiliative and expressive).

**The Hunting Society** – For reasons still debated, yield from the land ran out and man was forced to hunt for food. Hunting required male co-operation – the first move away from natural instinctive behavior and the beginnings of repression. For men to successfully collaborate, they had to be assured of a woman back home. So monogamy, instead of male competition came into being. And since the physically stronger men got the more desirable women, food needed to stimulate physical energy and vitality – the need for assertive expression. Hunting society is therefore placed on the left part of the implicit space – representing Vitality and Potency (Assertive, expressive).

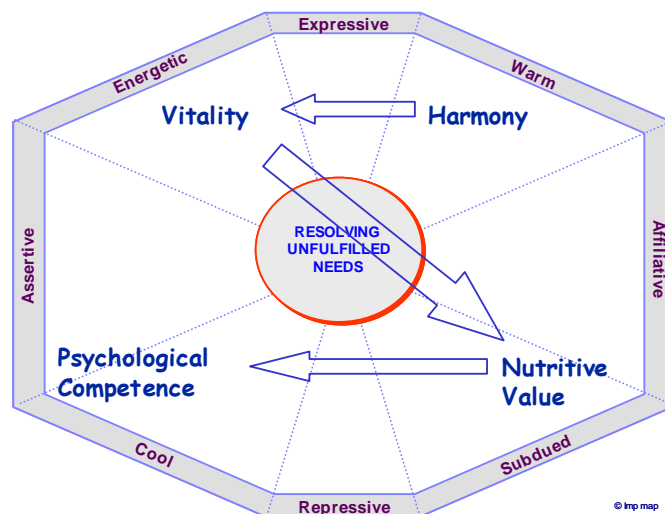
**The Agricultural Society** – With the men away, women began cultivating the land and breeding animals for food. Soon they discovered that this was easier to do than hunting. Agriculture required organization and planning – saving for the next harvest, division of labor, group control, and complex systems – a further move away from natural expressive behavior and therefore increased repression. Food served to provide physical warmth and high nutritive value, as paintings from this period depicting the

human form indicate. Agricultural society is on the right lower half of the map (Affiliative, repressive).

**Urbanized Society** – All agricultural societies tend to overproduce, resulting in the smarter (genetically stronger) members becoming the landowners, the managers and organizers, getting the weaker members to do the actual work. For this to succeed and endure, even more complex systems were needed which defined ownership, authority, norms to be complied with, and the intervening mechanisms to ensure smooth functioning. This is the society, as we know it today – even further away from natural, expressive behavior. Individualism and competition drive behavior requiring strong repression and calculative coolness. Food here is more mind over body, stimulation of psychological competence rather than physical benefits. Urban society is on the lower left of the IMPLICIT space – Assertive and repressive.

The role of food has therefore transitioned from harmony, strength and vitality, nutritive value to a stimulation of psychological competence. And while we are at the urbanized stage today, it does not mean that the primitive needs are no longer relevant.

