

NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE
NUS Business School
Department of Marketing

MKT4418 / MKT4716 Consumer Culture Theory

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Sessions Semester I, 2020-2021
Class timings and venues to be confirmed

Course Objectives

Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) is a synthesizing framework that examines the sociocultural, experiential, symbolic and ideological aspects of consumption. The tenets of CCT research are aligned with consumer identity projects, marketplace cultures, the sociohistorical patterning of consumption, and mass-mediated marketplace ideologies and consumers' interpretive strategies. In this course, we will explore the dynamic relationships among consumer actions, the marketplaces and cultural meanings using theories and methods from multiple disciplines.

At the end of the course, students will be able to appreciate the different modes of inquiry for studying consumer culture. They will learn how consumer culture theory enables them to understand consumers and markets from multi-disciplinary perspectives. They will also be encouraged to critically analyse the readings and develop their own ideas for exploring consumer culture.

Prerequisites

MKT3402/MKT3702 Consumer Behavior

Text and Readings

As CCT is a broad, multi-disciplinary theoretical framework, there is no assigned textbook for the course. Readings are mainly from consumer research journals. You can download the readings from Library Resources in LumiNUS. **Please note that there is a heavy reading workload for this course.**

Course Structure

The major topics to be covered are aligned with the four tenets of Consumer Culture Theory (CCT), namely Consumer Identity Projects, Marketplace Cultures, The Sociohistorical Patterning of Consumption and Mass-Mediated Marketplace Ideologies and Consumers' Interpretive Strategies. The CCT framework is explained in detail in the following article: **Arnould, Eric J. and Craig J. Thompson (2005), "Consumer Culture Theory (CCT): Twenty Years of Research," Journal of Consumer Research, 31 (March), 868-882.**

1. Consumer Identity Projects

Consumers are defined as identity seekers and makers. We will explore how consumers construct a sense of self using marketer-generated materials. This assumes the structuring influence of the marketplace which produces certain kinds of consumer positions that consumers can choose to inhabit. This implies constraints on consumers and invites questions on whether consumers can break free of these constraints.

2. Marketplace Cultures

Consumers are configured as culture producers. We will explore how consumption as a dominant human practice reconfigures cultural blueprints for action and interpretation and vice versa. How is consumer culture instantiated in particular cultural milieu and what are the implications of this process for people experiencing it? How do consumers forge feelings of social solidarity and create distinctive, fragmentary, self-selected and sometimes transient cultural worlds through the pursuit of common consumption interests (subculture of consumption, consumption world, consumption microculture)? We will also examine collective identifications grounded in neotribalism, rituals, social practices, mythologies and status systems.

3. The Sociohistorical Patterning of Consumption

Consumers are enactors of social roles and positions. We will explore what is consumer society and how it is constituted and sustained, and the processes by which consumption choices and behaviors are shaped by social class hierarchies, gender, ethnicity, families, households and other formal groups. We will also examine the relationships among consumers' experiences, belief systems and practices, and these underlying institutional and social structures (for example, as manifested in brand communities, hyper-cultural ethnic identities).

4. Mass-Mediated Marketplace Ideologies and Consumers' Interpretive Strategies

Consumers are interpretive agents. We will explore the normative messages that commercial media may transmit about consumption. How do consumers make sense of these messages and formulate critical responses? We will integrate insights from critical and media theory, literary criticism and semiotics for this analysis. Consumption contexts that provide data for such analysis include advertising, films, TV programs, and the Internet.

Assessments (to be confirmed depending on class size and safe distancing measures)

Class Participation	20%
Discussion Leadership	20%
Test or Essays	30%
Group Project	30%
TOTAL	100%

The course operates on an **interactive, discussion-based, seminar-style format**. You will benefit most when you come to class having read and critically evaluated the readings, and are prepared to share your views. Individual and group assignments are tailored specifically to the learning goals for each semester, and are intended to provide a stimulating learning experience.

ACADEMIC HONESTY & PLAGIARISM

Academic integrity and honesty is essential for the pursuit and acquisition of knowledge. The University and School expect every student to uphold academic integrity & honesty at all times. Academic dishonesty is any misrepresentation with the intent to deceive, or failure to acknowledge the source, or falsification of information, or inaccuracy of statements, or cheating at examinations/tests, or inappropriate use of resources.

Plagiarism is 'the practice of taking someone else's work or ideas and passing them off as one's own' (The New Oxford Dictionary of English). The University and School will not condone plagiarism. Students should adopt this rule - You have the obligation to make clear to the assessor which is your own work, and which is the work of others. Otherwise, your assessor is entitled to assume that everything being presented for assessment is being presented as entirely your own work. This is a minimum standard. In case of any doubts, you should consult your instructor.

