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OVERVIEW OF CONSUMER CULTURE THEORY:

DEVELOPMENT, CRITIQUE, APPLICATION & PROSPECTS

****To be published in Foundations and Trends in Marketing. ****

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Consumer culture theory focuses on explaining substantive issues emanating from the domain of consumption, which may be characterized briefly as the acquisition, use, and disposition of commercially circulated products, services, knowledge, images, and experiences by groups and individual actors. Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) is an umbrella term that refers to a variety of socio-cultural approaches to consumer behavior and market research (Arnould and Thompson 2005). CCT is the logical development of a cultural turn (Sherry 1990) in consumption studies that began to unfold in the 1980s, although its roots go back further (Tadajewski 2006). In this paper, First, we elaborate on the nature of Consumer Culture Theory. Second, a number of different approaches in CCT emerged sequentially but remain evident in subsequent CCT work. Thus, we address different approaches in CCT, including the humanistic/romantic approach, the social constructivist move and the postmodern turn. Third, we look at domains of inquiry in CCT, identifying important streams including identity work, marketplace cultures, the socio-historic patterning of consumption, an ideological turn, and critiques of CCT. Fourth, we identify some methodological issues and innovations that CCT

work has addressed, including issues of data collection, interpretation, around validity and verification. We also evoke work on alternative modes of representing research. Fifth, we identify how CCT research has addressed managerial and strategic issues, such as through brand communities, branding, and how consumers shape market systems. Finally, we discuss tendencies that are emerging in CCT.

Introduction

CCT provides academics and practitioners a brand for research interested in the “real behavior of real consumers” (Wells 1991, iii). It tries to put “the joy of discovery back into” such research,” yet adopts a “seriousness of purpose” (Ibid). Its aim is to unravel questions of how and why exchange and consumption happens in particular ways; the implications of marketplace production, exchange, and consumption for society and culture; and, to critique and offer solutions to the dilemmas imposed by global consumer culture. Naming these phenomena as a group helps academics and practitioners to recognize research that belong to this diverse body of work, and to identify tendencies within the body of work, which facilitates the use of insights that stem from this work in theory development, critique, and practical action.

In 2005, Arnould and Thompson proposed this “disciplinary brand” they called Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) to envelop the “flurry of research addressing the sociocultural, experiential, symbolic, and ideological aspects of consumption” (Arnould and Thompson 2005, 868). Arnould and Thompson (2005) focused on describing a set of concepts and research domains used to understand consumption better. The also endeavored to dispel myths that obstructed the legitimacy of the so-called “weird science” of interpretive consumer research

(Bradshaw and Brown 2008, p. 1400). In 2018, an edited introductory text and a handbook appeared that summarize many leading tendencies in this approach to consumer research (Arnould and Thompson 2018; Kravets, Maclaren, Miles and Venkatesh 2018).

According to the 2005 formulation, consumer culture theory is a field of inquiry that seeks to unravel the complexities of consumer culture. The CCT view of culture differs dramatically from the conventional consumer research representation of culture as a fairly homogenous system of collectively shared meanings, ways of life, and unifying values shared by a member of society (e.g., Americans share this kind of culture; Japanese share that kind of culture). In CCT, consumer culture refers to what consumers do and believe rather than an attribute of character. Similarly, “being a consumer” is an identity intrinsic to market capitalism, our dominant global economic system, and the two evolve and change in tandem. CCT explores the heterogeneous distribution of meanings and the multiplicity of overlapping cultural groupings that exist within the broader socio-historical frame of globalization and market capitalism. Further, Arnould and Thompson (2005) emphasize “the dynamics of fragmentation, plurality, fluidity, and the intermingling (or hybridization) of consumption traditions and ways of life” (Arnould and Thompson 2005, 869).

From a CCT standpoint, consumer culture is as a dynamic network of boundary spanning material, economic, symbolic, and social relationships or connections.. Don Slater (1997) proposes that consumer culture denotes a socio-economic arrangement in which markets either directly or indirectly mediate the relationships between lived experiences, that is, between meaningful ways of life and the symbolic and material resources on which they depend. According to Kilbourne, Beckman and Thelen (2002), central to the dominant worldview paradigm in Western economies is an ideology of consumption, a faith in technology to avert environmental destruction, support for liberal democracy, defense of private property ownership,

free markets and limited government intervention in the economy (Kilbourne, McDonagh and Prothero 2002). Thus, the consumption of market-made commodities and desire-inducing commercialized symbols is central to consumer culture (Slater 1997). Kilbourne et al. (1997) refer to this as an ideology of consumption, meaning that people view their quality of life in terms of their ability to consume ever-greater quantities of goods. In other words, people are materialistic in orientation. In macro-level terms, the perpetuation and reproduction of this system is highly dependent upon the exercise of what society represents as personal choice in the private sphere of everyday life. That is, the choice to choose among commercialized offerings drives the reproduction of consumer culture and market capitalism. The term consumer culture also conceptualizes an interconnected system of commercially produced images, texts, and objects that groups use—through the construction of overlapping and even conflicting consumption practices, identities, and meanings—to make collective sense of their environments and to anchor and orient their members' experiences and lives.

Today, CCT scholars focus on the many ways to amend or extend the set of concepts and domains Arnould and Thompson (2005) outlined (Kravets, et al. 2018). They use these concepts to understand the global culture of consumption as mediated by market systems rather than pursuing the “epistemic goal of making incremental contributions to a system of verified propositions” weakly linked to what living consumers think and do (Arnould and Thompson 2007, 5). Moreover, CCT is not a unified theory. Instead, it is a continuously evolving perspective on consumer society and markets that shapes cultural life. CCT offers a way of assessing consumption from particular socio-cultural systems embedded in globalization and market capitalism (Joy and Li 2012).

The dominant paradigmatic position of consumer research in marketing remains some variant of positivism, wedded to a logic of prediction (e.g., Calder and Tybout 1987; Kupfer, vor

der Holte, Kübler and Hennig-Thurau 2018). But in the early 1980s an alternative mode of interpretive research emerged (Shankar and Patterson 2001; Fitchett et al. 2014; Bradshaw and Brown 2008; Askegaard and Linnet 2011; Arnould, Thompson and Giesler 2013; Levy 2005), Consequently, in the 1980s, research paradigm battles concerning the nature and breadth of consumer research developed. These debates produced “many nebulous epithets characterizing” CCT as a research tradition (Arnould and Thompson 2005, p. 868-869). These historical markers include “relativist, post-positivist, interpretivist, humanistic, naturalistic, [and] postmodern” labels (Arnould and Thompson 2005, p. 868). While Tadjewski (2006, p. 449) argues that “the overriding goal of science is not, in fact, prediction, but instead, understanding” and that prediction “is simply the test of understanding and the control over any consumer behaviors that result is the reward for the systematic researcher,” (Ibid) Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) has in fact long eschewed specific epistemological commitments. However, just as biologists study fish in a way distinct from the approach of fisher folk, CCT research prioritizes the goal of ‘understanding’ consumption phenomena in their cultural context. That is to say CCT takes the interpretive perspective of biologists rather than the predictive perspective of fisher folk. Using a phenomenological approach, for example, consumer researchers “describe experience as it emerges in some context(s)” (Thompson et al. 1989, 135), recognizing that consumer experiences are always informed by socio-cultural and historic contexts. In the classic CCT approach pioneered in the Consumer Behavior Odyssey (Belk 1991), interpretive claims are grounded in real world consumer narrative and observation in situ that aims systematically to reveal the layers of cultural meaning that motivate and frame consumer behavior. Authors then compare their novel theoretical insights with existing frameworks and offer alternative ways of looking at the world that sometimes align with existing interpretive frames and sometimes extend or contest them.

Thus, in opposition to approaches aimed narrowly at predicting consumer or market behavior or simply improving theoretical models, CCT opens the doors to new insights that have helped develop the field of consumer research. In an analysis of the *Journal of Consumer Research* over the last 40 years, Wang et al. (2015) find that CCT articles are among the top cited contributors to the journal. They write, “Consumer culture research has experienced considerable growth since the 1980s and seems poised to flourish in the future” (Wang et al. 2015, 12). Consistent with the ideas expressed by Wang et al. (2015), MacInnis and Folkes (2010) highlight the success of Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) and its contributions by identifying it as a sub-discipline of consumer behavior. They write that the consumer behavior “expand[s] its intellectual horizons” by “adjoining disciplines” like CCT with more traditional sub-disciplines like economics and psychology (MacInnes and Folkes 2010, 907). That is, while consumer behavior in general draws from economics and psychology, CCT reproduces the original disciplinary eclecticism in consumer research that Holbrook (1987) celebrated. Thus, CCT emerged as a heterogeneous ensemble of perspectives that develop through a system of relations, offering disparate, but complementary unique theoretical views on the culture of consumption.

Arnould and Thompson (2005) outlined four analytical domains that can organize CCT scholars’ theoretical contributions; although nearly 20 years later, the field has evolved and hybridized (Arnould and Thompson 2018). These include work at the individual level, which explores the shaping of consumer identity projects; at the group level, which examines the influence of the marketplace on lived culture and cultural resources; at the societal level, which investigates the intersection of social categories, social organization and consumption; and, at the macro level, which addresses consumers’ strategies of interpreting mass mediated marketplace ideologies and discourses. Originally, these levels were outlined as domains of theoretical

contribution (Arnould and Thompson 2005), however, they now seem better approached as research directions, groupings of particular focus or tendencies since “CCT cannot be regarded as a unified system of theoretical propositions” (Arnould and Thompson 2007, 6).

Some Tendencies in CCT

The Humanistic/Romantic Move

The 1980s marks a period when interpretive consumer research offered an “alternative to information-processing theories, which reduced the complexity and indeterminacy of consumer experience to the mechanistic outputs of mental structures and soft-wired decision algorithms” (Thompson, Arnould and Giesler 2013, 155). This alternative emerged as a discursive system that took shape in an epistemic moment when cultural approaches emerged from within the marketing and consumer behavior fields and when oppositional contrasts to research steeped in positivistic, realist, and managerialist expectations primarily defined the orientation towards cultural approaches (Belk 1987; Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Sherry 1990). The alternate discursive system drew heavily from humanistic social psychology (Rogers 1961). This body of research,

drew from the vernacular of humanistic social psychology and its romanticising veneration of the particular over the abstract; the artistic over the technical; the emotional and expressive over the rational and utilitarian [...]; and the anti-structure of liminality over the structure relations of conventional marketplace” (Thompson, Arnould and Giesler 2013, p. 155).

Sociologist Colin Campbell (1987) provided the socio-historical account of the Romantic roots of modern consumerism. Moreover, one of the Ulster conferences organized by Stephen Brown foregrounded these Romantic dimensions in contemporary consumerism (Brown, Doherty, and

Clark 1998; see also Brown, Bell and Carson 1996). Accordingly, Humanistic/Romantic CCT discourses constructed consumers as emotional, creative, and self-directed individuals seeking authenticity, deep meaning, and self-actualizing experiences (Belk 1988). This formulation not only contrasted with the rational, information processing view that reigned, and still predominates, in marketing and consumer research, it also directly challenged the conception of the consumer as a passive, ideological dupe that stemmed from scholarship associated with the Frankfurt School that had currency in cultural studies (Ewen 2008/1976; Horkheimer and Adorno 2002/1947). While generally acknowledging the social and cultural aspects of consumption, these humanistic discourses still constituted the consumer as an atomized individual whose inner and extendable self stands athwart socio-cultural background influences.