### The Evolution of the Meaning of Food



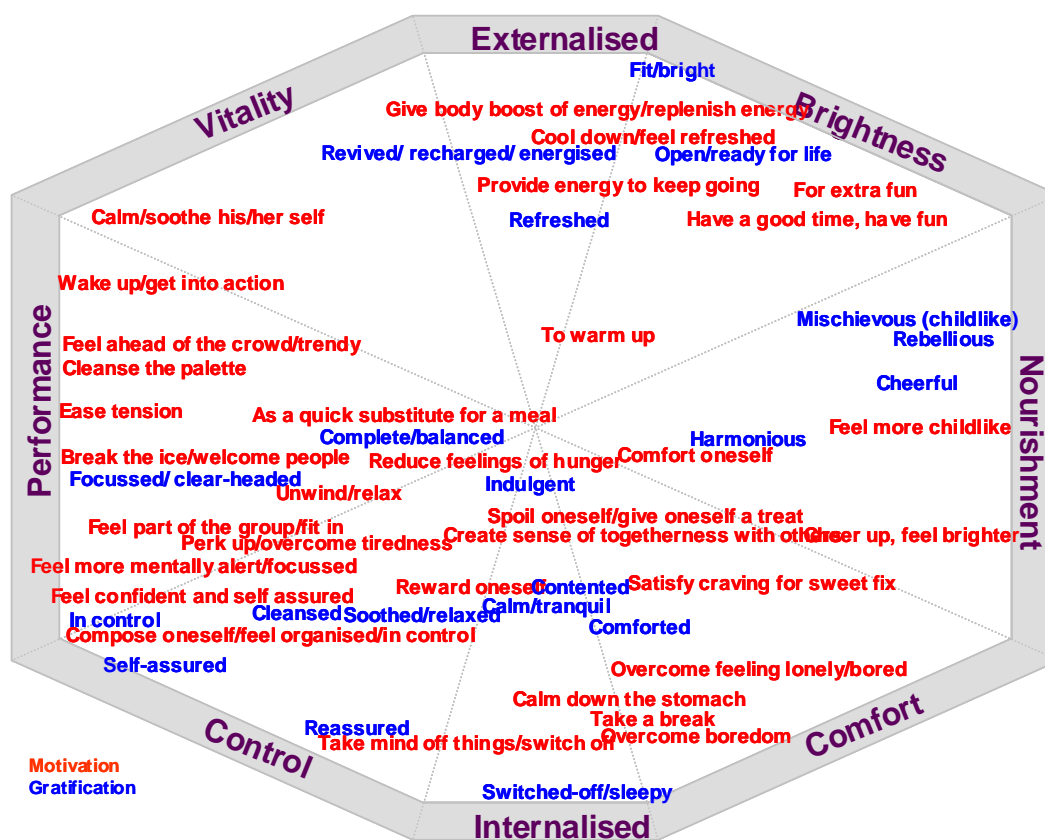
We still eat and drink for many reasons. We consume products that enhance performance and those that bring about a sense of harmony and togetherness. The wide variety of foods and drinks consumed is evidence, as is the different eating and drinking modes (chewing, sucking, nibbling, gulping, swallowing sipping). Depending on the nature of the trigger that activates the desire or compulsion to eat or drink and depending on the internal psychological need of the individual, different behavioural responses can be seen.

## We are What we Eat

We have so far discussed basic needs transcending cultures and geographies, as they operate at an instinctual, compulsive level and have their source in man's evolutionary history, which is also common across all human kind.

We will now examine how this framework can be used to understand consumer behaviour and for development of a global brand strategy. This is based on data from a cross-section of studies in different markets – Australia, India, Middle-East, Belgium and South Africa. Most of these were quantitative studies and therefore there is no subjectivity in the attained positions of the motives and gratifications (which go towards defining the need infrastructure of the market) or in the positions of the products. For the purpose of this paper, I have chosen markets considered to be extremely different – India and Australia.