Additional guidance is available at:

<http://www.nus.edu.sg/registrar/adminpolicy/acceptance.html#NUSCodeofStudentConduct>

Online Module on Plagiarism:

<http://emodule.nus.edu.sg/ac/>

MKT4418 / MKT4716 Consumer Culture Theory – Topics (to be confirmed)

- Session 1** **What is Consumer Culture?
And What is Consumer Culture Theory (CCT)?**
- Session 2** **Who are the Consumers?
And How Do We Understand Them?**
- Session 3** **Fanaticism and the Norm
Formation of Groups**
- Session 4** **Consumer Identity Projects
Group Project: Confirm Topic**
- Session 5** **Offline and Online Communities**
- Session 6** **Extraordinary Experiences**
- Session 7** **Social Class and Cultural Capital**
- Session 8** **Status Consumption**
- Session 9** **Conscious Consumption**
- Session 10** **The Circle of Life**
- Session 11** **Moving versus Staying**
- Session 12/13** **Group Presentations and Discussions**

Reading List (to be confirmed)

Session 1: What is Consumer Culture? And What is Consumer Culture Theory?

Eric J. Arnould and Craig J. Thompson (2005), "Consumer Culture Theory (CCT): Twenty Years of Research," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 31 (March), 868-882.

Session 2: Who Are the Consumers? And How Do We Understand Them?

The Global Consumer Trends Report by Euromonitor International.

Supplementary Articles (for Group Project):

Laurel Anderson Hudson and Julie L. Ozanne (1988), "Alternative Ways of Seeking Knowledge in Consumer Research," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 14 (March), 508-521.

Deborah J. MacInnis and Valerie S. Folkes (2010), "The Disciplinary Status of Consumer Behavior: A Sociology of Science Perspective on Key Controversies," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 36 (April), 899-914.

Robert V. Kozinets (2002), "The Field Behind the Screen: Using Netnography for Marketing Research in Online Communities," *Journal of Marketing Research*, 39 (February), 61-72.

Arsel Zeynep (2017), "Asking Questions with Reflexive Focus: A Tutorial on Designing and Conducting Interviews," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 44, 939-948.

Session 3: Fanaticism and the Norm

Scott Smith, Dan Fisher and S. Jason Cole (2007), "The Lived Meanings of Fanaticism: Understanding the Complex Role of Labels and Categories in Defining the Self in Consumer Culture," *Consumption Markets & Culture*, 10 (2), 77-94.

Anastasia Seregina and John W. Schouten (2016), "Resolving Identity Ambiguity through Transcending Fandom," *Consumption, Markets & Culture*, 19 (1), 1-24.

Session 4: Consumer Identity Projects

Anat Keinan and Ran Kivetz (2011), "Productivity Orientation and the Consumption of Collectable Experiences," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 37 (April), 935-950.

Delphine Dion, Ouidade Sabri and Valerie Guillard (2014), "Home Sweet Messy Home: Managing Symbolic Pollution," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 41 (3), 565-589.

Session 5: Offline and Online Communities

Hope J. Schau, Albert M. Muniz Jr., and Eric J. Arnould (2009), "How Brand Community Practices Create Value," *Journal of Marketing*, 73 (September), 30-51.

Schouten, John W. and James McAlexander (1995), "Subcultures of Consumption: An Ethnography of the New Bikers," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 22 (1), 43-62 – a classic and one of the earliest published works in JCR on a consumption/brand community

Siwarit Pongsakornrunsilp and Jonathan E. Schroeder (2011), "Understanding Value Co-creation in a Co-consuming Brand Community," *Marketing Theory*, 11 (3), 303-324.

Session 6: Extraordinary Experiences

Eric J. Arnould and Linda Price (1993), "River Magic: Extraordinary Experience and the Extended Service Encounter," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 20 (June), 24-45.

Gulnur Tumbat and Russell W. Belk (2011), "Marketplace Tensions in Extraordinary Experiences," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 38 (June), 42-61.

Session 7: Social Class and Cultural Capital

Michelle Weinberger, Jane R. Zavisca and Jennifer M. Silva (2017), "Consuming for an Imagined Future: Middle-Class Consumer Lifestyle and Exploratory Experiences in the Transition to Adulthood," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 44(2), 332-360.

Chen Wei-Fen and Michelle R. Nelson (2017), "Champagne taste, beer budget: The new poor's incongruent capital and consumption," *Journal of Consumer Culture*, published online.

Session 8: Status Consumption

Tuba Ustuner and Douglas B. Holt (2010), "Toward a Theory of Status Consumption in Less Industrialized Countries," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 37 (June), 37-56.

Suraj Commuri (2009), "The Impact of Counterfeiting on Genuine-Item Consumers' Brand Relationships," *Journal of Marketing*, 73 (May), 86-98.

Session 9: Conscious Consumption

Lindsey B Carfagna, Emilie A Dubois, Connor Fitzmaurice, Monique Y Ouimette, Juliet B Schor, Margaret Willis and Thomas Laidley (2014), "An Emerging Eco-Habitus: The

Reconfiguration of High Cultural Capital Practices Among Ethical Consumers,” *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 14 (2), 158-178.