Perhaps the best-known research exercise that illustrates the Humanist/Romantic move was the Consumer Behavior Odyssey, which took place in the summer of 1986. Tadajewski (2006), Bradshaw and Brown (2007), Fitchett, Patsiaoras, and Davies (2014) identify the contributions of the Consumer Behavior Odyssey as the Romantic mythic origin point of CCT. On the Consumer Behavior Odyssey, a group of researchers piled into a mobile home and travelled across the United States visiting swap meets, roadside attractions, flea markets, homeless shelters, farms and other unknown nooks and crannies of consumer culture. Their goal was to meet consumer culture where it was happening and to gain a deep understanding of the form, places and perspectives of consumer experience. To do that they adopted anthropological methods, removing themselves from their daily lives to glimpse new vistas of consumption and consumer experience. The researchers studied the consumption they encountered through interviews, participant observation, observation, and compiled copious notes, pictures, videos, and memos of their ideas. The data gathered through researchers' experiences on the Consumer Behavior Odyssey led to significant theoretical and methodological contributions (discussed

below)(Belk 1987; Belk et al. 1989; Belk et al. 1988; Wallendorf and Belk 1989). These included insights into the different ways consumers engage with consumption practices, approach shopping, and dispose of precious possessions, identifying examples of sacred vs. profane consumption experiences, lateral consumer-to-consumer marketing tactics, and experiences of possession attachment (Belk et al. 1989). The Consumer Behavior Odyssey and resulting papers catalysed the interpretive turn in consumer research. Thus, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, researchers produced a multitude of papers on a variety of then novel, consumer contexts such as domestic consumption rituals (Wallendorf and Arnould 1991; gifting (Sherry 1983; Sherry 1990; Sherry, McGrath and Levy 1993), swap meets and farmers markets (Belk, Sherry and Wallendorf 1988; Belk, Wallendorf and Sherry 1989; McGrath, Sherry and Heisley 1993). Research explored not just the things consumers buy, but how they buy, how they imbue items with meaning, and what they do with products over time.

Holbrook and Hirschman's (1982) work marks an important inflection point in the negotiation between positivistic and interpretive forms of research. A central contribution of their work is showing that consumption is not a dry outcome of rational decision-making but can be primarily about "the pursuit of fantasies, fun and feelings" (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982, p. 132). The experiential view that echoes Walter Benjamin's (1999/1935) ground breaking discussion of urban, leisure window-shopping as a quintessential modern pleasure focuses on the "symbolic, hedonic, and aesthetic nature" of consumption (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982, p. 132). Their companion piece (Hirschman and Holbrook 1982) on hedonic consumption along with work by Hirschman (1994) and Holbrook (1987; Holbrook and Huber 1979; Holbrook, Chestnut, Oliva and Greenleaf 1984; Havlena and Holbrook 1986) builds on social psychology and made room for a more holistic theory of consumer behavior. Holbrook (1987) even experimented with the term *consummation*, to define consumption as "a goal achieved, a need is

fulfilled, or a want is satisfied” (Holbrook 1987, p. 128). The experiential turn Holbrook and Hirschman championed spawned a subfield that both unpacks consumers’ experiences and experiential goals (Carù and Cova 2007; Higgins and Hamilton 2018; Scott, Cayla and Cova 2017, Sherry and Joy 2003), and also the co-creation of experiences between organizations and consumers (Hartmann, Wiertz and Arnould 2015; Jaakkola, Helkkula and Aarikka-Stenroos 2015; Minkiewicz, Evans and Birdsen 2014; Wattanasuwan and Elliott 1999).

The Humanist/Romantic tendency also built on an axiological premise that “eschewed managerial relevance as a source of disciplinary importance and legitimacy. This critical perspective enabled CCT researchers to claim philosophical and intellectual kinship with the base disciplines of political economy, sociology and anthropology that had historically viewed the marketing profession with skepticism, distrust, and even intellectual disdain” (Thompson, Arnould and Giesler 2013, p. 156; Firat, Dholakia and Bagozzi 1987; Hirschman 1986; Holbrook 1985). As we discuss below, this was not a death march for managerial relevance in CCT, rather managerial relevance re-emerges in ways that align with CCT to both critique and complement mainstream approaches.

The Social Constructivist Move

As the Romantic/Humanistic discursive system gained greater visibility and legitimacy in the consumer research field, some researchers began to criticize its concessions to positivistic approaches to research credibility, and its ontological reproduction of subjectivist versus objectivist dualisms (Firat and Venkatesh 1995; Hirschman 1993; Thompson 2002; Murray and Ozanne 1991). In a related move, consumer culture researchers, now less constrained by demands for epistemological justification, began to draw more inspiration from the narrative turn

in social science research (Clifford and Marcus 1986), such as Geertzian styled ethnographies (Celsi et al 1993; Penaloza 1991; Arnould and Price 1993; Schouten and McAlexander 1995), hermeneutics (Arnold and Fischer 1994; Thompson, Pollio and Locander 1994) and reader response theory (Mick and Buhl 1991; Scott 1994). All of these approaches placed interpretation, researcher reflexivity, and narrative at the center of the research enterprise. These parallel developments coalesced into a new discursive system—social constructivist CCT—which portrays consumers as culturally constituted actors whose experiences and identity projects are not expressions of an essential self, but rather are constructed from webs of socio-cultural meanings (Stern, Thompson and Arnould 1998). Moreover, in this perspective the researcher abandons an omniscient role, recognizing that all research reflects a point of view. All research is expressive of institutional interests (Woolgar 1992). This formulation of consumers as creative producers of identity is presaged in Schouten's (1991) paper on symbolic self-completion through aesthetic plastic surgery, and in Gainer and Fischer's (1991) study of home shopping. It is evident in research on girl's consumption practices at the mall (Haytko and Baker 2004), and ultimately in the concept that consumer culture fosters the proliferation of multiple consuming selves (Bahl and Milne 2007; Goulding, Shankar and Elliott 2002; Schau, Gilly and Wolfinbarger 2009).

The social constructivist turn also marked a turn toward a more critical engagement with, rather than a rebellious rejection of, all things marketing and commercial. In other words, some researchers recognized that consumer projects did not depend upon commercial resources and contexts for want of non-commercial alternatives, rather, consumer projects are in fact deeply embedded in commercial relationships. Peñaloza and Gilly's (1999) work that took retail marketers' socializing role in consumer acculturation seriously was pivotal in marking this change. Schouten, McAlexander and Fournier's ethnographic consulting work with Harley

Davidson and later with Jeep (Fournier and Lee 2009; McAlexander, Schouten and Koenig 2002) also signaled how CCT had embraced the complexity of culture and commercialism in personal projects, and indeed, how that was being communicated to brand managers in culturally nuanced ways (see below for more on managerial work).

The Postmodern Turn

The postmodern turn in consumer culture theory is based on critiques of the modernist social order that emerged towards the end of the 17th century and reached its apotheosis in the mid-20th century. Critics of modernity profiled the modern social order and social thought in terms of a number of historically particular characteristics (Best and Kellner 1991; Bauman 1997; Lyotard 1984). Modernity is based on a belief in the rule of reason and the establishment of rational order in social institutions (Weber 2009/1997). It accompanies the rise of scientific thought and the belief in material progress through the application of scientific technologies. Realistic representation in art and science is characteristic. The florescence of industrial capitalism, and the separation of the sphere of production, which is controlled by publicly owned institutions, from the sphere of consumption, which is domestic and private are central features (Featherstone 1991; Firat and Venkatesh 1995; Campbell 1987; Weber 2009/1930). Many thoughtful people agree recent historical events have called these premises into question. Conventional consumer research tends to hang on to these premises, as postmodern consumer research does not.

The postmodern turn had a particularly profound and liberating effect on consumer research in the UK and Europe (Cova, Maclaran and Bradshaw 2013). Postmodern theorists argue that marketing institutions are the grounds where conscious meaning making and

representation processes occur, and given the postmodern consciousness that has become skeptical of the modern project, it is these processes that construct the realities we live (Cova, Maclaran and Bradshaw 2013; Firat, Sherry and Venkatesh 1994). Postmodernists suggest that,

“we [consumers] rejoice in the ephemerality, contingency and diversity of the physical and human worlds as we experience them, be comfortable in the absence of certainty, learn to live without definitive explanations and recognize that the objectives of the Enlightenment project are utopian and unattainable” (Brown 1993, p.22).

Postmodernity entails a blurring between production and consumption as consumers take on new kinds of engagement with the market in what is termed “prosumption” (Ritzer and Jurgenenson 2010). This term attempts to erase the duality between production and consumption by looking at the ways that consumers produce value and meaning for companies, often without direct compensation (Arsel 2015; Cova, Pace and Skålén 2015). The postmodern CCT research tendency also follows Baudrillard (1975, 1981) in emphasizing a shift in the economy from a productive to a reproductive order in which simulations and reproductions increasingly constitute the world. Distinctions between the real and appearance are erased. Consumer markets produce need as a condition of their own continuity; useful products are replaced by waste and pollution. In addition, a plurality of narratives replace the modernist belief in scientific realism (the post-truth world). Universalism is replaced by localism. Social relations become saturated with shifting cultural meanings such that conventional social categories like social class, gender, or ethnicity lose their descriptive value. Consequently, consumer identity fractures and individual consumers often pursue multiple identity projects. In addition, consumption seems to address a variety of projects that have nothing to do with rational choice. In this tendency, authors have looked at consumer fantasy, the ritual impulse, and the reformulation of social roles, for example, via the enactment of consumer fantasies in the context of Mountain Men rendezvous (Belk and Costa 1998), which mythologize the fur trapping communities of the early 19th century in North America, for example. In the same vein, scholars have observed consumer identity

fragmentation in the context of rave culture, the intersection of consumption and gender experimentation in the Goth community (Goulding and Saren 2009; Goulding, Shankar and Elliott 2002), the emergence of hybrid ethnic consumer identities (Harrison, Thomas and Cross 2005), and the monetization of identity expression in Cosplay (Weijo and Seregrina 2017).

In a series of playfully astute articles and books (Brown 1995, 1998; Brown and Turley 1997; Brown, McDonagh and Shultz 2013), Stephen Brown significantly expanded the discursive limits of CCT while infusing the social constructive tradition with a highly refined postmodern sensibility. Along with Stephen Brown, Douglas Brownlie, Christina Goulding, and Maurice Patterson among others have advocated and demonstrated the use of alternative research narrative forms that disrupted the omniscient, objectivist, scientific conventions that continue to frame consumer research (e.g., Schau, Brown and Patterson 2001). This work has opened the door to alternative means of expression in the CCT community (e.g. poetry and film, see below; Sherry and Schouten 2002).

Perhaps the most compelling contribution of the postmodern tendency is the identification of consumer tribes. A consumer tribe is a co-consuming, heterogeneous group (in terms of demography), linked by a shared identity, and capable of taking collective action, often short-lived but intense. Consumer tribes can form around any leisure-based activity, interest, hobby or passion, tailgaters (Bradford and Sherry 2015) or Nutella fans (Cova and Pace 2006), for instance. Presaged in the youth subcultures that emerged in the post-War West (Hebdige 2012/1979; Jenks 2005), Kozinets (2001) was perhaps the first to identify the tribal make-up of the utopian Star Trek fan community. A defining feature of tribes is they produce their own consumer culture for the tribe, often because the cultural resources the tribe wants are not available in the market. These include resources to support rituals that produce linking value, experiences of sociality, a quality of diffuse, ephemeral social aggregation, and *communitas*, a

spiritual connection to others (Turner 1969). The global rave tribe is a well-documented example. The story of rave started in the late 1980s when a group of UK holidaymakers returned from Ibiza, and keen to replicate the ecstatic island clubbing experience, started an underground rave scene utilizing the UK's post-industrialized landscape for secretive, weekend drug and music-fueled rituals. In its early incarnation, participants experienced rave as a respite from high unemployment, and an antidote to Margaret Thatcher's neo-liberalism (Cova and Shankar 2018, 91-92; Goulding, Shankar and Elliott 2002). Following on, Schau, Muniz and Arnould (2009) have described how nine consumer tribes ranging from Jones Soda soft drink enthusiasts to fans of the Soviet era LOMO camera, engage in collective value creation in online and offline contexts. Hartmann, Wiertz and Arnould (2015) showed how a UK based gardening tribe produced outcomes of value to the firm sponsoring the tribe's on line platform.