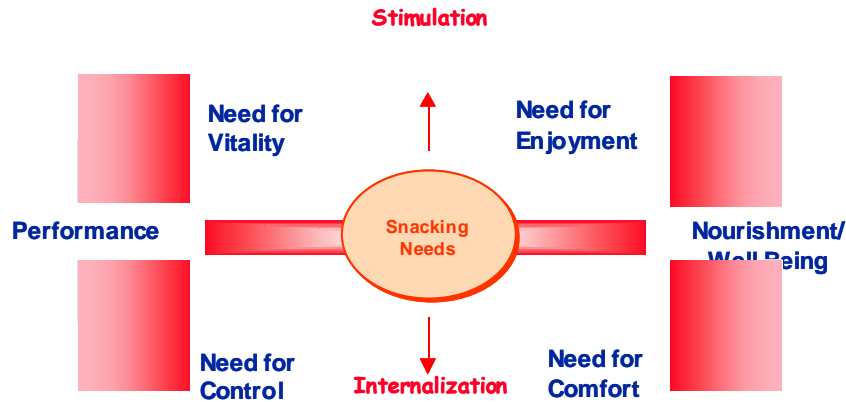
## Australia





## A Global Framework of Eating & Drinking Needs

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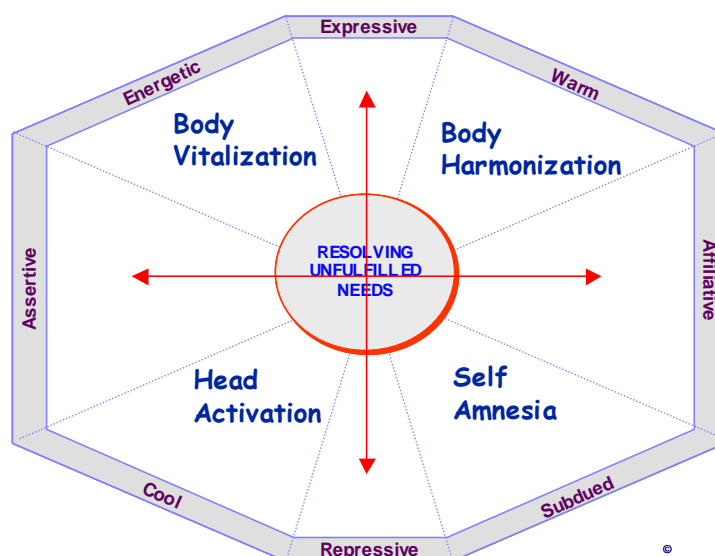


The externalized or expressive response is stimulation of the body. In the assertive mode, this is about strengthening or reinforcing the body to provide physical relief required for better performance. On the affiliative side, it provides warmth and harmony resulting in a sense of well being.

At the other end, anxiety is dealt with repression. Food serves as compensation – literally disconnecting the body from experiencing internal pain or tension. On the assertive side this is about the “head” taking control – food (or drink) serves to activate the head, making one focused and in control to perform better. On switching off the affiliative side, the repressive disconnect results in a catatonic benumbing of the body a switching off or blanking out to recharge – leading to a state of amnesia, regressing to a fetal calmness.

Translating this into triggers (needs) and strategies that brands can use, we have identified 15 triggers that give rise to 4 behavioral strategies. These have been summarized in the following table:

TRIGGER	STRATEGY
1. Re-energizing 2. Loosening Inhibitions 3. Recharge 4. Invigoration	<b>Body Vitalization</b>
5. Calming down 6. Bracing up 7. Self-confidence 8. Feeling in control	<b>Head Activation</b>
9. Withdrawal 10. Cleansing 11. Self purification	<b>Self Amnesia</b>
12. Creating togetherness 13. Encouraging bonding and Social Interaction 14. Expressing well-being 15. Cheering up	<b>Body Harmonization</b>



**Body Vitalization** is a need to re-energize the body, to feel active, lively and refreshed, to overcome sleepiness or lethargy (the morning cup of tea in all markets always get positioned in this zone). Eating or drinking could also facilitate breaking out of inhibitions – doing things that normally one would not do.

For all of these triggers, the need is to feel the effect over the entire body; the desired result is stimulation of internal vitality, strength and energy.

The mouth behavior desired is of total mouth activity and enjoyment, of biting, chewing and nibbling. Drinking is normally in big, quick gulps.

Emotionally, the behavior results in freedom, confidence, living life to the full, taking on the world. Coffee in all markets relative to other beverages is about body vitalization. In the more developed markets, sports drinks are positioned here as well.

**Head Activation** is using food (drink) to cope with anger, stress or anxiety. The desired gratification is a feeling of calm and control. Head activation could also aim to clear the head, to overcome one's doubts and confusion, to generate feelings of being intellectually superior and invincible. Food, which meets this need, generates a sense of lucidity, sharpness, putting the head clearly in control of what's happening.

Mouth behavior in this zone is cracking, rasping, flaking off layers, compulsive biting. Crackers crisps, salads, nuts across all markets are here. The need is not for a satisfaction of the senses, but for mental stimulation. Strong Black coffee is also here.

