

2017 ACR Fellow Addresses

Consumer Research in the Age of Neoliberal Discontinuities: Incitements to Intellectual Edgework

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Preface: I owe many thanks to my long-time mentor, friend and, partner in crime, Eric J. Arnould for his constructive feedback on an earlier version of this address.

One of my favorite films is the Coen Brothers' *Barton Fink* (1991) which tells the story of moderately successful New York City playwright—the titular Fink—who is unexpectedly commissioned to write a screenplay for a major Hollywood production. Though at first uncertain about leaving his local sources of creative inspiration, Fink decides to pursue fame and fortune in Tinseltown, but upon arrival, he is stricken with a paralyzing and unremitting case of writers block. From that point, the film takes the Coen brothers' signature surreal turns. However, my own experience of being named an ACR Fellow heightened the personal relevance of Fink's agonizing plight.

Upon official announcement that I was joining my fellow award recipients Debbie MacInnis and Jagdish Sheth as the newest class of ACR Fellows, I was initially stunned and then elated and, of course, deeply honored. However, that glowing aura was soon punctured by a nagging question—"what will you say as an ACR Fellow?"—that haunted me with increasing intensity as this imminent day grew ever closer and the magnitude of the task seemed more and more daunting. And every single time I sought to placate this anxiety by making tangible progress on this talk, I had a Barton Fink moment—blank stare meets blank screen.

But as they say, "adversity is the mother of searching the ACR archives to read prior Fellows' addresses and praying that you can steal some of their ideas without anyone noticing." During the course of that envisioned archival poaching, however, I noticed that these talks seemed to express a kind of collective consciousness, or perhaps, enacted a tacitly understood cultural script of how one makes such an address. This cultural script involves two discernible narrative motifs, sometimes expressed singularly and sometimes melded into a kind of hybrid form. And this inductive realization provided the elusive catalyst for this address—Barton Fink be gone.

In the first motif, an ACR Fellow articulates a vision of the field and uses the bully pulpit of the address to advocate for a particular research direction or methodological program that might allow our sub-discipline to attain a higher level of theoretical development and societal relevance. This motif, for example, can be found in the inaugural fellows address by James Engel (1981)—"The Discipline of Consumer Research: Permanent Adolescence or Maturity?" (also see Bagozzi 1994; Lynch 2011; Wright 1999).

The second narrative motif is more retrospective, introspective, and autobiographical. In these talks, the ACR Fellow offers a personal reflection on his/her career journey and the life and career lessons learned while acknowledging all those who helped along the way (c.f., Belk 1995; Holbrook 1995; Hirschman 1996).

Of these, the second theme seemed to better capture my feelings on being named an ACR Fellow. I started to write a talk that would recognize the numerous peers, mentors, doctoral students, and co-authors who have so greatly enriched my personal and professional life. But, in was reflecting on all those relationships, discussions, and shared experiences, another more reflexive line of questioning began to crystallize in regard to the ACR Fellows Award and its institutional purpose: "This award, instituted in 1979 recognizes the career contributions of ACR individuals, preferably during their lifetime

for "significant impact on scholarly work in consumer behavior" [https://www.acrwebsite.org/web/core-activities/acr-awards.aspx].

This criterion begs a question: why should a consumer researcher, institutionally deemed to have had "significant impact," be so recognized in the first place? To ask such a question will likely strike you dear reader as a peculiar one. The answer seems to be common-sense knowledge that can "go with saying." As with many ritualistic practices, this aura of self-evidence masks that the answer to this seemingly unnecessary question is actually contingent on cultural ideals and values that are given institutional credence and, conversely, those placed in a more marginal position. At this juncture, we can begin to articulate the neoliberal discontinuities referenced in the title of this address and the tensions that they create between two contrasting normative models of consumer research. These ideological discontinuities are represented in the Figure below and which also provides a visual template for the ensuing discussion.

