CONSUMER CULTURE THEORY

RESEARCH IN CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

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CONSUMER CULTURE THEORY: *VIVE LA RÉVOLUTION*

This book includes a selection of works presented and discussed at the 2016 Consumer Culture Theory conference, which took place in Lille, France, on July 6–9, 2016. It also includes a Presidential Address reflecting on the ongoing institutionalization of the consumer culture field by Prof. Eileen Fischer, President of the Consumer Culture Theory Consortium. Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) is an umbrella term for a broad range of theoretical approaches, methodological orientations, and representational practices that emphasize a cultural, and often critical, understanding of markets and consumption (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). The annual CCT conference is a meeting place for an increasingly large and more geographically diverse community of scholars: the 2016 edition witnessed a record attendance of 320 participants, mostly from Europe (with the largest contingents coming from France, the United Kingdom, and the Nordic Countries) and North America, but with growing presences from the Asia-Pacific region (notably, Australia and New Zealand) and South America (especially, Brazil). The conference also marks the first time the conference has been held in a conference center rather than on a university campus.

The development of the conference, which has reached its eleventh edition since its inception in 2005, has run parallel with the institutionalization of CCT. Prof. Fischer's paper offers an insightful analysis of the factors (both positive and negative) affecting the legitimization of the consumer culture movement in the broader institutional fields of marketing and the business school environment.

The other papers in this volume were selected by the volume editors, two of whom also served as conference co-chairs. The papers were selected from the 55 papers accepted for inclusion in the conference's competitive paper track (out of 93 submitted). Selection was based on reviewer feedback and the editor's own reading of the importance of topics, theoretical contribution, methodological rigor, and coherence with conference theme. While some excellent papers did not make it in this volume as authors had other publications plans, this volume is representative of the best work presented at the 2016 CCT conference.

The theme of the conference, "Vive la Révolution," connoted multiple meanings linked to France and its culture. As Arnould and Thompson (2016) have recently noted, one key development of CCT is the maturation of regional reflections on consumer culture. France is a hotspot for consumer culture theory, and home to a very active research community which has met regularly since the early 2000s thanks to dedicated events such as the *Journées de Recherche en Marketing de Bourgogne* (Marketing Research Days of Bourgogne) and the *Journées Normandes de Recherche sur la Consommation* (Normandy Days of Research on Consumption), which have contributed to legitimizing the field and creating a supporting environment for doctoral students and young faculty (Özçağlar-Toulouse & Cova, 2010). Since 2008, Lille has also hosted a seminar on Qualitative Methods and Research Design that is part of the Doctoral School in Consumer Culture Theorizing. Additionally, various French schools and universities now have a concentration of CCT-oriented faculty (examples include, but are not limited to, University of Lille, Skema Business School, and Kedge Business School).

Taking place for the third time in Europe (after Oxford, 2012; and Helsinki, 2014), the eleventh CCT conference's call for submissions took advantage of the benefits of its French location to contribute to a broader conversation on consumption, culture, and society in several different manners. First, France is perhaps most known for *la Révolution Française*. With its motto, *Liberté, égalité, fraternité* (liberty, equality, brotherhood), the French Revolution recalls key concepts in the CCT field (among them, agency, emancipation, community, sharing) as well as the experiences of those who bravely fought during the "paradigm wars" era to legitimize what now is a thriving community of scholars. In this spirit, the conference sought contributions with big ideas, which could contribute to revolutionizing not only theories and methods but also the impact of our research. Second, the conference theme hints at the role played by French theory in the cultural understanding of markets and consumption, whose potential is arguably still to be unfolded. Finally, France has a distinct consumption and marketing culture, for example in the areas of food, wine, fashion, and luxury, which evolved in a distinctively local manner before affecting, and being affected in turn by global marketplace dynamics.