'Have a break, have a Kit Kat' – is really about this need and unsurprisingly, Kit Kat consistently gets placed here in most markets. Kit Kat's purposive straight lines (in contrast to the rounded, sensorially indulgent chocolates), the opening and breaking ritual, the raspy texture of the wafer inside, it's positioning as an ideal accompaniment to coffee have together built a superbly successful brand. And that too in a need zone that is not typical chocolate territory.

**Self-Amnesia** is about consuming food to help switching off in order to cope with physical or mental exhaustion, or to deal with being annoyed and resentful. A typical occasion could be the end of a long stressful day, or when pressured by conflicting demands on time and attention. This could also be about restoring the body's balance – a need to purify or cleanse oneself when feeling sticky or out of balance. A need to bring about a sense of peace and inner (almost fetal) contentment.

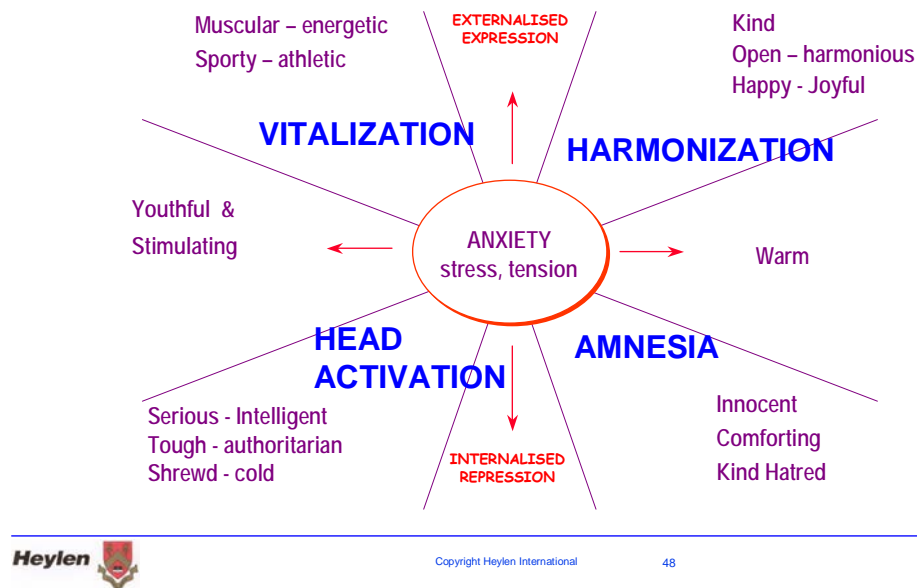
Mouth feel sought is melting, rhythmical sucking or licking. Drinking is slow and controlled – all serving to soothe not only the mouth, but also the entire body.

Products here are those with pure natural associations – full cream milk, thick fresh fruit juices and soft chocolates.