Discontinuous Models of Consumer Research

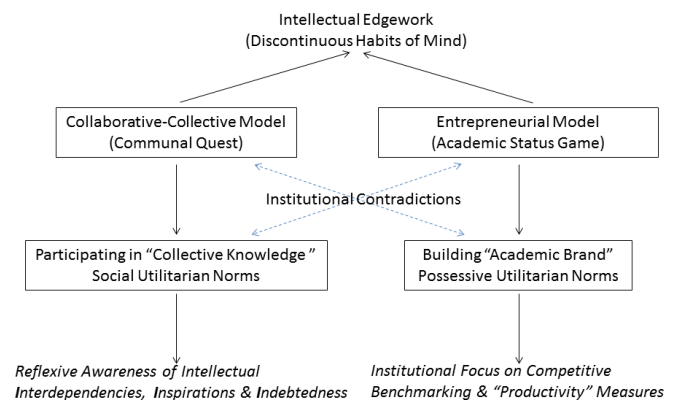


Figure 1

CONSUMER RESEARCH AS A COLLABORATIVE-COLLECTIVE PROJECT

The first cultural model is, in particular times and places, highly valorized in the consumer research field (as well as other spheres of research)—thought it harbors a nexus of meanings and implications that are often incompatible with the bestowment of a career achievement award.

This model cast consumer research as a cooperative and collaborative enterprise. From this perspective, all researchers are participants in a communal project of knowledge generation and working toward a collective goal of attaining a more comprehensive or refined understanding of "consumers," whether in terms of their choice processes or experiences of the marketplace. This model further highlights that a given consumer researcher, in conducting a given study, draws from a socially co-created body of knowledge and practices, and seeks to add his/her humble contribution to the commons.

This collaborative-collectivist model of knowledge production has become an increasingly prominent feature of our cultural land-

scape where knowledge flows across complex peer-to-peer networks and other modes of commons-based production (Bruns 2008). Media studies scholar Pierre Levy (1999) coined the term collective intelligence to describe this dynamic “wikified” web of knowledge generating and sharing relations. Collective intelligence is *universally distributed intelligence*, constantly enhanced, coordinated in real time, and enjoying a continuous expansion of skills and knowledge. This idea is often summarized by the Web 2.0 aphorism—no one knows everything but everyone knows something (Jenkins 2006).

Analysts of such user-generated networked cultures all too often become intoxicated with a feeling of radical difference and disjuncture, suggesting that we have entered into a revolutionary new epoch, that breaks from historical precedents. More often than not, such claims are hyperbolic ones that elide important continuities manifest in these structural changes. And we can say the same pattern holds for social science research. The production of scientific knowledge, has always has flowed across information networks, albeit operating at a more turgid pace, constituted by papers, conferences and analogue communication networks. To invoke less techno-Utopian (Kozinets 2008) tropes, we could describe this collaborative process as a system of sharing relationships or a grand game of pay-it-forward. In academic life, we often hear the phrase, “standing on the shoulder of giants” to acknowledge our intellectual debt to the past (and the collaborative precedents of others). To further calibrate this debt, let’s further acknowledge that these “giants” were equally dependent on the shoulders of many, many others. Thus, their lofty heights in the academic pantheon presuppose a community that has lifted and supported their enshrinement in the intellectual canon. Or to paraphrase an ancient Hindu parable used to represent infinite regress, and famously discussed by Clifford Geertz (1973, 28-29), the production of knowledge is “shoulders all the way down.”

This more abstract epistemological argument that scientific knowledge is a collaborative-collective enterprise is also supported by more immediate forms of experiential validation. Our research is routinely enriched by feedback from colleagues, the investments made by reviewers and editors, and last but not least, the co-creative actions of readers who will subsequently expand upon a given set of ideas and findings and integrate them into a broader web of collectively woven knowledge. Placed in this cultural frame, the conventional tendency to lavish accolades on a specific researcher seems to be an odd misconstrual of the knowledge production process.

Some members of the academic community do, in fact, strive to enact this collaborative-commonly found in the feminist studies literature, though it has found some expression in the consumer research sphere:

VOICE group (2010), “Buying into Motherhood? Problematic Consumption and Ambivalence in Transitional Phases,” *Consumption, Markets and Culture*, 13 (4), 373-397.

Such anonymous designations highlight the collaborative/collective aspects of the academic research and, conversely, subtly disavow the ethos of possessive individualism that underlies the social construction of academic celebrity, instead endorsing one of social utilitarianism and its ideals of cooperative sharing, universal access to knowledge, and embeddedness in a collective commons.

The institutional realities of academic life, of course, place significant constraints on how extensively this strategy can be applied or even how fully it can be implemented. In general, consumer researchers are situated in academic settings where individually scaled measures of “productivity”— via publications, presentations, and citation counts, and other activities that “count” in digital measures

performance monitoring systems—inform annual evaluations and corresponding administrative decisions about a given consumer researchers’ tenure, promotion, salary, research support, and other institutional incentives that govern our professional activities.