Following with the conference theme, this volume is divided into three broad sections. Part I, "The French Revolution: Liberté, Fraternité, Egalité," includes five papers employing French Theory as their conceptual underpinning or referring to revolutionary values. In the opening paper, Smith Maguire and Zhang build on Bourdieu's work on taste to examine how cultural intermediaries frame consumption as legitimate and desirable

in the emerging fine wine market in Shanghai. This is followed by Tonner, Hamilton, and Hewer's analysis of the home exchange phenomenon – usually considered as part of the sharing economy. Their findings show that consumers may treat their homes in an entrepreneurial manner in order to enjoy the freedom of traveling to places otherwise unreachable. Liberty from economic constraints therefore seems to motivate these consumers more than a sense of kinship or brotherhood with hosted travelers. Two other papers in this section deal with equality (or lack thereof). Harrison, Drenten, and Pendarvis investigate lived experience of gender inequality faced by female consumers in the masculine-oriented video gaming subculture of consumption. The authors found that gamer girls experience harassment, systematic disempowerment, and a defeatist attitude toward the future, resulting in vulnerable consumer identities. Syrjälä, Jaskari, Leipämaa-Leskinen's work examines the object agency of living horses and nonliving horsemeat in relation to humans. Their study has important implications for animal welfare, as it provides a theory-informed shift from a human-centered perspective to a post-human view of equality between various kinds of entities. The concluding paper in this section deals with the revolutionary value of brotherhood, which conflates together moral obligations toward others and a sense of community. Bajde and Ottlewski examine "housing for help" – a form of home sharing between a consumer who requires assistance and a person in need of low-cost accommodation. Their study introduces the term social-economic innovation to make sense of alternative exchange systems addressing today's social and environmental problems. Their research findings shed light on the cultural challenges that are inherent in the negotiation of roles and relational dynamics among participant consumers and organizations.

Part II, "Revolutionizing the Market: Consumer Activism and Sustainability," brings together five papers that follow the revolution's call to arms to change social reality for good. Gollnhofer's analysis of refugee camps shows how activist consumers can create places set apart from surrounding spaces to enact and convey values that are not accommodated in the traditional marketplace. Rosenthal and Cardoso's investigation of Brazilian consumers' reactions to the 2014 FIFA World Cup similarly shows that subcultural activism can play a role in the deligitimation of mainstream markets. Gabl, Stoeckl, and Hemetsberger focus instead on the rise in public brand evaluations in online networks. Their analysis shows that consumers can collectively contrast global brands by broadening concepts of acceptable conduct and by assigning responsibility. Moving beyond the micro-level of analysis, Fuschillo's conceptual piece proposes

that market-generated phenomena operate as social and institutional forces that can influence society as a whole. Using fandom as a case in point, he suggests that work in CCT can be productively used to understand emerging phenomena in the fields of politics and religion that would be difficult to understand with mainstream conceptual frameworks. In the final paper in this section, Robinson and Chelekis propose a Heideggerian approach to identify and reconcile the epistemic contradictions between sustainability and marketing. These authors draw attention to the fact that as long as mainstream marketing remains embedded in a paradigm of unlimited growth and consumption of natural resources, a sustainability agenda will remain unachievable in the market. In their view, sustainability can be productively conceptualized as a metaphorical funerary rite that can put consumers and marketers in contact with the fragility of human life on the planet, resulting in positive changes in attitudes and behaviors.

The third and final part of this volume, "The Digital Revolution," comprises two papers that look at the methodological opportunities and challenges stemming from the revolutionary impact of social networks on consumer lives. Scaraboto, Ferreira, and Chung examine the interplay between the curatorial practices of consumer collectors and the materiality of the collected objects thanks to publicizing private collections on social media (specifically, YouTube). Methodologically, this paper is insightful as it shows how online data can be employed to meaningfully investigate the material aspects of consumer-object relationships. Eagar and Dann's concluding paper proposes methodological procedures to capture and analyze social media data consisting of images and text such as Instagram selfies.

We thank all contributors for making their work available in this volume, which constitutes an enduring legacy of knowledge exchange and co-creation generated thanks to the 2016 Consumer Culture Theory conference. We hope that readers will find this selection of use to make sense of contemporary consumption phenomena and provide a source of inspiration for their own research.