Domains of Inquiry

Consumer culture theory focuses on explicating substantive issues emanating from the domain of consumption. The basic CCT framework is a heuristic mapping of four clusters of theoretical and practical interests. These common structures of theoretical interest systematically link together studies that manifest diversity in terms of methodological orientations (e.g., ethnography, phenomenology, multiple schools of textual analyses, historical methods, web-based methods). They also combine diverse theoretical traditions (variously drawing from sociology, anthropology, literary criticism, critical theory, and feminist studies to name a few). These four clusters of theoretical and practical interests are discussed in a bit more detail below, followed by a section on critique of CCT.

Identity Work

Consumer identity projects align CCT with the cultural studies focus on identity work and the negotiation of cultural contradictions through the marketplace, as well as the commodification of cultural rituals and emotions. Researchers ask questions like: Why is identity such an issue in consumer culture? How do consumers pursue their identity projects? How do they use commercially circulated products, services, knowledge, images, and experiences to construct identities? What meanings do consumers pursue? How does a sense of selfhood form in market-mediated societies? What problems does globalization of consumer culture pose to individuals in diverse cultural contexts?

The concept of consumer selfhood and later consumer subjectivity developed through the early work on experiential consumption. Russell Belk's (1988) seminal article on possessions and the extended self, sets the stage for conceptualizing the consumer self. This study focuses on the way objects as external vessels get endowed with meaning, and consequently how we, as consumers, "regard possessions as part of ourselves" (Belk 1988, p. 139). Belk (1988) states that possessions both contribute to consumer identity formation and act as reflections of consumers' current identities. He identifies ways that consumers use objects to portray their identities, for example adolescents seeking to differentiate themselves from their families or align themselves with social groups, and old people using possessions as a way to help connect their identities to the past and the future, to help prepare themselves for death. A key contribution of this work contends that possessions are central to how consumers build their identities and how they reflect that sense of self to the world through social interaction (See also, Miller 1987). The author suggests, "Some possessions are more central than others. The possessions central to self may be

visualized in concentric layers around the core self, and will differ over individuals, over time, and over cultures” (Belk 1988, p. 152). Some possessions like the body or mind are more central to the self and express ‘core self,’ while other possessions are less identifiable and express ‘extended self.’ The extended self represents possessions that are beyond direct physical and mental control and the meanings of which the social and cultural environment influences.

Other scholars have also shown the role of objects in helping define individual identity and also the individual’s place in social and historical settings. For example, Wallendorf and Arnould (1988) looked at favorite objects as places where people store personal meanings, including those addressing gender, age, family and culture. O’Guinn and Belk (1989) describe a Christian fundamentalist theme park, where the attendees see consumption of the park experience as both pilgrimage and affirmation of their commitment to their religious identity. They accord items acquired at the theme park (cosmetics, handbags, statuettes) sacred status due to an imagined proximity to the consumers’ deity. Women in Schouten’s (1991) study became empowered through breast enhancement surgery as it gave them a sense of control and efficacy. Through physical reconstruction, consumers in this study reformulated their identities through creative appropriation of marketplace resources. In an influential study, Sherry (1983) adapted the anthropological theory of the gift economy to consumption contexts and in an ego-centered account of reciprocal gift giving, showed that personal identity can be confirmed in presenting gifts to others. Gifting is a market-mediated process in which consumers choose and offer gifts to align the identities of giver and recipients. Fischer and Arnold (1990) showed that gender organizes Christmas gift giving in North America and has distinct consequences for the identities of men and women.

Identity research has sought to build a culturally relative understanding of consumer self-hood. For example, in Bonsu and Belk’s (2002) ethnography of death-ritual consumption in

Asante, Ghana, they show that “existing conceptual frameworks can be challenged and extended based on evidence found in differing cultural contexts” (Bonsu and Belk 2002, p. 41). These authors complement existing identity theory that assumes identity construction stops after death. Instead, the authors find that the dead’s social identities continue to take new form through reciprocal relationship established at funerals between living and the dead. Even in the disposition of a body, consumption practices are engaged through intergenerational exchanges, and the struggle for social capital. The authors thus find that “terror-management theory” is ethnocentric in its account of how people make sense of death. More cross-cultural work of this type is needed.

Some recent scholarship adopts a more conflictual less playful and agentic perspective on identity work. Jafari and Goulding (2008) analyze the different meanings of consumption and consumer identities for young adult Iranians in their home country and, subsequently, in expatriate locales in the UK. In Iran, informants described using consumption as means to resist theocratic restrictions imposed on their identity practices. Participation in Western consumer culture became a risk-laden expression of defiance and liberty (see for instance the recent trend among Iranian women to post “uncovered” selfies or dance on social media). Once ensconced in the UK, however, these immigrant consumers struggled to address the overwhelming array of “free” market choices and the unnerving obligation to construct an “authentic” identity that often conflicted with internalized Iranian moral codes. However, they also used consumption to enact Westernization and thereby ease suspicions that they might be a threat to the civic order. In both settings, these consumers experienced themselves as the subjects of social surveillance. Facing these potentially disempowering conditions, in Iran they sought freedom from theocratic restriction (which could afford a more expressive identity project) through consumption and, in the UK context freedom to live in anonymity, free from suspicion. In another paper, Izberk-

Bilgin (2012) shows how some Turkish consumers construct market-oriented practices that align with their religious ideals. These consumers work on an identity project that promotes a cultural identity that is resistant to Western consumerism by rejecting “infidel” brands. Scaraboto and Fischer (2012) explore the identity work of plus-sized consumers. They examine how plus-sized consumers appropriate the stigmatizing term “fat” to a positive collective identity of “fatshionistas.” These plus-sized consumers forge an identity as fashion-conscious consumers without products to buy. They demand more product options, and indeed, begin to create this new market through entrepreneurship, building institutional alliances, and using social media to promote and celebrate their identities. Thus, CCT projects on identity work are closely aligned with cultural studies, even crossing cultural boundaries, social stigmas, and markets. This work explores how consumption shifts in light of new cultural and social circumstances. It sheds light on how consumers use their interactions with commercially circulated products and services mediated objects and services to build and change their identities and identity projects.

Marketplace Cultures

The interest in marketplace cultures aligns CCT with anthropological studies on material culture (e.g., Miller 2001a, b; 2008, 2010). Research on brand communities for example, highlights the way in which technology and market structures facilitate new forms of communal organization and rituals of solidarity. At the same time, a new generation of studies has explored specific tensions between local and global meanings systems and institutions.

Contemporary social life is a rich, complex, kaleidoscopic mixture of emotional and cultural relations. In the postmodern view, the building blocks of human social life are not found in abstract categories that are applied to the analysis of social life, nor in enduring clusters of

consumption objects associated with static groups. Instead, they are manifest through consumption practices within the multiplicity of market-mediated social groupings that people participate in. Society appears therefore as a network of marketplace cultures, through which people migrate and to which they can experience strong emotional bonds, and share experiences and common passions – moments and spaces of shared identity. At different life stages, some of these market place cultures will be more or less important than others. The advent of the Internet and then the emergence of social media platforms that facilitate consumer-to-consumer interaction have facilitated the proliferation of marketplace cultures. People all over the world are now able to connect with each other and contribute to games, events, campaigns, and other productive cultural practices mediated through the Internet and related social media (Cova and Shankar 2018). In conjunction with globalizing processes, the disruptive uneven global flows of money, people, ideas, and things (Appadurai 1990), historic linkages between culture and geography are profoundly transformed. CCT work in this area helps us identify and make sense of these transformations.

This tendency in CCT work has identified how consumption communities organized around specific iconic brands such as Harley-Davidson and Apple provide a sense of belonging (Muniz and O’Guinn 2002), shared meaning and transcendent experiences (Belk and Tumbat 2005; Muniz and Schau 2005; Schouten, McAlexander, and Koenig 2007), moral support and affirmation as well as technical support and socialization (Schouten and McAlexander 1995).

Social mobility, globalization, and digital culture have led scholars to consider ways that taste is transforming in contemporary consumer culture (Arsel and Bean 2018, 277). For example, Sandıkcı and Ger (2010) detail the emergence of the market for *tesettür* fashion, which involves an intersection of political Islam, familiar market channels, and the strategic use of economic and cultural capital. *Tesettür* began as metropolitan professional women appropriated a

dressing practice that had formerly been associated with the impoverished and less educated rural sector of Turkish society. These formerly secular women embraced political Islam and sought to destigmatize veiling practices. Leveraging their economic capital and the cultural capital acquired through their middle-class upbringing, formal education, and, most of all, lifelong immersion in the sphere of secularized consumer culture, assisted by profit-seeking market intermediaries, these women remade the once stodgy and unflattering *tesettür* style of dress into a more urbane, appealing, and hybridized fashion style. These aestheticizing transformations led to the emergence of an upscale *tesettür* market of designers, retailers and middle-class clientele that not only legitimated this mode of public presentation but also further mainstreamed political Islam as a countervailing ideology to the secular legacy of Kemal Attaturk, the nation's founding father.

Some of this literature identifies how consumers use the values and behaviors supported and promoted by consumption communities to change their own lives. Press and Arnould (2011b) look at how personal values and behaviors changed over time in two contexts, one of which was a Community Supported Agriculture program, the other a digital marketing agency. Over time, consumption choices of those in these two communities began to align with the values promoted by the national CSA movement, and likewise with those values espoused in the marketing agency. Consumers used these value systems as frameworks to push their goals and also their habits into alignment, changing daily routines and long-term goals. Fischer and Scaraboto's (2012) work on *fatshionistas* shows that body image positive rhetoric and market responsiveness to consumer demand for more plus sized fashion diffused new fashion practices and self-assessment among members of the community. Not surprisingly, Moisio and Beruchashvili (2010) find support groups that are organized around issues of overconsumption, such as Weight Watchers, resonate with members' quest for well-being in terms of a culturally

particular spiritual-therapeutic model. The spiritual-therapeutic model as organized by Weight Watchers, the largest of such groups, provides a platform for angst-alleviating therapeutic confession, facilitates a revitalizing practice of auto-therapeutic testimonial, and repetitively mobilizes the support group as a benevolent system of therapeutic oversight.

Work on marketplace cultures offers insights into the role of everyday practices and rituals in creating institutional forms of social and familial solidarity. The papers mentioned above are but an example of research in this area. More research is certainly needed, for example, exploring emerging global meaning systems and ideological tensions.

Socio-historic patterning of consumption

The socio-historic patterning of consumption aligns CCT with sociological and historical research on the role of class, gender, and ethnicity as structural influences on marketplace behaviors and vice versa. In this tendency, authors explore how specific types of sociological categories are created and sustained in consumer culture. For example, Holt (1997) explored the processes through which sociological categories emerge by offering an alternative to the personality-values lifestyle and object signification approaches to the analysis of consumption patterns. Holt shows that social collectivities are expressed primarily through distinctive consumption practices rather than through object purchases or preferences as was supposed in the earlier values/lifestyles perspective. Further, lifestyles reflective of social class, gender or ethnicity are created by relational differences between consumption practices shared by such groups. He illustrates that social class affects consumption practices and “serve[s] as a basis for affiliating with certain types of people and, likewise, as a resource for distinguishing oneself from others, reinforcing social positions” (Holt 1997, 336).

Holt (1997, 1998) argues that systematic differences in patterns of consumption practice organize difference in social class. A further example is the “Fits Like a Glove,” embedded choice model (Allen 2002) that shows how systematic differences in patterns of consumption practice organize differences in social class through strong preferences and distastes in post-secondary education choices among secondary school students that perpetuates social class hierarchy. Kravets and Sandikci (2012) show that new middle class “Turkish consumers adopt a distinct mode of consumption, referred to as “formulaic creativity,” that imbues conventional international brands with meanings of normalcy “to highlight their personal qualities while locating themselves [securely] in the middle of a transforming society.”

