

CONSUMER CULTURE THEORY

Edited by Samantha N. N. Cross,
Cecilia Ruvalcaba, Alladi Venkatesh,
and Russell W. Belk

RESEARCH IN
CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

VOLUME 19

CONSUMER CULTURE THEORY

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PREFACE

We live within a global culture that is being rapidly transformed, especially due to developments in technology (e.g. social media) and emerging cultural geographies. In this context, we make reference to an earlier work ([Belk, 2008](#)) aptly titled, ‘Hyperreality and Globalization’. With a slight modification, the two themes for the Consumer Culture Theory conference (2017 CCT) are ‘hyperreality’ and ‘cultural hybridization’.

Given the general focus (i.e. hyperreality) of the conference, we selected the conference location as Disneyland, Southern California. As a cultural imaginary, here is a quote from [Jean Baudrillard \(1988\)](#) which seems appropriate:

Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, whereas all of Los Angeles and the America that surrounds it are no longer real, but belong to the hyperreal order and to the order of simulation.

A second theme for the conference is ‘cultural hybridization’, implying that, thanks to virtual media and other related developments, we are witnessing a transnational imaginary and global cultural connectivity that has not been seen before – leading to transformations in cultural patterns and practices. The CCT forum provided a unique opportunity to explore related themes.

The 2017 CCT conference attracted submissions from over 34 countries. In attendance were 230 consumer cultural theorists and several presentations were of the highest order. In this volume, we have included 11 research papers as chapters under three headings: Part I: (Hyper) Reality and Cultural Hybridization; Part II: Navigating the Marketplace and Part III: The Consumer Culture Theory Paradigm. Part I consists of three chapters, followed by seven chapters in Part II and one single chapter in Part III. Space limitations have restricted us from including more articles.

The following are highlights of the chapters in this volume.

**PART I:
(HYPER) REALITY AND CULTURAL
HYBRIDIZATION**

In their chapter titled ‘Amazing Information: Hyperreality’ and ‘The World of *Wicked*’ Kent Drummond, Susan Aronstein and Terri Rittenburg propose a promotional exhibit for the Broadway musical *Wicked*, entitled ‘The World of *Wicked*’, to better understand the ways in which arts marketers hail and compose new and existing consumers. Eco’s concept of hyperreality and its relationship to remediation and cultural sustainability are brought to bear upon arts phenomenon. As producers utilize new media platforms to reach the consumer, they make the experience of their shows more immediate and quite compelling. This paper received the Best Competitive Paper Award at the conference.

In the next chapter, Mariam Humayun and Russell Belk focus on the mythic nature of the pseudonymous Bitcoin creator, Satoshi Nakamoto. Drawing on ideas from Foucault and Barthes on authorship, they analyze the notion of the absence of the author, using interview data, participant observation, archival data and netnography. The authors examine the discourses that emerge in the wake of multiple Satoshi Nakamoto exposés ‘that serve as both stabilizing and destabilizing forces in the Bitcoin ecosystem’. They analyze the different interpretations of Satoshi Nakamoto and identify how consumers try to find meaning in Satoshi’s disappearance, while providing a richer understanding of the nature of anonymity in our hyper-celebrity culture.

In the third chapter in this section, Francesca Sobande explores parental management and use of media, as part of strategies to affirm children’s racial identities, as well as to assist such parenting efforts. The research analyzes how parents construct Black children’s engagement with media, as being a counter-cultural coping mechanism, to temper the potential racial and diasporic discordance of their children’s identities. In-depth interviews are conducted about the media marketplace experiences of Black women in Britain. The analytic approach is informed by studies of identity, visual consumption, as well as race in the marketplace, which emphasize how identity intersects with consumer culture.

PART II: NAVIGATING THE MARKETPLACE

In the first chapter, ‘Emerging Market Dynamics Within and Beyond Consumer Tribes’ the authors, Silvia Biraghi, Rossella Gambetti and Stefano Pace, explore how the interplay between a passionate consumer and his or her embeddedness in the network of a consumer tribe provides a fertile environment for the emergence of an entrepreneurial venture, combining macro-level and micro-level concerns linking the needs of the marketplace and the tribe. The research, set within the context of a consumer’s entrepreneurial project, employs an ethnographic methodological approach.

The next chapter by Jennifer Smith Maguire adopts a practice-oriented approach to address gaps in existing knowledge of the significance of cultural producers’ and intermediaries’ practices of taste for the construction and organization of markets. Using the example of the cultural field of ‘natural’ wine, the author proposes how taste operates as a logic of practice, generating market actions in relation to the aesthetic regime of provenance. The chapter sets out the conceptual relationship between aesthetic regimes and practices of taste. The discussion draws from interpretive research on natural wine producers and cultural intermediaries involving 40 interviews with natural wine makers, retailers, sommeliers and writers based in New York, Western Australia, the Champagne region and the Cape Winelands. Three dimensions of how taste is translated into action are examined. The chapter’s discussion of dispositions, affect, intuition and pattern identification provide interesting insights with implications for market development and value construction.