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PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

A REFLECTION ON THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF CONSUMER CULTURE RESEARCH

The co-organizers of this year's Consumer Culture Theory conference, Nil Özçağlar-Toulouse and Diego Rinallo, kindly invited me to write an essay for this volume on the topic of "changes in the CCT field." They encouraged me to reflect on this, they explained, because of my current vantage point as both the Consumer Culture Theory Consortium President, and as a *Journal of Consumer Research* (JCR) co-editor. I interpreted their request as an opportunity to reflect on dynamics in the institutionalization of the field. It is an opportunity that engenders both gratitude and apprehension. Gratitude, because I spend so much time thinking about this topic and have been an active participant in the broader movement for decades, Apprehension, because in offering an honest reflection, I must acknowledge some persistent challenges. And I fear that acknowledging this may be discouraging to some or misinterpreted as disparagement by others. My intentions are quite the opposite. I want to encourage this diverse community of scholars, especially the newest generation. For them, in particular, I think it is important to understand what has been achieved and to think about what lies ahead.

I think it is valuable to view the emergence of what is now typically referred to as consumer culture theory field, and of the "brands" that preceded it, through the lens of institutional theory. The disparate streams of research that were knit together in Arnould and Thompson (2005) were as much acts of institutional entrepreneurship – efforts to reconfigure an existing field of scholarship – as they were academic writings. The earliest researchers in what they themselves might have referred to as the naturalistic, interpretive, or postmodern traditions (Badot & Cova, 1992; Belk, Sherry, & Wallendorf, 1988; Brown, 1993; Hirschman & Holbrook, 1992) were attempting to make space in the journals they targeted and the schools they worked in for researchers who wanted to do consumer and marketing research differently. From an institutional theory perspective, the goal was to create legitimacy for work that departed from the dominant

psychological and economic traditions and that embraced more humanistic, sociological, and anthropological perspectives. I use the term legitimacy here to refer to a "generalized perception or assumption that [actions – such as doing academic work in non-dominant traditions] are desirable, proper or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs and definitions" (cf. Suchman, 1995, p. 574).

The pioneering efforts of these institutional entrepreneurs were successful in some important respects. For example, work published by some of them has been disproportionately impactful, as illustrated in part by a recent review that identified the most cited papers in JCR's 40-year history (Wang, Bendle Mai, & Cotte, 2015); it documented that the portion of the top-cited papers that we might retroactively categorize as belonging to the consumer culture tradition was far greater than the percentage of such papers that has been published in the journal (see also Rapp & Hill, 2015). As another example, consider the fact that work in this tradition has for some time been published in the majority of the marketing journals that business school deans encourage faculty to target when they have ranking exercises in mind: for instance, four of the six marketing journals included in the Financial Times "FT 50 list" (see http://blog.openinnovation.net/2016/06/research-policy-added-to-ft-journal-list.html) frequently feature papers by scholars in this community. And speaking of rankings and ratings, another indicator of institutionalization is that journals that have devoted large or increasing portion of their page space to work of this kind – *Consumption, Markets and Culture* and *Marketing Theory* come immediately to mind – are ever more highly rated in terms of their impact (see, e.g., http://ama-academics.communityzero.com/elmar?go=6112732). I could also note that individuals associated with the tradition are held in high regard within the wider professional field; to take but two examples, I note that Nil Özçağlar-Toulouse holds the position of editor of the top French language marketing Journal, *Recherches et Applications en Marketing*, while Linda Price is a past President of the Association for Consumer Research and President Elect of the American Marketing Association's Academic Council.