Recent studies have been looking at complex intersections of social categories. One example is Harrison et al. (2015), which looks at how multiracial (black and white) populations experience the marketplace. The article broadens the scope of the multicultural marketing landscape (Costa and Bamossy 1995) and deepens our understanding by conceptualizing multiculturalism as a fragmented, ambiguous experience that can encompass distinctly different identity developments. Therefore, consumers with multicultural background may have unique identity development journeys and face unique conflicts in defining the self. Harrison et al.’s (2015) participants describe the multiracial identity development as “the journey” through living in two different worlds of their black and white heritage. “Mighty ringlets” emerges as a visual representation of their multiracial identity where their black and white backgrounds joined together. Their findings indicate that multiracial consumers engage with the marketplace to assuage racial discordance by possessing multiracial looks and legitimize the liminal space they occupy for example through mighty ringlets, an interaction that becomes a dual play between consumption freedom and societal constraint. These consumers use brands to enhance or suppress associations with their heritage background.

CCT research has applied extensions of the performative approach Holt pioneered to the study of gender, the overall thrust of which constitutes a vigorous critique of the so-called evolutionary psychological approach to gender (Griskevicius and Kenrick 2013; Hasford, Kidwell and Lopez-Kidwell 2018), that has elsewhere received a more generic critique (Schneider and Woolgar 2012). Hirschman's (1991) content analysis of research published in the *Journal of Marketing*, showed how the language used to describe the relationship between marketers and consumers drew tacitly on masculine tropes of power, control and aggression thus uncovering a gender bias in the literature. Fischer and Bristor (1993) were among the first to identify the systematic elision of discussions of gender in consumer research. They identified used three feminist perspectives to identify insights into how the field of marketing might address these taken for granted world views. In his paper on gendered consumption meanings, Thompson (1996) offers a contextually grounded interpretation of how the social construction of femininity and motherhood affect consumption patterns and choices. Thompson (1996, p. 405) notes a major contribution of Bristor and Fischer's perspective, saying that "in-depth research on the gendered nature of consumption can enrich our understanding of how psychosocial and institutional dynamics shape consumer practices and preferences."

Scholars have explored the performance of female, male, gay, and gender crossing identities through consumption and productive consumption. In a study of the intersection of gender, brand consumption, and hegemonic masculinity, the set of behaviors that grant social dominance to men (Visconti, Macalaran and Bettany 2018, 188), Avery (2012) showed how gender roles, and transgressions of their normative expectations, can create dissension within a brand community. She focused on the tension between male owners of Porsche sports cars and the new faction of women consumers who entered the brand community after the launch of its first SUV, the Porsche Cayenne. The backdrop to the tension is that the Porsche brand had

historically catered to men and is culturally coded as a highly masculine brand. After the introduction of the Cayenne, male owners of Porsche sports cars defined themselves as an in-group and cast women owners as the outgroup. Male Porsche owners took it as a cultural given that they had an exclusive, gendered right to Porsches. In light of these established social expectations, we can view Porsche's challenge in launching its Cayenne, overtly targeting women (the so-called 'soccer moms') as a marketplace example of a breach of the cultural link between Porsche (the brand) and masculine identity (the historically situated term).

CCT researchers have developed Judith Butler's (1990) influential idea that gender is something performed rather than possessed as an innate quality in studying masculinities (Brownlie and Hewer 2007; Coskuner-Balli and Thompson; Holt and Thompson 2004; Moisiso, Arnould and Gentry ; Schroeder and Zwick 2004;) and alternative femininities (Martin, Schouten, and McAlexander 2006; Stevens, Cappellini, and Smith 2015; Tuncay Zayer et al. 2012). Goulding and Saren (2009) explore diverse narrative accounts of identity at a Goth Festival at Whitby, UK. The authors find that a plurality of gender forms and identities performed through dress and comportment at the festival challenges the dispositional interpretation of gender. They find that feminine performances tend to be privileged over the male through cross-dressing, as males performing as female is more transgressive than the opposition. The authors argue, "many myths of femininity help perpetuate the patriarchal order (passivity, self-sacrifice, humility, modesty). However, the Goth female vampire persona sharply opposes traditional feminine values" by evoking fear and empowerment (Goulding and Saren 2009). Goths revel in gender as a construction; the Whitby festival offers a space to perform and to reconfigure gender.

Again, following Butler, Üstüner and Thompson (2015) explored how women use the gender bending discourse and consumption practices associated with roller derby to perform

femininity in ways that challenge traditional norms and expectations. They showed how performing this derby grrrl identity helps women transform their attitudes and predispositions formed through socialization. Derby grrrls use their public performances of an alternative gender identity to challenge subtly and slowly change constraining everyday gender norms and expectations that hold sway in their suburban and rural communities.

Research on the intersection of social categories in CCT has further shown that social class influences the ways men interpret and use brands and consumption practices in constructing their masculine identities. For example, upper-class versus working class men interpret Do-It-Yourself (DIY) work differently, and respectively either as a therapy to bureaucratic office work, or as a duty to accomplish their masculine ‘family steward’ role (Moisio, Arnould, and Gentry 2013). Middle-class men employ consumption to legitimate the role of “stay at home” dad (Coskuner-Balli and Thompson 2012). As Hearne and Hein (2015) point out, gender is a complex, evolving social and cultural category (see also Zhang 2017, for example) and there much theorization is to be done on the evolving intersection between gender, consumption, and the market.

Immigrant consumer acculturation is a topic where CCT has provided both theoretical insights and practical implications for managing social issues that intersect with the marketplace. Acculturation is typically defined as a phenomenon resulting “when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of wither or both groups” (Redfield et al. 1936, 149). Consumer cultural theorists have paid consistent attention to consumer acculturation since early pioneering studies (e.g. Wallendorf and Reilly 1983a, b; Reilly and Wallendorf 1984; Peñaloza 1994). Immigration and consumer acculturation remain critical issues considering the accelerating globalization, massive population movements, and increasingly multicultural populations within national

borders (Ozçaglar-Toulouse, Beji-Becheur & Fosse-Gomez 2009; Üstüner and Holt 2007; Luedicke 2011).

Border crossing may cause psychological crisis as it usually entails processes of socio-cultural adaptation to unfamiliar cultural, social and economic conditions (Luedicke 2011). CCT authors have contributed to acculturation studies in a variety of contexts. Early CCT papers already show sensitivity to acculturation issues, such as Wallendorf and Reilly (1983) who show that, contrary to predictions based on the traditional linear model of assimilation, Mexican-American consumption patterns were not a blending of Mexican and Anglo patterns. Rather, Mexican-American consumption patterns suggest the emergence of a unique cultural style. In an ethnography of a Haitian family in the mid-western United States, Oswald (1999) shows how ethnic consumers move from one cultural identity to another through the products they use. Thus, these individuals use consumption practices to negotiate relations between home and host cultures. In a study of Greenlandic migrants to mainland Denmark, Askegaard et al. (2005) show that immigration does not necessarily lead to assimilation and linked distinctive consumption practices to four different identity positions: rejection of the dominant culture, oscillation between identification with the home and dominant cultures, assimilation, and over identification with the dominant culture. Based on a recent ethnographic study conducted in Turkey with poor migrant women, Üstüner and Holt (2007) develop a model called dominated consumer acculturation. The model differs from prior studies concentrating on the “postmodern acculturation model”. Üstüner and Holt (2007, 54) claim, “in contrast to prior studies, which have developed an individual-level voluntarist model of acculturation, we find that our informants collectively develop consumer identity projects and practices in response to the sociocultural structures in which they live.” Further, they emphasize that in the dominated consumer acculturation context, the internal Turkish migrants lack the economic, social and

cultural capital necessary to participate in Turkish consumer culture, a situation that leads to alienation. Üstüner and Holt's (2007) study helps us understand immigrants' shattered identity projects of experiencing a betwixt-and-between anomie where "culture continually 'teases' them with a life that is immensely attractive but that out of reach; on the other hand, they are forced to tolerate the unwanted identity squatter life forces upon them" (Üstüner and Holt 2007: 55).

Luedicke presents a model that frames consumer acculturation as a complex system of recursive socio-cultural adaptation (2011). He explores acculturation through the ways that indigenous consumers interpret and respond to immigrants (2015). Further, he looks at how immigrants acculturate to local cultures through the consumption of local brands, stores, neighborhoods, traditions, and places (2015, 110). Because this paper addresses the resistance of home country consumers to immigrant consumers' efforts to acculturate, this paper addresses issues of ethnic group conflict through consumption, and explicitly consumerist forms of racism in novel ways (see also, Olivetti 2016 for a Hong Kong example).

Some work has looked at marketers' role as acculturation agents. For example, exploring the role of a grocery retailer, Hernandez and Kaufman (1991) find that in addition to providing the neighborhood a place to make convenient purchases, the bodega in a Puerto Rican barrio in Philadelphia served a key role in helping consumers maintain their Latin culture. In another study of acculturation of Mexican immigrants, Peñaloza (1994) explores adaptation processes that lead to different outcomes of assimilation, maintenance, resistance, and segregation. Penaloza's study also reveals, "by providing user-friendly access to mainstream US products and services for Mexican immigrants, marketers have also facilitated their assimilation of those items" (Moisander and Valtonen 2006, p. 62). At the same time Penaloza and Gilly 1999 suggest retailers may use cues and heuristics as shortcuts to assess consumers' habits and thus impose stereotypical identities on them. In sum, CCT work on the socio-historic patterning of

consumption explores how sociological categories are performed, maintained, and transformed through consumption rather than determined by these categories. It looks increasingly at the role of consumption patterns in identity work at the intersection of class, gender and ethnicity.

Ideological Turn

Consumer culture theorists' interest in mass-mediated ideologies and consumers' interpretive strategies aligns CCT with media studies examination of the active and creative media user (Scott 1994, Scott and Vargas 200/) and the critical theory tradition (Murray and Ozanne 1991), which examines the ideological bases of consumer culture. Ideology simply refers to values, norms, beliefs, meanings, symbols, and customs, that is, "action-oriented sets of beliefs" that "offers a position for the subject," (Eagleton 2007, pp. 1-2) as part of a worldview (Homburg and Pflesser 2000). Researchers in this research area ask questions like: What are the ideological underpinnings of consumer societies? How do consumers make sense of these ideologies? How do resistant and divergent consumer ideologies form? How do such ideologies take material form in consumer goods and services? How do new technologies and markets become legitimate objects of consumer desire? Kozinets and Handelman's (2004) study of new social movements critical of consumer culture provides a useful illustration. In this tradition, to be critical means to "prevent the foreclosure of possibility, to keep the future of a different future open" (Kompridis, 2005: 340), meaning using social science to imagine alternative ways of living.

In this regard, consumer culture theorists argue that consumers creatively and constructively rework mass media and advertising messages in ways that often run against the grain of their corporate-encoded meanings. This stream of research examines how consumers

exert agency and pursue identity goals through a dialogue both through their behavior and through communicative acts with the cultural frames proposed by dominant commercial ideologies. Thus, Thompson (2004) showed how some consumers construct alternative epidemiologies and self-treatment regimes out of dissatisfaction with the dominant ideology and practice of allopathic medicine.

Press and Arnould (2011a) use a socio-historic lens to explain the growth of the legitimacy of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs, and indeed of CSAs, in the US. They use American pastoralist ideology to link 19th century agrarian ideals to 1950s suburbia, then to 1970s counter-cultural communes and finally to modern CSAs. They explain how American pastoralist ideology has driven these mainstream and countercultural movements. They highlight shared tropes across these movements, including the desire to be separated from filth and pollution, the desire to be part of a small community, tensions in the middle landscape (where nature is tamed and civilized), fear and risk, and general moral superiority that comes from engaging in the particular behavior supported by the specific movement. In this historical unfolding, Press and Arnould (2011) illustrate how each movement is expressed in opposition to the evils of industrialization and show that across all of them, the American pastoralist dream supports ideas of safety, community, spiritual fulfillment, contributing to a better world. Ultimately, their research shows how the American pastoralist ideology was used to help change food markets in the United States.