The third chapter in this section by Bhupesh Manoharan and Rohit Varman examines beef consumption practices in two villages in Tamil Nadu, India. It examines how the upper caste creates spatial boundaries to separate the inside from the outside in their consumption of beef. The authors conducted 70 in-depth interviews, and observed beef buying and consumption practices. The research shows how the upper caste members separate the inside from the outside and surreptitiously consume beef. Dalits or untouchables are unable to create such separations and as a result are stigmatized and ostracized. Moreover, the distinction between the outside and the inside is not fixed but is in a state of transition. This study offers insights into how stigma is defined by spatial boundaries and help us understand purity, pollution, and stigma in consumption practices as ongoing processes of social division and discrimination.

The fourth chapter by Kathryn Pounders and Marlys Mason examines the experiences and struggles of young women with breast cancer as they navigate the intersectionality of their illness and gender identity. Specifically,

the research explores the construction and expression of gender identity as a core part of who they were prior to diagnosis and who they desire to be in the future. Using a phenomenological approach, the authors investigate how women with breast cancer experience changes related to gender identity. The findings indicate that young women undergo gender identity disruptions and shifts as the result of breast cancer diagnosis and treatment. Informants in this study indicated that their resultant identities did not conform to cultural normative representations of gender, which profoundly impact their perceptions of the physical self, gender roles and intimate relationships.

The next study by Carly Drake and Scott Radford seeks to determine the marketplace practices that consumers engage in with regard to masculine and feminine codes employed in product design. Since extant consumer research argues that consumers prefer marketing stimuli that matches their sex or gender identity. This study also asks how consumers' practices inform this understanding of the possession-self link. The authors use semi-structured interviews with an auto-driving component to answer the research questions. Data from 20 interviews were analysed using feminist critical discourse analysis and a post-structuralist feminist-informed theoretical framework. Different consumer practices identified in the data show that interpretations and evaluations of product gender are sometimes, but not always, a reflection of the gendered self. In addition to gender, future research must include different socioeconomic backgrounds, as well as non-binary or gender non-conforming individuals, in order to enhance or even challenge these findings.

The study by Ivan Small examines emerging consumption patterns in Vietnam's transportation market and considers them within broader practices and histories of mobility. The specific focus is on how Vietnamese consumers are apprehending the current transportation shift from motorcycles to automobiles and the corresponding societal transformations it foreshadows and remembers. Research was conducted between 2013 and 2016 and involved analyses of transportation industry global and regional documents and reports, observations and interviews with users and sellers of motorcycles and automobiles in Vietnam, participant observation and focus groups with drivers and driving schools in Danang and Ho Chi Minh City Vietnam, and discussions with transportation designers, engineers, manufacturers and marketing professionals. The main findings indicate that, in this transition period, as shifts in manufacturing and recent trade agreements mandating tariff reductions on transportation commodities reorient temporal and material relations to the market, anticipations of automobiles are paramount.

The final study in this section, by Annamma Joy, Russell Belk, Steve Charters, Jeff Wang and Camilo Peña, comprises multi-year ethnographic

research, encompassing participant wine tours, depth interviews and short interviews, on wine-tourism in selected regions in South Africa and India. The authors discuss the wine-tourism experience as pleasure-oriented consumer journeys undertaken by individuals and groups. On this journey, guides and consumers collectively co-create the memorable shared experience, which ultimately builds a sense of social obligation among participants towards tour guides and winery staff. The authors use performance theory to highlight the types of consumer engagement that tour guides induce, combining products and processes to leave participants with vivid, lasting memories.

PART III: THE CONSUMER CULTURE THEORY PARADIGM

The only chapter included in this last section, Shahzeb Jafri, fittingly addresses the issue of how CCT as a discipline has faced criticism from its inception to date. The author argues that while criticism based on methodology and research goals comes mainly from marketing's qualitative realm, various CCT proponents have pointed out the field's inadequacy in conducting a macro-level consumption analysis. The article presents the emergence of the CCT tradition as a new paradigm within consumer research, with criticisms raised against the discipline presented as 'anomalies' highlighted in a normal scientific procedure. The paper uses an overview and analysis of the immigrant acculturation literature produced by CCT researchers to depict how CCT projects focus on adding persistence to theoretical frameworks. By doing so, anomalies have been implicitly treated by the tradition's members. The article illustrates a previously marginalized research tradition advancing towards strengthening its paradigmatic boundaries. Moreover, the paper aims to unfold the possible implications this boundary strengthening could have for aspiring CCT researchers, where both negative and positive outcomes are discussed.

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