Zachary Schrank and Katrina Running (2018) “Individualist and Collectivist Consumer Motivations in Local Organic Food Markets,” *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 18 (1), 184-201.

Session 10: The Circle of Life

Darach Turley & Stephanie O’Donohoe (2017), “Mortality, morality and the marketplace: empathetic improvisation and the double duty of care in service encounters with bereaved consumers,” *Consumption Markets & Culture*, 20:5, 456-476.

Valérie Guillard (2017), “Understanding the process of the disposition of a loved one’s possessions using a theoretical framework of grief, *Consumption Markets & Culture*, 20:5, 477-496.

Session 11: Moving versus Staying

Marius K. Luedicke (2011), “Consumer Acculturation Theory: (Crossing) Conceptual Boundaries,” *Consumption Markets & Culture*, 14 (3), 223-244.

Soren Askegaard, Eric J Arnould and Dannie Kjeldgaard (2005), “Postassimilationist Ethnic Consumer Research: Qualifications and Extensions,” *Journal of Consumer Research*, 32 (June), 160-170.

Fleura Bardhi, Giana M. Eckhardt, and Eric J. Arnould (2012), “Liquid Relationship to Possessions,” *Journal of Consumer Research*, 39 (3), 510-529.

Sessions 12 and 13: Group Presentations and Discussions

Individual Assessments (to be confirmed)

Please read through and comply with all the requirements and deadlines. Failure to do so will result in a grade penalty. Please plan ahead as there will be no deadline extensions; all completed assessments are to be uploaded into the appropriate folders in LumiNUS.

Class Participation (20%)

This involves showing an understanding of the critical issues raised in the readings, and a willingness to speak up and participate in the discussions. It is the quality of your contribution that matters, not the quantity. You should also pay attention to the ongoing discussion and show how your contribution adds value to our overall understanding of the issues discussed.

If you miss class, your class participation score will be adversely affected. You will be asked to keep track of your contributions in class through a weekly Class Participation Survey. I will review your responses after each session. Please note that I will be assessing your contributions during the discussions, and will be “moderating” these taking into account the performance of your peers.

Discussion Leadership (20%)

This assignment is done by you and your partner(s). It involves taking the initiative to lead the discussion for the article (except for Reference Articles) in a particular class session. I will help to facilitate but the leadership should come from you and your partner(s). Sign-ups for articles / sessions are on a first-come first-served basis.

This Discussion Leadership assignment involves the following:

- (1) providing a concise summary of the key points of the article,
- (2) crafting one or two questions that will help the class to delve deeper into the issues discussed in the article, and
- (3) providing your own insights and/or supplementary materials to stimulate the discussion and highlight additional learning points.

Test or Essays (30%)

A test is likely to comprise three essay questions that will cover the course content/materials up to the end of Week 11. Instead of a test, students may be asked to write two individual essays. This assessment component will be confirmed closer to the start of the course.

Group Assessments (to be confirmed)

Teams will be required to conduct an in-depth study using a specific consumption context of their choice. The purpose of this project is to use insights from the course to explore and analyze the meanings and experiences that are important to consumers. Some examples would be consumer identity projects, marketplace cultures or consumption communities based on certain ideologies, and migrant consumers or ethnic consumer groups.

As part of this project, you will be encouraged to use some of the methods you have been reading about in the articles such as face-to-face interviews, participant/non-participant observations, ethnography, etc. Your project grade will be based on a holistic appraisal of the content and quality of your project according to the application of CCT concepts and theories and a final presentation. Your contributions to the project will also be evaluated by your team-mates (peer evaluations).

Interviews and Transcripts

For interviews, the number of interviewees should be two multiplied by the number of project team members (e.g., if you have 5 team members, you should do 10 interviews). The use of a recording device is strongly recommended. Each interview must be transcribed.

All transcripts must have the following identifiers – date/time/location of interview, name of interviewer, pseudonym for interviewee and pertinent demographic information for the interviewee. All the interview transcripts should be uploaded collectively as one dataset into the **“Group Projects” Folder** in LumiNUS, together with your Interview Guide and a Profile of Interview Respondents with pertinent demographic information

Your project grade will be based on a holistic appraisal of the content and quality of your project according to the requirements outlined below. Your contributions to the project will also be evaluated by your team-mates, and the project grade may be adjusted based this evaluation. You will not receive any marks for the Group Project if I do not receive your Peer Evaluation.

1. Application of CCT Concepts and Theories (20%)

First and foremost, your team will be evaluated by how well you have used the concepts and theories discussed in class to gain insights into your choice of consumption context. The insights you share should be supported with rigorous and relevant data collection and analyses.

2. Presentation (10%)

You will be required to make a creative and interesting presentation lasting no more than **20 minutes**. We will draw lots for the order of presentations (for Sessions 12 and 13). A soft-copy of your presentation materials must be uploaded into the **“Group Projects” Folder** in LumiNUS during Week 12 regardless of your presentation date. A hard-copy of your presentation materials (two slides on each page) should be made available to me at the time of your presentation. No formal written report is required.