Giesler, and Veresiu (2014) develop a framework of consumer responsabilization that illustrates how managers and other institutional actors make demands on consumers to assume responsibility for financial well-being, social welfare and healthcare traditionally invested in government actors. They illustrate how consumers' perceptions of freedom of choice are actually part of a neoliberal marketplace mythology that operates as part of the political authority. They

call for researchers interested in making positive changes for consumers to focus on systemic issues around how neoliberal capitalism shapes and is shaped by consumption (Giesler and Veresiu 2014, 854) and suggest scholars work on research topics such as the relationship between marketplace mythologies and institutional logics (Askegaard and Linnet 2011), how these issues render certain behaviors acceptable and others reprehensible (Humphreys 2010), and how ethical images of consumers erase any trace of social inequality (Giesler and Veresiu 2014, 854).

Peñaloza and Barnhart (2011) illustrate one aspect of the way in which institutional forces normalize certain forms of consumer responsibility. They show how the normalization of credit and debt in the United States comes from “the national legacy of abundance” (Peñaloza and Barnhart 2011, 759). They found that people talk about credit and debt in terms of The American Way, identifying that “everyone does it.” Against the social backdrop of friends, family, and neighbors with larger houses and cars and sons and daughters attending prestigious universities, it becomes more difficult, indeed old-fashioned and out of sync, not to leverage credit/debt as a normative activity to consume at higher levels now and to generate future wealth, even as doing so has constrained some informants and left others in significant debt. They argue the responsibly indebted consumer is a pillar of the reproduction of consumer culture in the US.

Humphreys (2010) shows how a reviled consumption practice, gambling, becomes legitimate over time. She highlights the role of media in shaping the legitimacy of gambling by selecting sources and certain types of information, valuing particular information, and representing it in a way that “factualizes” it. Her socio-historic approach measures changes in public discourse to evaluate shifts in normative, cognitive and regulative cultural systems over time. At a given point in time, certain semantic categories are evident in public discourse. Then, through a network of regulative and normative transformations, these categories adjust to

incorporate a new cultural reality. In this way, a network of discursive and institutional factors join to legitimate this consumption practice.

Press et al. (2014) explore how culturally-embedded ideologies affect business strategy choices and economic outcomes in the context of commodity agriculture. They explain why some firms fail to change their strategic orientation from chemical to organic practices, despite economic incentives to do so. Press et al. (2014, 103) show that “ideological tensions affect the legitimacy of different strategic orientations among firms.” They illustrate that many producers do not adopt organic agriculture as a strategic approach to their business because they see organic as ideologically distasteful; it conflicts with their deeper cultural–cognitive commitments about the proper way to be a commodity producer. Press et al. (2014) illustrate how exploring ideologies that affect business strategy decisions can identify reasons for less than optimal choices among firms. In other words, underlying ideological conflicts can constrain economic choices; the ability to identify the reasons for such choices can open the door to redressing them.

Some of this work invites an activist stance that encourages more transformative consumer practices (Murray and Ozanne 1991). This approach has inspired the reform-minded Transformative Consumer Research group (Davis, Ozanne and Hill 2016) that aims to promote societal wellbeing and redress intractable social problems provoked by consumer culture. Arnould and Thompson (2015) observe that in many of these studies cultural networks cohere and dissipate within institutional fields and contexts and, as such, the political consequences of consumption should emphasize these elements where moving forward. They argue that “these institutionally framed CCT studies bring to light the complexities of structuration: that is the ways in which institutional realities are recursively produced (and reconfigured) through coordinated actions and tacit social agreements among social actors which are, in turn, organised by the very institutional structures being enacted as objectified social realities.” (Arnould and

Thompson 2015, 15). Indeed, the papers cited in this section explore the interplay between consumers and institutions, looking at how they are mutually affected by historical, cultural, social and personal issues.

Overtly critical consumer research looks at social and cultural issues through a more reflexive lens, that is, directly questioning the dominant ideologies and taken-for-granted assumptions that structure marketing and consumption. In this frame, researchers examine consumption critically, identifying its benefits and costs. Tadajewski and Brownlie (2008, 16-17) usefully enumerate a host of critical reflections on consumption ranging from studies inspired by Karl Marx, Michel Foucault, Gaston Bachelard, or post-colonial scholars like Frantz Fanon. For example, Pietrykowski (2004) explores the ramifications of the slow food movement for progressive alternatives to overconsumption. Lane (2006) offers Bachelard who argued that certain poetic images' "dynamic potential; evoking the deep affective bonds between workers and the matter on which they worked" can awaken a sense of our "inherent creative capacities, hence encouraging a productive synthesis of imagination and will" (p.24). He proposes Bachelardian perspectives as part of a path to re-humanize market-mediated society. For their part, Moisander and Personen (2002, 330),

"see the political struggle associated with green consumerism as "politics of the self"... We look at green consumerism as resistance to the power that produces the prevalent forms of subjectivity for contemporary western consumers.... we see moral agency as resistance, one side of which is to refuse what we are, and the other to invent who we are by promoting new forms of subjectivity."

Tadajewski and Brownlie (2008, 14) describe the general nature of these positive critiques of consumer culture:

"Broadly speaking, research inspired by critical theory... functions in 'unmasking' inequalities in exchange relationships (Horkheimer, 1972: 207), questioning the privileging of 'having', that is consuming, over 'being' and relatedness to the world ... scrutinizing the role of marketing and advertising in the repression of individuality and the expansiveness of human existence..., critiquing the emergence of the marketing

character and the failure to articulate humanist alternatives...The ultimate goal of critique in this sense was to fuel positive social transformation...”

Some of the work they discuss is authored by scholars associated with CCT and some emanates from allied disciplines like sociology and political economy. The eclecticism of these studies also points toward a future project of a more coherent critical consumer culture theory.

Critique of CCT

Arnould and Thompson’s aims in their 2005 article were threefold. First, they sought to provide a heuristic framework for mapping out a diverse body of research in terms of recurrent core theoretical concerns. They felt that this framework could be particularly helpful for Ph.D. students who sometimes struggle with the diversity presented by this research tradition. Second, they aimed to refute a number of misconceptions that held sway, particularly among those not trained in this research stream such as the idea that CCT is defined by qualitative methods, that its findings are context-bound and a-theoretical, or that it only investigates entertaining esoterica that lack practical relevance. Third, they aimed to create a defensible, descriptive brand name for this research tradition, one that rhetorically countered these misconceptions (Arnould and Thompson 2007). However, this movement has not escaped critique.

Following the seminal article in 2005, some scholars questioned, “the need for CCT, and the thrust of their concerns seemed to be concerned with imposing CCT as a totalizing narrative” (Arnould and Thompson 2007, p. 5). Critical marketing scholars Tadjewski and Brownlie (2008, 10) argue “that there appears to be more of a concern for managerial relevance in [CCT] than we would support (e.g. Arnould and Thompson, 2005: 869, 870, 876; Thompson et al., 2006).” However, CCT shares with critical marketing, “theoretical pluralism, methodological

pluralism and boundaries delineated by a commitment on three fronts: ontological denaturalisation, epistemological reflexivity and a non-performative stance” (Ibid), i.e., a stance that does not necessarily privilege managerial action (Holbrook 1987). CCT scholars share the recognition that consumer culture is a historically contingent rather than a necessary and inevitable state of affairs (denaturalization). Epistemological ecumenicism is built into the architecture of CCT.

Recent internal critics argue “that consumer culture theory (CCT) has institutionalized a hyper-individualizing, overly agentic, and sociologically impoverished mode of analysis that impedes systematic investigations into the historical, ideological, and sociological shaping of marketing, markets, and consumption systems” (Thompson, Arnould and Giesler 2013, p. 149; Askegaard and Linnet 2011; Earley 2014; Fitchett, Patsiaouras and Davies 2014; Moisander, Peñaloza and Valtonen 2009). Desmond (1998) puts his finger squarely on the problematic focus on the successfully agentic consumer. He notes that as actors operating within a particular kind of market system like globalized market capitalism, we are ‘rarely faced directly with the consequences of our actions’ (Desmond, 1998: 179). Thus, we are not faced with the child slave labour that has produced our highly-priced, expensively-marketed sports shoe. Nor do we witness the environmental waste discharged into a river as a result of the manufacturing process. As he puts it, once ‘the face of the other has been “effaced”, employees are freed from moral responsibility to focus on the technical (purpose centred or procedural) aspects of the “job at hand”’ (Desmond, 1998: 178). As he implies, so too are consumers and consumer researchers able to ignore consumer culture’s systemic consequences. Authors such as Askegaard and Linnet (2011), and Moisander, Peñaloza, and Valtonen (2009) remind that there are powerful social and cultural elements that condition the market and act on consumers, “operating beyond the level of conscious awareness” (Earley 2014, p. 76) some of which are destructive. Askegaard and Linnet

(2011, p. 381) remind that the purpose of CCT is to “expand the contextualization of lived consumer experiences with another contextualization, this time the one of systemic and structuring influences of market and social systems that is not necessarily felt or experienced by consumers in their daily lives, and therefore not necessarily discursively expressed.” This observation points to the need for units of analysis that move the research approach beyond consumer interviews or even ethnography to incorporate, or even focus on archival or other forms of institutional data that reflect contextual influences on consumers that they cannot express themselves. Further, as mentioned above, scholars aligned with the CCT tradition have commented on the agentic consumer construct. They point out that consumer agency is an essential component of a neo-liberal market ideology (Veresiu and Giesler 2014). They argue that adopting an agentic vision of consumers contributes to an insufficiently critical view of the implicit exploitation in consumer culture generally (Cova, Maclaren, and Bradshaw 2013), and especially in the so-called sharing economy and customer co-creation models (Carrington and Zwick 2016; Cova, Dalli and Zwick 2011).

In the name of intellectual liberation, Moisander, Peñaloza, and Valtonen (2009) argue for explicit inclusion of marginalized voices in the domain of consumer culture studies as a way of building a stronger consumer culture community. Varman and Costa (2013), Varman and Vikas (2007) write passionately on the theme of subaltern consumers. Subalterns refers to groups excluded from a society’s established institutions and thus denied a voice in society. Because market-mediated consumption is the driving institutional force in consumer cultures, some researchers have specifically targeted subaltern consumer groups for study. They have problematized the role of materialism and self-identity among the homeless (Hill, 1991; Hill and Stamey 1990); examined limited individual freedom in consumption choices (Varman and Vikas 2007); relationships between global televisual mediascapes increasing consumerist aspirations

and atomization (Varman and Belk 2008); ideology and ethnicity (Crockett and Wallendorf 2004); and, the symbolic wounds inflicted through expressions of racial hierarchy through consumption (Chin, 2001), for example.

Cova, Maclaren, and Bradshaw (2013) extend this argument into discussion of the context of contexts, saying that since the “demise of the postmodern critique,” CCT should adopt communism as its next radical framing theory. They identify how the postmodernism turn forced researchers to rethink mainstream theories of marketing and consumer research and how it exposed taken for granted ideologies and power relations inherent in mainstream concepts and techniques (Ibid.). Cova et al. (2013) suggest that CCT destroyed the postmodern critique due to the focus on establishing legitimacy for CCT. Thus consumer scholarship has seen a decrease of radical interventions and an increase of incremental contributions. “CCT has allowed itself to fall into the melancholic state, as Dean (2012: 15) might put it, CCT, ‘has accommodated capital, succumbed to its lures of individualism, consumerism, competition and privilege and proceeded as if there really were no alternative to states that rule in the interests of markets.’ (Cova et al. 2013, 9) contend we must acknowledge that the conditions that produced such melancholy have been ruptured by events and the ‘context of context’ has transformed around us.” Thus, they argue that through a communist perspective “faith in the eternality of capitalism is disrupted and we can dare to imagine an alternative order, and see its germinations in the everyday and in the occasional rupture of the extraordinary and once again allow our research to be guided by an association of ethics and possibility” (Cova et al. 2013, 10). In sum, irrespective of the merits of the various strands of critique, we can conclude that CCT has produced its share of critical commentary and radical reflection, evidence of the health and maturing of the field.