Given this institutional reality, the choice to anonymize and collectivize the published presentation of research—as in the VOICE Group example—is more of a symbolic gesture, which is not to say that it is meaningless or inconsequential. Such unconventional actions can inspire a reflexive assessment of status quo conventions and help to precipitate actions and choices which push the boundaries of established institutional values and norms and the constraints they subtly (and not so subtly) manifest, thereby, testing and potentially expanding the boundaries of an ideological system (c.f., Thompson and Üstüner 2015).

A collective-collaborative framing of the research enterprise also problematizes the ACR Fellows award. If we accept the view that a given researcher is situated in the web of collective intelligence, then such an award arbitrarily designates one node in the network as having been more consequential than all the others that enabled the “designated Fellow” to exert a localized influence that reverberates across some segment of the larger system. For example, an alternative approach would be to bestow fellow status on a concept that has mobilized consumer researchers and shaped our discourses, such as decision heuristics, utility maximization, cultural capital, or ritual action and to celebrate these ideas—not as the expression of a given researchers’ individual brilliance (and whose name may be strongly associated with the salient theory)—but by tracing out its genealogy which in most cases, would lead back to Eastern and Western philosophers of the antiquities.

This collective-collaborative model carries a host of positive connotations that have been well-integrated into our disciplinary self-conceptions, particularly when discussing the normative ideals that should guide the research process, such as an altruistic spirit of discovery; a communal sharing of ideas and knowledge; and a transcendence of egotism and self-interest through the disinterested pursuit of knowledge. While supporting a more virtuous framing of the research enterprise, this model is largely discontinuous with the prevailing institutional conditions that shape the professional lives of many, if not most, consumer researchers situated in academic settings. To negotiate these discontinuities, we apply this model very selectively and tend to ignore its democratizing, “wisdom of crowds” (Jenkins 2006) implications when they overtly contradict institutionalized norms that are premised on assessments of individual accomplishment and that engender a corresponding ideological effect: the production (and reproduction) of academic status hierarchies.

CONSUMER RESEARCH AS AN ENTREPRENEURIAL PROJECT

The second prominent cultural model cast the research process as an entrepreneurial project. In this cultural frame, consumer researchers (like other participants in the academic status game) are promoting their respective ideas, methods, papers, and academic “brand” in a competitive marketplace, or stated alternatively, seeking to maximize the market value of their human/intellectual capital (c.f., Becker 1964). In this spirit, for example, *ResearchGate*—the potentially copyright violating, for profit, academic networking site—promotes its services on the grounds that it can “create exposure for your work: share your work from any stage of the research cycle to gain visibility and citations” [<https://www.researchgate.net/>].

Such rationales seem completely unremarkable in their common-sense rationales. Of course, we want to promote our work and

gain more citations and recognition for our efforts. However, this sense of self-evident validity is one means through which orthodox understandings and beliefs serve to block further questioning of their ideological functions and channel action in certain directions, rather than others, and thus, constrain horizons of possibility (Bourdieu 1984).

In discussing this entrepreneurial model, I take an analytic cue from the critical historian Michel Foucault who described his approach to analyzing power relations in the following manner:

My point is not that everything is bad. My point is that everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same thing as bad. If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do. So, my position leads not to apathy or enervation but to a hyper and active pessimism (Foucault 1983, 231-232)

So, what dangers lurk in this orthodox framing of consumer researchers as intellectual entrepreneurs? One clue to this question is that it so closely aligns with the neoliberal vision of a society organized by market competitions, among decentralized and functionally independent economic actors, and where the market is both the ultimate adjudicator of value and the guiding force that governs decision about how one invest their time and efforts (Peck and Tickell 2007). In this neoliberal Utopia, there are no distortions of the competitive market mechanism, such as regulations that impede flows of capital or that might artificially constrain or subsidize the market value of an entrepreneurial skill or that would reduce competitive incentives—this latter logic is often leveraged by critics of the academic institution of tenure, deeming it to function as a disincentive to continued productivity over the course of one's career.