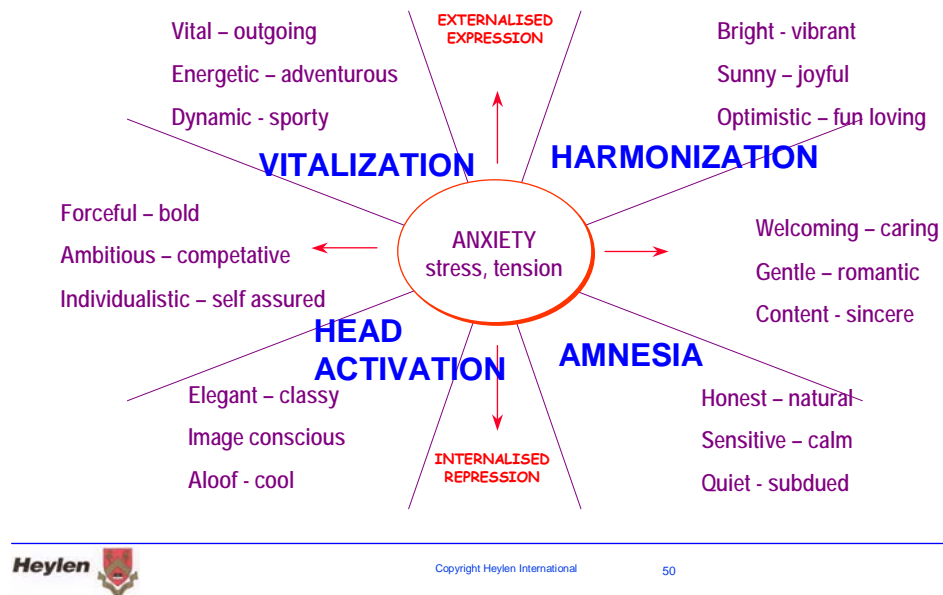
**Body Harmonizing** – The need is to create a bond or a sense of togetherness and food or drink facilitates this. The need could also be to break the ice and facilitate social interaction. The desired feelings are a sense of well being, of enjoyment and cheer, liveliness and brightness, where one feels in complete harmony with oneself and one's environment. Flavored drinks, chocolate drinks, fresh fruit, chocolate chip cookies, muffins meet this need

Once these triggers and fulfillment behavior have been understood both in terms of emotive and physical delivery requirements, it possible to look at alternative strategies for your brand. The charts below describe the personality requirements of each zone.

## IMPLICIT PERSONALITY - FOOD



## IMPLICIT PERSONALITY - DRINKS

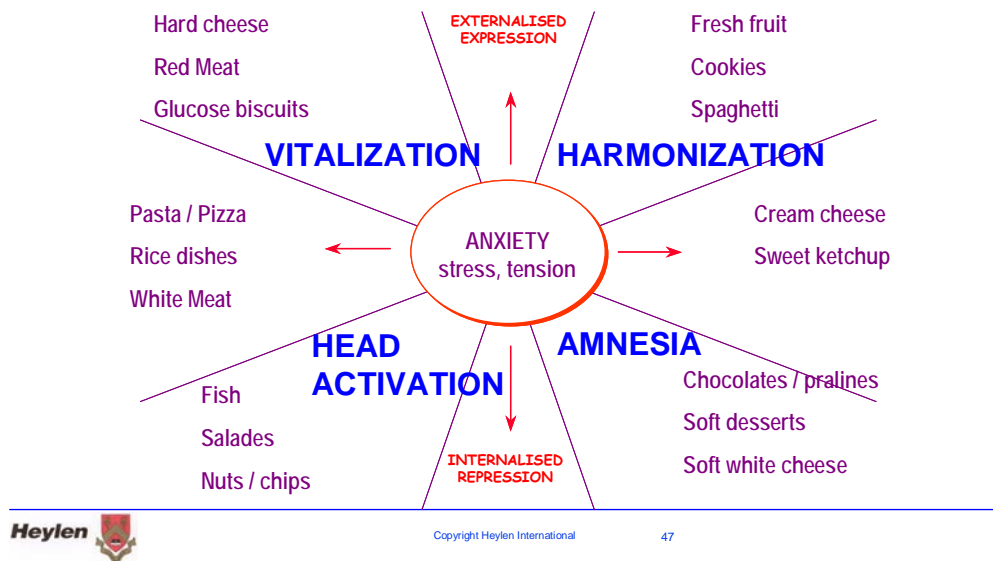


In Body Vitalization, consumers seek a product that conveys a sense of dynamic, extroverted vitality – sports drinks, red meat; glucose biscuits (in India) are here. In contrast Body Harmonization needs a product with an open, warm, welcoming, joyful personality. Fresh fruit, citrus drinks, carbonated sodas always map out here.