Methodological issues

A key aim of Arnould and Thompson's (2005) paper was to confront and refute misconceptions holding sway over the broader marketing field. One notable misconception included the idea that CCT was defined by the use of qualitative methods. While qualitative data are used extensively in cultural research, especially in observing new phenomena and building theory, CCT work has also refined, improved and created new methods for cultural explorations. In addition, CCT by no means relies exclusively on qualitative data. On the contrary, "consumer culture theory researchers embrace methodological pluralism whenever quantitative measures and analytic techniques can advance the operative theoretical agenda" (Arnould and Thompson 2005, p. 870).

From the mid-80s to mid-90s, the Association of Consumer Research encouraged authors to explore methodological issues pertinent to the field. This inspiration produced several papers outlining how interpretive research can establish a better understanding of why consumers engage in certain types of behavior. Such work includes: Anderson's (1986) outline of critical relativism; introductions to interpretive consumer research (Hudson and Ozanne 1988), phenomenological inquiry (Thompson, Locander and Pollio 1989) and hermeneutics (Arnold and Fischer 1994; Thompson 1997; Hirschman's (1991) proposal for humanistic inquiry; a how-to-guide for analyzing qualitative data (Spiggle 1994); Murray and Ozanne's (1991) outline of critical theory in consumer research, which led to the implementation of participatory action research (Ozane and Saatcioglu 2008). As with other aspects of CCT, these methodological articles bring together a heterogeneous ensemble of interpretive approaches as a toolkit of possible ways to work. Further, they share a general purpose that emphasizes understanding particular phenomena, relationships or contexts, over causality and reproducibility, highlighting one goal of CCT scholarship as "to illustrate through thick description" and "understand through systematic interpretation" (Shankar and Patterson 2001, p 496-497).

Shining this lens onto methodological issues, CCT scholars recognize that social and cultural elements operating in the background contextualize and influence consumer awareness, and further, individual experience is grounded in a larger social and cultural context. Thus, researchers must situate the consumer viewpoint within that influential background. As a way of emphasizing lived experience, Thompson et al. (1989) called for more interview data as an appropriate way to centralize the consumer in research. Askegaard and Linnet (2011, p. 385) highlight that Thompson et al. (1989) perspective emphasized that the “‘lived experiences’ of ‘real people’ became the standard (pun intended) behind which flocks of consumer researchers could rally in the paradigmatic fight against the ‘modelers’ of the ‘normal science view’.”

Epistemologically, the early days of interpretive consumer research were engaged in “an attempt to merge interpretive consumer research with positivist criteria,” which led to a form of postpositivist research (Holt 1991, p. 59). This is because the problem these researchers faced was the legitimation of insights base on qualitative data as contributing to scientific understanding (Holt 1991; Shankar and Patterson 2001). For example, *The Odyssey* followed Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) naturalistic ethnographic inquiry as a framework and justification (Belk et al. 1989). It included reflections on novel methodology and approaches to research such as auto-driving (the use of snapshots as research stimuli, Heisley and Levy 1991; Sherry 1987; Wallendorf 1987). It led to the development of criteria to evaluate trustworthiness in research based on ethnographic fieldwork (Wallendorf and Belk 1989). Authors like Holt (1991) and Shankar and Patterson (2001, p.485) highlight that this framework parallels quantitative criteria for assessing trustworthiness where “internal validity is replaced by credibility (do our interpretations agree with the subject’s?), external validity with transferability (can we generalize our interpretation?), reliability with dependability (given that the measurement instrument is a researcher, are interpretations consistent?), and objectivity with confirmability (are data-

grounded interpretations free of bias?).” The epistemological orientation of research at this time focused on justifying interpretive research as a legitimate form of science, and Lincoln and Guba’s naturalistic inquiry provided that foundation.

CCT researchers appropriated ethnography from anthropology and sociology as a counterpoint to the survey and experimental methods adopted from sociology and psychology in mainstream consumer research. Early examples of ethnography begin with the Consumer Odyssey work (Belk, Wallendorf and Sherry 1988; Belk, Wallendorf and Sherry 1989; McGrath, Sherry and Heisley 1993), and a proliferation of such research followed. Arnould (1989) explored globalization and the diffusion of consumer innovation in a West African context. Hill (1991) examined homeless peoples’ consumption behaviors. Celsi, Rose, and Leigh’s (1993) studied high risk consumption in the context of skydiving, Arnould and Price (1993) explored experiential servicescapes in the context of white-water rafting and Schouten and McAlexander’s (1995) redefined consumer subcultures in the context of Harley Davidson motorcycle fans. Ethnography has proved to be an important tool for researchers to expand the domain of consumption studies, and continues to provide new insights as in Scott, Cayla and Cova’s (2017) examination of pain as a consumer benefit and Higgins and Hamilton’s (2018) ethnography of therapeutic pilgrimage.

In their methodological article, Arnould and Wallendorf (1994) discuss ways to provide thorough and sound levels of data collection, rich interpretations and extended analysis for the mutual benefit of both academics and marketing practitioners. The open-ended interview is an opportunity to collect subjective viewpoints and provide text for analysis, but the author's highlight that bi-gendered teams allow for the inclusion of multiple perspectives, as informants react differently to different genders (see also Martin, Schouten and McAlexander 2006; Bristor and Fischer 1993). Ethnography also provides participant and non-participant observation. These

forms of data collection allows one to see what it is that consumers are actually doing, for example, using branded goods to express family identity through arrangements in the cupboard (Coupland 2005) or to feel what the consumption activity is like as a researcher, as in most of the ethnographies mentioned here (Sandberg 2005; Arnould and Cayla 2015). The researcher can collect and analyze pictures and video to add additional layers to interpretation (Arnould and Wallendorf 1994; Martin, Schouten and McAlexander 2006).

Embracing the digital era, CCT has contributed netnography to the researchers' toolkit (Kozinets 2002, 2006, 2010). Netnography is a form of participant-observation or ethnographic research adapted to the unique contingencies of various types of computer mediated social interactions. Netnography insists on the importance of cultural context in making sense of online data. At the same time, it recognizes the unique alterations of communicative practice on-line, the anonymity and pseudonymity characteristic of online environments, the wide accessibility of online forums and their varying degrees of hybridity between the public and the private. However, the automatic archiving of online interactions means that netnographers have access to an enormous amount of data, which has implications of analysis beyond the scope of this paper

As mentioned above, CCT is an approach that embraces multiple methods and theoretical approaches. While the field itself is interpretive, it does not exclude the use of quantitative measures as valid methodologies. Some diverse examples of quantitative data used in CCT work include Arnould and Price (1993) analyses of satisfaction in extended service encounters; McQuarrie and Mick's (1999) study of advertising rhetoric effectiveness; as well as Humphreys (2010a, 2010b), Arsel and Bean (2013) and Humphreys and Thompson (2014). Each of these papers includes quantitative measures as well as interpretation of qualitative data. Earlier work employed conventional measures and statistical procedures. Work that is more recent pioneers new methods. For example, Humphreys's (2010a, p.4) analysis of the legitimization of casino

gambling sampled newspaper articles for the word “casino” and qualitatively coded the data, and performed a “quantitative content analysis to systematically document historical trends.” By taking a multidimensional approach to understand how culture and society condition the marketplace, Humphreys (2010b) identified the process of megamarketing as a tool for understanding marketplace legitimacy over time. Arsel and Bean (2013) developed a theory of taste regimes through a qualitative analysis of content on the Apartment Therapy website. They then use quantitative textual analysis to refine their theory of taste regimes. They formed a database of over 145 million words, tagged them for part of speech and coded the 500 most frequently used words to identify whether people were discussing objects, actions or meanings, the core of their taste regimes. The results of the quantitative analysis in this paper helped them demonstrate these three core components of their theory of taste regimes. Humphreys and Thompson (2014) use a quasi-quantitative methodology in their study of cultural processes that affect public opinion. Specifically, they analyze public discourse surrounding the Exxon Valdez spill of 1989 and BP Gulf Spill of 2010 to explore how brand-centric disaster myths that are conveyed in the media influence anxiety about the event. They conducted a discourse analysis of over 1500 articles, which they supplemented with quantitative methods to examine the correlation between narratives and to track changes in their occurrence over time. In addition, they created a database of over 2000 photographs, quantified the content and used alpha scores for coding agreement about the photographs’ content. They provide a table of “content analysis” categories for the photographs that includes frequency, percentage and a K-value for each. In addition, they provide frequencies for mentions of key words in articles over time. This multi-method approach used quantitative data to fuel macro-level theorization about both the institutional and the ideological structures that shape consumers’ risk perceptions and world beliefs.

Consumer Culture theorists constantly strive to find new ways to convey the rich tapestry of consumer experiences, to conduct the choir of diverse consumer voices (Price and Arnould 1998). For example, early on CCT scholars delved deeply into the idea of lived experience and what that means in terms of data collection and analysis with an exploration of introspection. Introspection is an “ongoing process of tacking, experiencing, and reflecting on one’s own thoughts, mental images, feelings, sensations and behaviors” (Gould 1995, p. 719) and is a radical move away from either traditional psychological methods like experiments or phenomenological interviews. Holbrook (1987, 1998, 2006) contributed a number of insightful introspective accounts of consumer experience, fanaticism, and aesthetic appreciation. Despite their skepticism, Wallendorf and Brucks (1993) highlight a role for introspection in research and conclude that guided introspection “offers considerable future potential to consumer research. Guided introspection “asks research subjects to report their past and present experiences and internal states” (Wallendorf and Brucks 1993, p. 353). In this sense, introspection can inform and support other forms of consumer data.

Shankar and Patterson (2001, p. 494) forcefully argue that we should “strive to represent our work in such a way that it stands in opposition to the hegemonic discourse of positivism/logical empiricism.” They further comment that “strange and unusual, serves to make reading an interesting, satisfying and cocreational pursuit” (Shankar and Patterson 2001, p. 494), encouraging authors to seek such unfamiliarity in their work. Thompson, Stern and Arnould (1998) argued that we should resist the tendency to represent seamless interpretations of consumption phenomena that tend to mask variations in interpretation varying theoretical perspectives would reveal. Sherry and Schouten (2002) take heed of this representational stance by identifying a role for poetry in consumer research. The article underscores the limitations of conventional prose in conveying or even representing deep understanding of experiences. Their

work has paved the way for greater inclusion of creative work in CCT. Since 2006, a poetry track at CCT has resulted in 12 volumes of poetry. An art gallery has been growing in sophistication since the 2014 conference. Compendia of CCT research (Sherry and Fischer 2017) and outlets like *Journal of Advertising*, *Journal of Business Research*, *Consumption Markets & Culture* have accepted poetry submissions.

In addition to poetry, film has taken shape as an important form of research representation. A series of films coming out of the Consumer Odyssey project was a precursor to the videography tracks at the Association of Consumer Research and Consumer Culture Theory Consortium Conferences. Additionally, *Consumption Markets and Culture* has embraced alternative methods of representation in their DVD editions (Belk and Kozinets 2005, 2010). Until now, most videographic work aimed for documentary or descriptive goals that conform to common approach in qualitative research. However, scholars have begun to consider how to use videography as a tool for distinctive ways of theorizing. Rokka and Hietanen (2018) argue that videography is an ontologically distinct medium-video is inherently fantastic and non-representational-- that invites new ways to imagine theorizing itself (e.g., Hietanen and Rokka 2018). They argue,

by tapping into the affective and evocative capacities of the moving image, {videography} should foreground its phantasmatic qualities...and actively embrace affective and 'sensory ways of knowing' (Torraldo et al., 2016: 2) and encounters it produces (Rokka and Hietanen 2018, 115).

In sum, alternative modes of representation are part of CCT's efforts to push the boundaries of traditional modes of representing research and findings, and to expand our understanding of how consumption influences individuals, groups and culture at large.

