

# MSC Consumer Studies Programme (Concept)

## 1. Profile of the programme

Why do consumers behave the way they do? What are their needs, desires and practices? How does this relate to society, where health and sustainability are seen as increasingly important? Consumer Studies offers a unique approach to study consumers in an ever changing society. This two-year program provides you the skills to analyse consumers making choices, acquiring products and services, using these products and services and disposing of them. You will also learn to constructively engage with emerging trends in our society that challenge and transform the roles of consumers and consumption. You look at the consumer as an individual, part of a household or a member of society. You understand how consumers take rational and emotional decisions, in the short and the long-run. To understand consumers in all their complexity you learn to combine insights from sociology, economics, psychology, product design, communication, lifestyle and consumer behaviour in an interdisciplinary perspective. In addition, the unique Wageningen collaborations across the agriculture, environment and food domains enable you to learn how to collaborate in teams that combine knowledge from both social and natural sciences. The consumer centered approach is unique and incomparable to other programmes. Graduates in Consumer Studies often find employment in businesses, NGO or governmental advisory roles or research and education.

## 2. Unique selling points

- Understanding consumers to improve quality of life is central to our programme.
- We provide insights from the different perspectives of lifestyles, consumer behaviour, product design, economics, communication science.
- You study consumers in contexts relevant to the life sciences domain, integrating insights from a range of natural sciences such as food technology.
- The two-year program offers a combination of in-depth theoretical and academic insights and skills, and the practical application of these in interdisciplinary assignments in the first year. This will culminate in an internship and academic thesis in the second year.
- Consumer studies prepares professionals to apply a consumer centered view in business, governmental and non-governmental organizations, and research.

## 3. WU-BSc-programmes with unconditional admission

Students from the WUR BSc programmes BBC and BGM have unconditional admission to this MSc programme.

## 4. Main target groups next to unconditionally admitted students

Within WUR: Bachelor Tourism; Bachelor Health and Nutrition; Bachelor Communication for Life Sciences; Bachelor Food Technology and who have taken courses on consumer science during their BSc or followed a relevant premaster.

From (inter)national research and applied science universities: BSc programme in psychology, sociology, economics, communication science, marketing, consumer behaviour, product design, agricultural and food sciences and who have taken courses on (agri)businesses during their BSc or followed a relevant premaster.

## 5. Admission requirements for students not unconditionally admissible

- a. At least 20 credits of consumer related courses during the BSc, of which at least 10 ECTS in consumer behaviour, psychology, sociology, and/or behavioural economics.
- b. At least 10 ECTS in research methods that include data and qualitative and/or quantitative analysis techniques.
- c. A motivation letter in which you explain how the completion of this academic program will help your personal and academic/professional development.
- d. A GPA for the BSc study programme of at least 70% of the maximum scale.
- e. Fluency in English, both written and spoken.

## 6. Information on the five specialization courses

The specialization enables students to analyze the role and actions of consumers with the help of different scientific approaches through a sequence of five courses. The first course introduces different paradigms of consumer research and illustrates how these open up distinct perspectives on consumer situations. With the knowledge of this multi-perspectivity, students will then explore in course 2 how internal mechanisms and course 3 how external trends influence consumer actions. In the fourth course the strands are integrated when students theoretically and conceptually work on a consumer problem of their own choice, for which they then advance the necessary skills by choosing the most relevant methodological in-depth course as fifth course.

### 1. The consumer scientist of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. (6 ECTS, new course, compulsory period 1)

The main contribution of this course is that students are made aware of alternative positions that can be taken and learn to consciously and critically think about how to fulfil their role and responsibility as consumer scientist. This course discusses with the student cohort the different roles and responsibility of a consumer scientist in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We discuss the representative role of the consumer scientists and how they can play a role in increasing consumer's quality of life by supporting well-being of consumers while aligning this with the major challenges of this time: sustainability and health. We discuss the role that consumer scientists can have in business, government, non-governmental organizations and research to improve quality of life for individual consumers, but also society as a whole. Alumni and professionals will give guest lectures and/or a field trip to a consumer studies department will be organized (e.g. Unilever). Students are challenged to think and find their own position in the ethical decisions a consumer scientists cannot avoid when playing their role in society. Students will also explore what paradigmatic approach to science best fits which types of consumer science and how this philosophy of science relates to the choice of research methods used to frame and influence outcomes.

### 2. Sensory perception and consumer preferences (6 ECTS, based on existing course MCB30806, compulsory, period 2)

The main contribution of this course is to learn the students how the design decision in physical product development influence consumer perceptions and preferences. The human senses are the consumer's window to the world. This course teaches how sensory perception drives and affects consumer behaviour in the market place and how technology applications can be embedded in marketing offerings (products, services and environments) to optimize the consumer's experience. The course is an interdisciplinary course offered to both

this consumer science programme and as restricted optional for MFT, MFQ, MNH. Lecturers from the social and natural sciences contribute to this interdisciplinary course.

**3. Consumer, technology and innovation** (6 ECTS, based on existing course YSS31806, compulsory, period 2)

The main contribution of this course is to learn the students how to place technical and social innovations they as consumer scientists will be involved in, in the larger context of grand challenges of the times. This course considers consumers, technology and innovation in relation to the 'grand challenges' of our times, such as climate change, public health, resource depletion, and food security. It explores a number of key questions: how does consumption relate to technology and innovation in the context of the grand challenges? Is innovation inherently good? Do innovations have unforeseen consequences? And what causes new technologies or other innovations to succeed or fail? In addressing these and other questions, the course explores the interfaces between consumer, technology and innovation.

**4. Advanced consumer studies** (6 ECTS, new course, compulsory, period 5).

The main contribution of this course is that it shows the student how to translate a practical problem into abstract terms, to find the relevant generic literature from those and synthesize this in a conceptual approach to deal with the problem. In this course students have to be aware of the normative choices they make (related to ethical and philosophy of science) in doing so. They then intensively search for relevant high-level literature, evaluating those in relation to the paradigmatic choices for their own and the paper's abstraction and to creatively synthesize the findings in a conceptual framework.

**5. RO cluster** (period 6):

**Quantitative approaches for consumer studies** (6 ECTS, new course, RO)

This course will discuss the underlying paradigms in relation to a range of advanced data collection methods for quantitative experiments and surveys. It will provide students with the advanced inferential statistical analysis methods needed to analyze such data. These will (most likely) include moderation and mediation, repeated measures and non-parametric technique to analyze choice data. Students deepen their knowledge through an assignment where they choose a specific technique in relation to research questions they have (either from the previous course or otherwise) and outline a detailed data collection and analysis strategy.

**Qualitative approaches for consumer studies** (6 ECTS, new course, RO)

This course will discuss the underlying paradigms in relation to a range of advanced data collection methods for qualitative observations, interviews and focus groups and a number of advanced qualitative methods. Students deepen their knowledge through an assignment where they choose a specific technique in relation to research questions they have (either from the previous course or otherwise) and outline a detailed data collection and analysis strategy.

## 7. Chair groups that offer a major thesis in this programme

Consumption and Healthy Lifestyles (CHL), Communication (COM), Food Quality and Design (FQD), Marketing and Consumer Behaviour (MCB), and Urban Economics (UEC)