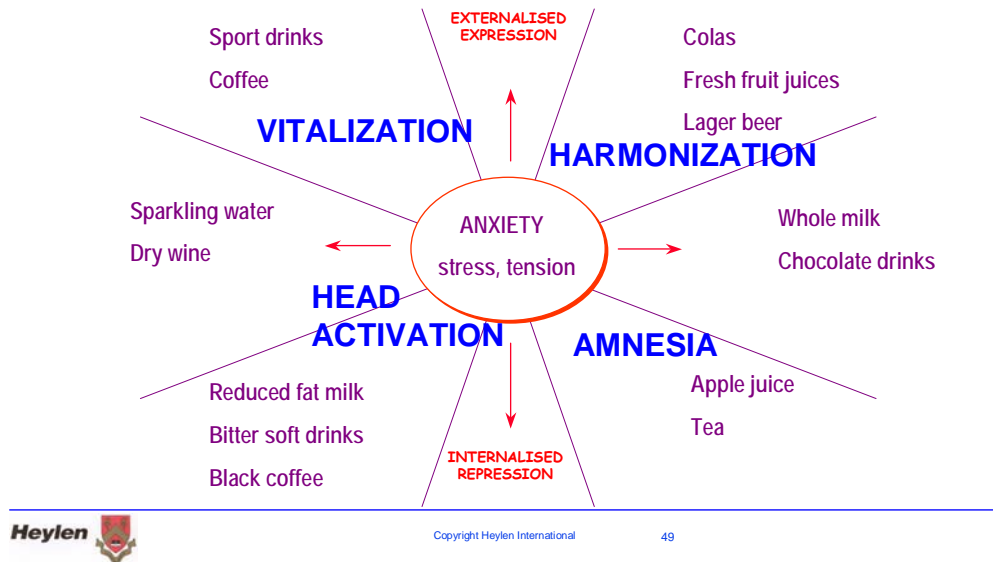
Let us look at where different food and drink products map out:



## PRODUCT POSITIONS - FOOD



## PRODUCT POSITIONS - DRINKS



Apart from the likeness in need structures, there is an uncanny similarity in the products used to meet each need (where products exist across markets). This is because all products have their own implicit personality, over and above their physical characteristics and functional benefits. So coffee is distinct from tea, even though they are normally spoken off as substitutes. They have distinct, different personalities and satisfy different needs.

The implicit personality is drawn from the product appearance, the product physique, the product experience as well as historical and evolutionary associations. Orange for example is one of nature's juiciest fruits and one that excites the sense of taste, smell, touch and sight, providing dramatic symbols of unlimited sunshine, abundance and joyful living. It forms a perfect fit with the Body Harmonization zone – radiant, gay and exuding optimism. Orange drinks unsurprisingly get positioned here, irrespective of whether the consumer is in hot, humid Mumbai or in the always-cold Sweden. Orange juice has a natural association with the morning. The shape of the fruit symbolizes the sun, a life giving and energizing source.

Carbonated drinks convey a sense of bubbling over, spreading far and wide, reaching everyone, every place. Again in most adult studies all over the world, CSDs stand for excitement, energy, friendship and coming together.

### **United We Dine**

Studying successful brands will more than likely reveal a perfect fit between the implicit personality of the product and the need they target. Most of these successes are a result of their creators' instinctual understanding of human desires. With the Heylen Implicit model, we now have a means to objectively doing this - mapping, evaluating, segmenting and measuring the extent of different need states in all markets, consumer groups and categories.

What does this imply? By going beneath the conscious, rational surface and penetrating the unconscious, instinctive dimensions of consumer behavior, we reach consumer needs that are more similar than dissimilar across different markets. This allows them to be mapped on the Implicit space, which is constant for all humankind. It does not change with gender, race, geography and age or even over time. And because the Implicit space is about needs, changes in the market (introduction of new brands or products) do not alter the IMP space either. This allows for comparison over time, analysis of how market activity has impacted brand perceptions and positions and how the brand landscape is changing.

Most marketing in the present is about bridging what is perceived as the global and the local divide. What we are saying in this paper is that the divide is only superficial. The key to global extension of categories and brands lies in understanding and fulfilling basic instincts.

**Acknowledgement & Bibliography**

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2. Rigas Haribilas, Director, TNS Group for his support and insightful guidance.

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