Consumer Culture Theory in Management

Applications

CCT's insights into the culture of consumption offer new avenues of thought for a wide variety of managerial issues including those related to pricing, markets, customer loyalty, and channeling and distribution. A CCT approach can help managers find "different alternative ways of viewing the world, as well as representing themselves and others" (Moisander, Valtonen and Hirsto 2009, 333; Cayla, Beers and Arnould 2015). The results of taking a more managerial approach to consumer culture manifests in different ways. They are reflected in edited volumes that adapt classic marketing management texts to reflect a CCT approach (Penaloza, Özçaglar-Toulouse, and Visconti 2012) and another that highlights the intersection between economics, marketing, and culture (Zwick and Cayla 2011). They are seen in CCT work that illustrates how culturally-grounded theories can be used to explain market systems and dynamics (Giesler 2006, 2008, 2012; Press and Arnould 2011; Sandikci and Ger 2010; Scaraboto and Fischer 2013). They are used to invite managers to increase empathy, showing that by viewing the consumer from the consumer's perspective they can more easily align product offerings and communication about such offerings (Cayla and Arnould 2013; Peñaloza and Venkatesh 2006). Identifying a tension in typical organizations where "marketers grapple with consumers in parallel processes of learning about consumers as 'other'" and "only with much effort designated to see the other on its own terms can such subjective understanding emerge" (Peñaloza and Venkatesh 2006, p. 307; see also Cayla, Beers and Arnould 2015).

Brand Community

The managerial implications of consumption communities build directly on the foundational insight that brands can be strong relationship partners (Fournier 1998). Going further, CCT research shows that consumption communities provide unique value to firms and brand communities can be cultivated strategically to be of more direct value to practitioners (Cova and Pace 2006; Skålén, Pace and Cova 2015; Schouten and McAlexander 1995; Muniz and O’Guinn 2001; McAlexander, Schouten and Koenig 2002; Martin, Schouten and McAlexander 2006; Schau, Price and Arnould 2007). Based on study of both successful and unsuccessful brand communities, Cova and Shankar (2018, 94-96) outline the rules of managing brand communities. There are five basic rules for cultivating and growing a brand community. First, firms should leverage an existing activity-related group. Carefully choosing the field of intervention is the first step. In some categories – notably sales of basic goods – the very idea of a brand community is absurd and ineffective. Conversely, there are other areas where communities already exist. For instance, iconic brands like Apple, motorcycling, car rallying, scootering, outdoor adventuring, geocaching, television programs, rodeo, and so on foster communities. Before Tough Mudder was first launched there were already more than a million people in the US taking part in these obstacle course-based races. Second, firms can offer linking value, defined as the value of what the brand is offering in terms of building or reinforcing connections between consumers. Offering connections is more important than offering things. Thus, the linking value must be a core principle in the branding effort. Tough Mudder’s forcing fans to run their courses in teams exemplifies this principle. Living through something that they will want to discuss afterwards, facilitates online and offline interactions that sustain people’s sense of community. Third, firms should encourage interactions. The idea here is to allow a wide range of groups born out of the offer to link up and form a veritable community. Managers must

also consider symbolic aspects. Awareness of belonging to a distinct group requires a name, in the same way as the brand itself. Tough Mudder consumers, for instances, are called mudders. Star Trek fans are “trekkies.” While aficionados of Alfa-Romeo are “alfisti.” Other types of “badging” are important too, such as the rally badges BMW mini owners display. Mudders flood Facebook with tales of the obstacles they face and overcome. The company re-broadcast top fan videos on YouTube. Fourth, firms should facilitate collaboration that accelerates community consolidation. The more consumers collaborate with one another or with the people working for the brand, the greater their sense of belonging to a community. Each Tough Mudder course requires major logistics. Consumers volunteer for some of these necessary tasks and help participants complete the course. Similarly, Salomon sponsored snowboarding competitions early on in the development of that sport. BMW facilitates Mini rallies, and a UK-based gardening firm encourages community members to share gardening tips. Finally, firms should facilitate social differentiation within communities. Firms must avoid treating all community members as homogenous clones. What people want is a well-oiled community offering perpetual differentiation/de-differentiation. Within Tough Mudder, many participants come in disguise. Online platforms are there to relay images of people in their disguises and the things that they achieve. Cova and Shankar (2018) thus identify guidelines for managers overseeing or creating brand communities to understand what exactly they can provide and how they can most effectively engage with customers.

Brands and Branding

Holt (2004; 2010) has written two books addressed to a practitioner audience on how to use cultural strategies to build and promote brands. His books, with case examples and frameworks also appeal to an academic audience because the strategy is built from empirical

evidence and social and cultural theory. His 2004 work “How Brands Become Icons” outlines his cultural branding strategy for managers. This strategy is built on understanding how larger social trends and national ideologies influence consumer preference. The trick for managers becomes understanding how everyday life diverges from idealized norms and tailoring the brand story to assuage the anxiety created by these inevitable divergences. In Holt’s model demand is premised on the need for cultural alignments, not universal biopsychological “needs.”

Managerial implications for cultural branding strategy include the suggestion that traditional segmentation and targeting strategies miss the mark when it comes to accurately positioning products and brands. Holt (2004) suggests that instead of focusing on demographics or psychographics, marketing managers should be analyzing social and cultural trends and attempting to tap into the creative movements that operate on the fringe of society because they foreground larger cultural rifts between ideology and everyday experience. He argues that in postmodern times these cultural rifts can appear without warning and companies that attempt to build their strategy around consistency and repetition will not be able to adjust quickly enough to changing cultural and social trends that shape demand. In the face of the instability and change, managers can gain insight about their customers and brands, and directions for strategy development through cultural analysis.

In addition, Holt (2002) argues against marketers’ presumption of authority. He claims that “the postmodern branding paradigm is premised upon the idea that brands will be more valuable if they are offered as cultural resources, as useful ingredients to produce the self as one chooses” (Holt 2002: 83). Thus, while he emphasizes that brand authenticity serves as a valuable ingredient in producing consumer identities, actually creating a brand consumers perceive as authentic proves challenging. Sometimes by avoiding direct brand communication and using product placement, the firm dodges attributions of undue cultural influence. Crowd sourcing

advertising can also be an effective tactic because brand meanings perceived as original and disinterested prove more valuable as resources for consumers' identity construction. For example, Starbucks' White Cup contest that urged customers to decorate their Starbucks cups and share images on Social Media serves as a good example of engaging consumers' identity construction through indirect branding. It is also an example where a brand contributes directly to consumers' identity projects by stimulating their imagination. In addition, Holt (2002) suggests that corporate civic responsibilities are increasingly important to consumers. Consumers are looking for companies that act like local citizens of the community, and they are interested how firms treat non-consumers of their products. For example, Patagonia provides a well-known success story. Patagonia has acted as "an activist company", part of the consumer community driving environmental values through their sustainable clothing brand. To act like local citizens, brands "must be perceived as invented and disseminated by parties without an instrumental economic agenda, by people who are intrinsically motivated by their inherent value. Postmodern consumers perceive modern branding efforts to be inauthentic because they ooze with the commercial intent of their sponsors." (Holt 2002: 83). Ideals woven into brands should be connected to the material actions of the companies.

Another point of CCT's engagement with brands is by developing theory and increasing understanding about how myth is used by advertisers, brand managers, and consumers to construct brand and personal identities (Arsel and Thompson 2011; Brown, McDonagh, and Shultz 2013; Giesler 2012; Holt 2004; Luedicke, Thompson, and Giesler 2010; Penaloza 2000, 2001; Thompson 2004; Thompson and Tian 2008). For example, Giesler (2012) explains how doppelgänger brand images influence market creation as a brand-mediated legitimation process. By doppelgänger brand image, he refers to "competing set of brand meanings that have the potential to influence consumer beliefs and behavior" (Giesler 2012, 55). Doppelgänger brand

images are likely to emerge as a reaction to brands that assert dominance over a product category such as Starbucks (Thompson, Rindfleisch, and Arsel 2006) or Coca-cola (Alcade 2009). The meaning of a branded innovation evolves in the course of contestations between the images promoted by the firm and contradictory images promoted by other stakeholders. Thus, a brand such as Botox cosmetics promising to synthesize nature and technology in an innovative way almost inevitably provokes a doppelgänger image that questions the brand's ability to do so. Therefore, managers need constantly to adjust the brand's meaning to its targeted consumers to resolve the nature-technology conflict and to maintain its identity value. Giesler suggests that his theoretical formulation can help managers combat conflicting messages about their brands that would otherwise undermine the "perceived authenticity of their emotional branding story" (Giesler 2012: 56).

CCT inspired literature has also provided interesting observations on rebranding or brand transformation. Whereas the traditional perspective has seen brands as relatively static and unchangeable, these authors argue rebranding should take into account evolving market conditions (Lucarelli & Hallin 2015). For example, noting a secular trend towards nostalgia in society, Brown, Sherry and Kozinets (2003) unpack the techniques of retrobranding classical brands, drawing on the 4As of Allegory (brand story), Aura (authentic brand essence), Arcadia (idealized community), and Antinomy (brand paradox, contradictory meanings). Automobile brands like the updated VW Beetle and Van or the BMW mini, cinematic reboots of legends like Camelot or Robin Hood, the original Star Wars films, or East German brands (Brunk, Giesler Hartmann 2018) illustrate the cultural complexities of retrobranding. Similarly, Dion and Mazzalovo (2016) investigate strategies to revive "sleeping beauty" brands. Sleeping beauties are brands that are no longer active on the market but retain latent brand equity that managers can revive by rearticulating the brand's heritage. Indeed, heritage is often the only asset held by

sleeping beauties when commercial activity has ceased. Because sleeping beauties are embedded in individual and/or collective memories, their reputation persists like the mythic Orient Express. These studies look at brand transformation as a non-linear, emergent and complex process, which takes a variety of market intermediaries such as consumers and not just managers, into account (e.g. Martin & Schouten 2014). Thus, there is a strong base of CCT work on branding and brand strategy that take into consideration the cultural context of branding.

Consumers shaping marketing systems

Traditional marketing management focuses on firm-centered market transformation, where consumers have a passive role in firm-driven innovation (von Hippel 2005; Martin & Schouten 2014; Lucarelli & Hallin 2015). Markets can, and increasingly do, change through consumers' initiatives, with firms playing a more reactive role than in traditional conceptions. Consumer culture theory has studied market change from multiple perspectives both initiated by the marketers (e.g. Giesler 2012, Humphreys 2010a) and by consumers (Martin and Schouten 2014; Dolbec and Fischer 2015; Hietanen et al. 2016). Recent research by Martin and Schouten (2014) depicts how a new market emerged in the motorcycle industry that was driven by consumers. They illustrate how market formation can happen without consumer rebellion or resistance, and how consumers created the Minimoto market without product managers' centralized or strategic actions.

Martin and Schouten (2014) outline stages of market formation: first was consumer innovation when consumers working as entrepreneurs using skills and creativity to innovate functions working from ready to hand objects. Second, consumption community through the joint innovation with others with similar desires. Third came a metacommunity phase, in which a broader, transnational set of electronically networked communities, sharing know-how,

enthusiasm, stories, and material resources coalesced. Entrepreneurial commerce in minibikes, parts, and accessories supported and was supported by the growing metacommunity of practice. Finally, came market stabilization when commercial players began to participate in the Minimoto market. This research emphasizes the connectedness and interactions of social agents in market formation, showing how consumers play an active, entrepreneurial role in market emergence. In sum, the market is not constructed by “supply chains, marketers, and customers; it co-creates them all.” (Martin and Schouten 2014: 858). The study suggests businesses searching for market opportunities and expanding into new markets to seek out consumer environments in the early stages of market formation. For example, a company could identify a market at the consumer innovation stage and offer material support, object or skills to enter the emerging market. Alternatively, businesses could hunt for markets in the metacommunity stage and look for opportunities for entrepreneurship. Being early to the market and understanding the environment of the market under construction could also allow marketers to intervene in the distribution of tasks and innovation costs to the communities (see Cova and Pace and Skålén Pace and Cova 2015). Such communities support the use of market resources and the communities themselves develop resiliency. Researchers in other fields have begun to recognize the market forming power of engaged consumers (Schlagwein and Bjørn-Anderson 2014).