There is also no doubt in my mind that the efforts of Arnould and Thompson (2005) to forge a brand that would "better enable researchers working inside and outside of [the] eclectic research tradition to better grasp the theoretical questions and concerns addressed by … contextually grounded investigations" (Arnould & Thompson, 2016, p. 1) further fueled institutionalization, as they themselves outlined in a paper published in last year's edition of this volume. Equally important in institutionalization have

been training initiatives such as those mounted by the faculty at University of Southern Denmark, Bilkent University, Royal Holloway, and University of Lille, not to mention the training workshop that is held each year that the Consumer Culture Theory conference runs in North America, and, of course, the annual conference itself. These serve not only their stated purposes but also as venues where newcomers can meet one another and those more established in the field, forging bonds that help newly minted PhDs find their first job and mid-career scholars make their next moves.

While I do, then, regarding the field as having made progress toward institutionalization, I think that there are in some quarters distinct limits to the current perceived legitimacy (and all legitimacy is perceptual) of the CCT brand, and of the scholarly movement of which it has been an important part. Arnould and Thompson (2016, p. 1) note that they had hoped their 2005 paper "would help to dispel enduring misconceptions of this research tradition as a sphere of exotica and esoterica, lacking in practical value or theoretical consequence [and] circumvent the pejorative associations that had come to haunt prior monikers such as qualitative consumer research, interpretivist consumer research, or postmodern consumer research". I think the success of this effort has been mixed.

More specifically, I believe that while the cognitive legitimacy of consumer culture research has increased, its practical legitimacy is more unevenly established or even contested. Cognitive legitimacy refers to the awareness of an emergent entity among members of the larger field it has entered; while an entity may not be fully understood, it existence becomes taken-for-granted when cognitive legitimacy is achieved (Suchman, 1995; see also Humphreys & Latour, 2013). And I do think that the branding efforts recounted by Arnould and Thompson (2016) were highly effective in helping create a conceptual node or category for work that is not in psychology, economics, or other traditions familiar to many faculty in marketing departments. Having one single label that could serve as a short hand has proven incredibly useful for categorization purposes. My evidence for asserting this is largely anecdotal, but I find that if I introduce myself to marketing faculty who work in other traditions as a "CCT scholar" they understand me to be saying I am part of a group that studies consumption and consumers using approaches that differ from theirs. My sense is that they know little about the theoretical content of consumer culture theory, most have never read a consumer culture paper, and many assume that it is the use of qualitative methods that is the hallmark of a CCT paper. But at least they are aware of the label and have some associations with it.

Pragmatic legitimacy refers to an audiences' self-interested calculation of an entity's value to them (Suchman, 1995). And I see more mixed evidence that marketing faculty who work in other traditions, or the business school deans who make hiring decisions, see CCT research as having pragmatic legitimacy. To me, evidence of pragmatic legitimacy would manifest itself as willingness or even eagerness to hire faculty who are publishing consumer culture research. Clearly, in many Nordic and European schools (which for the moment still includes UK schools) CCT researchers and their research must have considerable pragmatic legitimacy since so many academic institutions have a track record of hiring and retaining faculty who self-identify themselves as doing consumer culture research. A number of European schools boast not one or two but three, four, or more such scholars. This speaks volumes about the perceived value to the institution of having faculty in their employ who conduct such research. And the same is true at a small handful of North American, South American, and Australasian institutions as well.

But many researchers whose identity as consumer culture scholars are isolated in their institutions, and report that there is little if any chance their departments would even consider hiring a second person doing consumer culture research. Their perceptions resonate with the observation that many business schools have not replaced CCT scholars who were denied tenure or who left voluntarily. But perhaps the most compelling evidence of the limits to the pragmatic legitimacy of this brand is the fact that the sizable majority of North American academic institutions have no CCT scholars in their business schools and demonstrate no interest in attracting them, judging by the wording of job ads that are posted and the paucity of interviews granted to CCT candidates who apply for open positions.