Neoliberal doctrines underlie increasingly ubiquitous political demands that institutions of higher learning align their curriculum with the specific “competencies” desired by corporations and corresponding pressures to deliver high levels of customer service to customer-students. This latter neoliberal figuration further entails that these customer-students are empowered to be “informed consumers,” via rankings and more aggressive branding and positioning activities. This responsabilization of the student-customer also is encouraged by a shift toward loan-based funding of such educational investments in one's human capital—which eventually need to be repaid, rather than governmental grants (Ward 2014).

It is perhaps worth noting that this neoliberal, market-competency, customer-driven approach to higher education is a radical transformation of the normative ideals and intellectual orientations that historically guided higher education. For example consider this passage from John Stuart Mill's inaugural address as Rector of the University of St. Andrews (1867):

Universities are not intended to teach the knowledge required to fit men [women] for some special mode of gaining their livelihood. Their object is not to make skillful lawyers, or physicians, or engineers, but capable and cultivated human beings (218).

Mill's statement reflected his adamant belief that an intellectual culture, which encouraged citizens to think critically and beyond their own immediate self-interests, provided needed societal safeguards from the excesses of mercantilism, what we would now call capitalism, and militarism. Of course, the University of Mill's time was a decidedly elitist institution that reproduced a gamut of social inequities. However, as Ward (2014, 464), discusses, the humanistic ideals manifest in this vision of higher learning “also contained the political seeds for the larger democratization of the university that would slowly take place in the twentieth century.” This democratization of higher education was also contingent upon Keynesian-

oriented welfare state policies that heavily subsidized the cost of secondary education. [As a personal aside, I almost certainly would not be an (entrepreneurially successful) college professor, speaking from the institutional position of an ACR Fellow, without the social safety net assistance afforded by a host of federal and state programs that enabled low income students to have access to higher education.]

In today's academic environment, Mill's idealistic pronouncements seem quaint, as much of our pedagogical efforts are institutionally directed toward the instrumental goal of ensuring that our customer-students will be able to quickly and efficiently transition into productive occupations. In the aftermath of disruptive shocks, however, most recently the financial meltdown of 2008, we sometimes do see critical admonishments that business schools should adopt a more socially redemptive pedagogical mission so as to not produce a new legion of greed-driven, selfish mercenaries, as evinced by redemptive statements from leading B-school administrators (quoted in Green 2009):

Wealth creation is about building a better society, and character and integrity are just as important in a manager's capability. I've always had a very strong view that the role of education is not just to give people technical skills: it's there to give people the context of how to be and how they can contribute, not just to their own gain, but to the gain of everybody else.

– Chris Bones, Dean of Henley Business School

Professor Arnoud De Meyer, director of the University of Cambridge's Judge Business School, says that 2008 will be seen as a “watershed year” for the MBA. He argues that future curricula will have to prepare students for the inevitable increase in financial regulation, and should also focus more heavily on how business interacts with society. The schools, he says, will have to become “a bit more academic, independent, curious and interdisciplinary” in their approach to teaching.

But such reflective cautions and calls for educational reform tend to be short-lived and soon enough, business schools returned to their pro-corporate, neoliberal proselytizing status quo as the financial crisis of 2008 faded into distant memory.

Neoliberalism is also restructuring higher education in ways that are compatible with its veneration of efficiency and “flexibility” (neoliberal shibboleths that often correspond to a practice of reducing labor costs by avoiding the obligations of extended labor contracts). To illustrate, in 1969, non-tenure track faculty were an institutional exception, constituting about 20% of the total teaching force in higher education; however, this precarious category of academic works is the institutional norms who now make up over 70% of the instructional faculty (Shulman et al. 2016).

Stories about the neoliberalization of academe are now commonplace in outlets such as the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Times Higher Education*, or, on occasion, the *New York Times* and other news media that reporting on these disruptive transformations. These stories illuminate a brave new academic world where tenure protections are being rapidly eroded by hostile state legislators (as in my home institution of the UW-Madison); where departments are increasingly reliant upon a legion of adjunct faculty who toil in the class room for relatively low pay and little, if any long term, security and where tenured and tenure track faculty (to the extent that those classifications have any institutional meaning) face increasing demands to work more efficiently. That is, to assume more teaching and administrative responsibilities while maintaining established, and sometimes intensified, standards of research productivity.