In a similar vein, Hietanen et al. (2016) illustrate theoretical and practical implications for retailing practice through acts of civil resistance occurring on Restaurant Day. Restaurant Day emerged as a consumer-driven pop-up food carnival where consumers set up restaurants for one day in different locations around the city of Helsinki including in their homes, in parks or on the street (www.restaurantday.org). Organizers created the festival to protest overly strict legislation that governs restaurant operations in Finland. The study identifies how appropriating the logic of retailing enabled a consumer social movement to subvert stultifying bureaucracy and achieve

success. The logic of retail practice worked as a common language for consumers to draw on in organizing an alternative retail landscape featuring new, hybrid, and fanciful cuisines and modes of preparation, delivery and consumption. These initiatives actually re-dynamised the retail food sector in Helsinki and led to liberalization of legislation. Similar to Martin and Schouten (2014), this paper emphasize consumers' agency, although unlike that case, Restaurant Day was a resistance move.

These studies on market transformation bring broader understanding of different roles played by a variety of market intermediaries. Whereas traditional marketing sees consumers as passive in the market transformation, the recent CCT research emphasizes the active role of consumers and offers rich perspectives on co-creative practice. These insights are especially useful to businesses looking for new markets and new businesses looking at where to launch. Furthermore, this research provides managers with ideas on how to leverage consumer activity and insights toward firm marketing efforts.

Future

We have suggested above some developing research areas in CCT such as work on non-Western identities, the intersection of ethnicity, race, class, and gender roles, identities and consumption, and a more coherent critical tradition. Other important topics we hardly addressed, such as the social construction of value (Arsel 2015; Holbrook 1999, Karababa and Kjeldgaard 2014, Schau, et al. 2009), or the consumption of time (Woermann and Rokka 2015) and space (Bradford and Sherry 2015; Visconti, et al. 2010) in a globalized digitized world where the meanings of value, time and space are changing rapidly. Below we expand on a few other emerging topics.

Sustainable consumption

One of the most necessary and critically important emergent areas of research in the CCT tradition is work on sustainability and sustainable consumption. Since the 1990s, and certainly in the 21st century, CCT scholars have been conducting research on sustainable consumption. As reflected from other fields, efforts in this area are diverse and are only slowly emerging with their own thematic trends. Some work has tried to identify what ethical consumption means and what it looks like, discussing overconsumption (Pietrykowski 2004) and offering alternative ways to engage in consumption, such as the sharing economy (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2012) and liquid consumption (Biraghi, Gambetti and Pace 2018).

In a microcosm of streams of CCT research we see research on sustainable identities (e.g. Cherrier 2009; Carrington et al. 2016; Heiskanen and Pantzar 1997) that explores how ethical and sustainable identities affect consumption choices and market engagement behaviors. We see work that addresses institutions and the role they play in driving consumer choice and affecting market options (Giesler and Veresiu 2014), particularly around alternative market choices (e.g. Herbert et al. 2018; Press et al. 2014; Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007). We see work that addresses ideological issues around sustainable consumption and reasons for resisting mainstream market options (Kilbourne, et al. 2002; Moisander and Personen 2002; Press and Arnould 2011). In addition, we see work around changing marketplace cultures to foster sustainable consumption (e.g. Holt 2002; 2012). Finally, some work addresses social structural issues constraining sustainable behavior (e.g. Bartiaux 2008; Press and Arnould 2009; Shove 2010; Spaargaren 2003) and addresses how to encourage and manage transitions to more sustainable market options and behaviors (Shove and Walker 2007). More research is needed in both conceptualizing and understanding sustainability in markets and consumption especially on

how we might transition to a more circular economy that still delivers consumer benefits poor bulk of humanity. Consequently, this area of inquiry would benefit from a multi-disciplinary approach that looks at markets, policies, macro-institutions as well as socio-cultural aspects. That is, this is a wide open area for research and contribution to theory and practice that must be addressed at micro, meso and macro levels; we urgently need better theories and models.

Postcolonial turn

A recent discussion about colonialism/neocolonialism/post colonialism has emerged in CCT work. In this vein authors are addressing these ideas in terms of the imposition of a neo-colonial understanding of local culture onto hybrid forms as diverse as curry and yoga (Coskuner-Balli and Ertimur 2017; Varmin 2017, 354). Neocolonial discourse stereotypes the Other in ways that normalize hierarchical relationships between elites and dominated social groups (Olivotti 2016). For example, Varman and Costa (2013) show that the idea that subsistence producers in developing countries exist in a kind of naturalized state of lack – of knowledge, of entrepreneurial skills, of foresight, of capital – and that they need to “catch up” to the developed west. However, at the same time producers in developing countries are Othered as themselves underdeveloped and needing to emulate normalized Western behavioral models of neoliberal economic behavior (Mwauru 2017; Varman and Costa 2013; Veresiu and Giesler 2014). In a sustained critique of the Americo-Eurocentrism in consumer research, Arnould has sought to inject the distinctive logic of marketing and consumption practice among market actors in francophone West Africa into the conversation; for example, emphasizing the distinctive globalities enacted through consumption (Arnould, 1989); distinctive forms of relationship marketing (Arnould, 2001); and flexible cluster forms (Arnould and Mohr, 2005). Bonsu (2008, 2009) and DeBerry-Spence (2010) have begun to enlarge a critical African voice in CCT Dolan and Scott (2009a, 2009b) have analyzed the “Double X” economy represented by Bangladeshi

and South African women's unpaid and/or undervalued domestic labor and activities in the informal and underground economies. Press and Arnould (forthcoming) address the issue of why small entrepreneurs in east Africa, with access to many resources in the market system, are not emerging from poverty. They suggest that the neocolonialist capitalist viewpoint of how markets should work and how small entrepreneurs should interact with markets overlooks institutional issues that shows how such a market is designed for small players to fail. As Thompson, Arnould and Giesler (2013, 165-166) suggest,

This postcolonial strand of the CCT heteroglossia would...enable consumers to better interrogate the historical conditions that underlie their own socioeconomic privileges and the sources of marginalization and disempowerment that affect such a large percentage of the world's population. In so doing, postcolonial CCT would begin to disentangle the material and discursive webs that both sustain and potentially destabilize these global networks of political, cultural, and socioeconomic distinctions and hierarchies.

[Building more direct connections to managerial practice](#)

Consumer culture theory is inherently a field of inquiry that seeks to unravel the complexities of consumer culture. In that goal, it shares conversations with many social science fields, anthropology and sociology being but a few. Some of our fellow academics do work and publish for managerial audiences (e.g. Holt and Cameron (2010) or Madsbjerg and Rasmussen (2014), and some consultants and anthropologist practitioners (e.g., Sunderland and Denny 2007) also join CCT scholars in their home court, whether in publications or events. Though CCT has an academic origin, its approach is valuable and applicable in the managerial sphere, as brand managers realize that cultural meanings, consumer collectivities and social affiliations, and consumer identity projects are integral to the market success of brands (Atkins 2004; Fournier and Lee 2009; Holt 2004; McCracken 2009). The recognition of the value of CCT is seen in the desire to employ anthropologists and designers inspired by cultural insights and the plethora successful consulting firms like the Practica Group, ReD Associates, Stripe Partners, or the

:Anthropik network. CCT can be a powerful tool to identify myriad issues within organizations and among stakeholders and to connect such issues with appropriate strategy development, building innovation and thought leadership. CCT researchers can play a larger role in driving direct innovation in managerial practice. CCT researchers continue to explore new empirical terrain and develop innovative methodologies, it is time to develop dissemination innovations. That is, CCT researchers should take a cue from TCR (Davis, Ozanne and Hill 2016) and seek ways to drive direct connections to practitioners and others outside the academic comfort zone.

Understanding business ecosystems

This is a largely unexplored area and one that is rife with opportunities for CCT researchers. Other fields have started to recognize the importance of looking beyond dyadic relationships in the supply chain. While CCT researchers have addressed networks of influence, such as brand communities (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001; Muniz and Schau 2005; McAlexander, Schouten, Koenig 2002), social movements and social media (Davari, Iyer and Guzman 2017; Kalliny, Ghanem and Kalliny 2018), a conceptualization of the interplay between industry, entrepreneurs, and other institutions remains underdeveloped. While some authors have probed the issues and opportunities coming from this interplay (e.g. Giesler and Veresiu 2014; Humphreys 2010a,b; Press et al. 2014, Martin and Schouten 2013; Thompson and Tian 2008; Lucarelli and Hallin 2015), CCT research in this area is underdeveloped. A cultural approach to understanding business ecosystems would build on this past CCT work, as well as work on the context of context (Askegaard and Linnet 2011; Cova et al. 2013) to shed light on how markets are built, maintained and address legitimacy in an increasingly high-risk world.

Exploring new business models

Researchers are seeking new exchange models to explain market realities. Many of the papers published in the CCT tradition and discussed above indeed refer to non-mainstream business models (Press and Arnould 2011; Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007; Thompson and Troester 2002; others?), but they do not directly address the subject of alternative business models. Thus, there has been an interest in sharing and other non-monetary forms of exchange. Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012) explore how social exchanges like sharing allow access to resources otherwise not available to some users. They chronicle access practices in market and nonmarket economies to identify the connection between knowledge around access to resources and the social system in which they are embedded. They propose that culture and social class moderate this relationship by creating contexts where social exchange (e.g., sharing) can provide access to resources in market economies. Other researchers have looked at collaborative consumption as a collective shift away from the outright purchase of things (McArthur 2015). In her study of sharing land with others, McArthur (2015) finds that significant social belonging, physical and mental benefits result from collaborative consumption. Others still are starting to address the sustainability of existing business models and propose new modes of exchange. For example, Herbert, Robert and Saucède (2018) explore the impact of liquid modernity on the French food retailing sector. They highlight how retailers are adapting to transformations in their industry, often looking to alternative modes of food provisioning for answers. They suggest some ways that retailers can regain some legitimacy by claiming a role in territorial sovereignty. Thus, we see the mixing of information and strategies between mainstream and alternative modes of food provisioning.

CCT researchers have an opportunity to directly address business models, perhaps starting by identifying the role of previously-studied alternative businesses in consumers' lives. Indeed, organizations looking to develop, grow, and expand need culturally-grounded ideas

about how to work with stakeholders, how to encourage innovation, and how to work with stakeholders in a more meaningful way. The discussion about stakeholders has up to now, largely remained in the dichotomy of retailer/firm/producer and consumer/user. With all the work CCT has done around blurring the lines between roles, a direct exploration of business model innovation could be fruitful for researchers, managers and ultimately other stakeholders as well.

Conclusion

Almost 40 years of research on CCT has produced hundreds of academic publications, dozens of books, an international organization, the Consumer Culture Theory Consortium, and an annual conference soon to celebrate its 15th year. Where CCT has fared less well in in gaining more than a toehold in top business schools, especially in North American (Arnould and Thompson 2007). The socio-historical reasons for this have been examined elsewhere (Thompson, Arnould and Giesler 2013; Tadajewski 2006). Nevertheless, the movement has spawned regional variants in the Nordic countries and the Mediterranean region and an emergent variant in Latin America. Researchers have proven the theoretical and practical value of constructs drawn from a range of social sciences and humanities. As researchers, we now know an enormous amount about the full circle of consumption phenomena from pre-acquisition to disposition, and the relationships between these practices and identity, community, social life, and belief systems in the context of global market capitalism. We know a lot more about the geographical scope of and cultural variations in consumer culture that we did in 1980. Fortunately, CCT has not coalesced into a unified theoretical program. Researchers continues to

welcome unfamiliar theoretical orientations, and innovations in methodology and representations of research results. Because of this heteroglossic diversity, CCT has fostered debate and reasoned disagreement, which for the most part remains constructive. This does not mean that CCT does not represent some currents of thought better than others, thus offering exciting opportunities for further debate and development as suggested above.

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