Why is it that pragmatic legitimacy of the CCT brand may be so unevenly established? One possibility relates to my speculation above that scholars unfamiliar with the theoretical content of CCT research consider it synonymous with qualitative research methods, and tend to denigrate research produced using qualitative methods as bad science relative to that produced using quantitative ones. While there may be some individuals who feel this way, I doubt this alone can be the main explanation. I argue this because so many of the same business schools that demonstrate no interest in having a CCT researcher in their marketing department have in their employ one or more organizational theory and/or strategy scholars who routinely use these methods. If qualitative research per se were the "bogey man" to business school scholars who use other methods, then we

should find reluctance to hiring them across all departments, rather than a localized wariness in marketing departments.

When I have asked marketing scholars in schools with no CCT faculty whether they would consider hiring one, the reply I most often hear is that "we can't because we wouldn't be able to mentor them the same way we could mentor a junior faculty who does the kind of research we already do." I concede it may seem impractical to hire someone who would be difficult to mentor when there is a plethora of scholars in the "mainstream" traditions seeking employment and when helping junior colleagues get through tenure is a major consideration. The difficult-to-mentor explanation also may help make sense of the fact that CCT scholars don't represent such a potential pragmatic liability in schools – such as many of those in Europe and Scandinavia – where tenure systems don't exist.

I believe this is not the entire story however. I think there is an enactment of the CCT brand that leads to some unevenness in its pragmatic legitimacy. This enactment arises out of quite legitimate differences of opinion about the nature of the CCT brand. When these differences of opinion are played out in public fora, however, audiences outside the CCT community see an enactment of fractiousness which leaves questions in their minds about what any individual CCT researcher might bring to their department.

Consider, for example, some of the discussions that unfold on the Consumer Culture Theory Facebook group. In the kind of threads I am referring to, one person will express uneasiness about the cooptation of the CCT brand, and imply that making CCT useful to stakeholders such as the managers being trained by businesses schools would be antithetical to what the brand stands for. Other voices raised in these conversations will counter-argue. Some will pointedly claim space for dialogue with industry. Others will point out that managerially oriented organizations have been instrumental in supporting CCT research and researchers. Then the thread will die down or move in other directions, but in a few weeks or months, another similar debate will occur. While differences of opinion are to be expected given the disparate strands of scholarship that were intertwined when the CCT brand was forged, the net effect of ongoing, sometimes heated, debates leads to understandable confusion among outsiders looking on and seeking to figure out whether hiring a CCT researcher is likely to benefit their business school.

My point in making this observation is not to silence or condemn the heterogeneity in perspectives that characterize those affiliated with consumer culture research. I celebrate the fact that CCT has claimed as much institutional space as it has while remaining a movement that is, in my

view, a very big tent indeed. My point is that the public enactment of debates —sometimes seeming like attacks on particular individuals or streams of research — can have unforeseen consequences in terms of our positioning in the eyes of outsiders.

Perhaps it does not matter whether there is pervasive pragmatic legitimacy of the brand so long as those who wish to do consumer culture research can find meaningful and satisfying work in schools that do see the value in having consumer culture researchers as part of their complement. But when I hear junior scholars lamenting that it is tough to get a job in North America, I think it's important to understand why the CCT brand might not have the attractiveness to potential employers they might have expected given that more than 30 years have passed since the early institutional entrepreneurs began their efforts. And when I think about the future, I see the possibility that fewer North American doctoral students will take the risk of doing CCT research since employment prospects in their home continent are not growing and since Europe is (for other reasons) in something of a state of turmoil.

More than anything, I think that CCT is not a brand owned by anyone. It is a social movement whose strengths are those of its members. And I believe that the generation of scholars that is only now hitting their stride will be particularly crucial in determining the directions (geographic and otherwise) in which it advances.

Happily, this is good news indeed: I see a remarkably talented cadre of next generation consumer culture theorists on multiple continents who are increasingly gaining visibility. Many of them are eschewing existential debates about the nature of the CCT brand in favor of establishing vibrant streams of research on vital topics of immense relevance to multiple societal constituents. I hope this reflection will aid them in celebrating the achievements of those who started this movement and help them take up the challenges that lie ahead as they become the face of the CCT brand, and its custodians.

Eileen Fischer

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