These dramatic shifts reflect a generation of neoliberalizing budget cuts and an increasing reliance on private funds to keep academic institutions viable; money that generally comes with various expectations and requirements, few of which serve a University's research mission (much less practices of critical inquiry). These neoliberalizing forces also ideologically portray public institutions (and tenured faculty who are the functional equivalent of the trade unions so widely condemned in neoliberal doctrine) as a sphere of market-distorting entitlements that need to be reformed through a logic of privatization and the imposition of competitive pressures (and hence incentives for "excellence").

I am not the first to note that these neoliberal trends pose disconcerting threats to hallowed values such as academic freedom, critical inquiry, and intellectual diversity (Ward 2014). For example, the competitive market may support a plethora of courses in finance and marketing but perhaps not so many in Middle Eastern studies or Slavic languages, leading to a truncation of faculty in fields that do not enjoy high market demand. Such market-driven adjustments create a more intellectually homologous system of higher education that becomes increasingly technocratic in its aims and reciprocally, that produces a student-customer who similarly exhibits an instrumental mindset with few predilections to question the neoliberal status quo.

As academics, it is all too easy to lament this process of neoliberalization as an accursed nexus of demands and constraints that are imposed by extraneous economic forces and political actions beyond our immediate control. Yet, as consumer researchers, we also need to recognize that the neoliberal "skids" have been greased by our own well-worn habits of mind and our naturalized tendency to think and act in ways that are in fact quite continuous with the ideals of efficiency and competitiveness used to justify these neoliberal transformations of the University.

The entrepreneurial model hails each and every one of us to build our academic brand (what right minded marketing academic does not have a personal website and a social media presence?); to maximize the efficiency our workdays so as to be able to produce more papers (our proverbial "widgets"); to manage our production "pipelines"; and to see ourselves as relatively autonomous agents ever ready to transfer our human capital/academic brand to wherever it will be most rewarded by market forces.

The same neoliberalized system which produces a class of adjunct faculty negotiating the stresses of economic precarity (Standing 2011) is also the very one which creates academic celebrities, ACR Fellows, and well-compensated chaired professors. In this winner versus losers neoliberal frame, such outcomes are "optimal" ones that directly reflect different degrees of entrepreneurial acumen. From a more critical standpoint, these outcomes reflect structural inequities which confer competitive advantages to some while creating constraints and barriers for others. In other words, it is much easier to pull yourself up by the (competitive) bootstraps when circumstances have endowed you with a jet pack rather than an albatross.

But, my concern is the more specific dangers that lurk within this entrepreneurial-neoliberal habit of mind as it pertains to the conduct of consumer research. As a thought experiment, think of five or six attributes that you believe would be common among ACR Fellows. My expectation is that "productivity" is likely among them. Of course, productivity can function as a shorthand reference for dedication, commitment, perseverance, and other revered traits which contribute to "productive" outcomes. But, if we reflexively acknowledge the institutional conditions that situate and "nudge" our actions, then it becomes difficult to ignore that the disciplinary valorization of "productivity" also places the research process on an instrumental plane. Tangible measures of productivity—publication

counts by journal rankings, presentations, books, and other tangible signs of intellectual productivity—provide key evaluative criteria in performance assessments and hence, determine the distribution of resources via teaching loads, salaries, promotions, awards, and, of course, recognition.¹

This entrepreneurial model also enjoins the interesting evaluative convention of having to quantify one's particular share of contribution for co-authored works, inducing an annual rite of calculation—"I contributed 57% to the theoretical positioning; 48% to the analysis; and 65% to the conclusion, with my aggregate contribution being 56.7%—that would seem preposterous in a world where the collective-collaborative model held institutional sway.

This entrepreneurial model further encourages a truncation of the intellectual enterprise in the name of efficiency. We all know the narrative of harried academic life—there are only so many hours in the day and between teaching, faculty meetings, reviewing, so little time is left for research that we must be focused and efficient in our efforts. But, academic training—not just in marketing and consumer behaviors—but in many academic fields, creates predispositions toward such "adaptive" habits of mind—that is, we are socially conditioned to function in this neoliberalized system and, conversely, to accept it, tolerate it, and even embrace it, when our entrepreneurial efforts are rewarded.

As just one example of this subtle conditioning process, I would surmise that nearly every Ph.D. advisor and nearly every Ph.D. candidate has had a mentoring exchange that hinges on the importance of the "elevator talk"—those 60 second distillations of doctoral dissertation research that every prospective job candidate stands every ready to deliver to a listener/potential employer. And the "elevator talk" has an undeniable instrumental appeal and no small amount of practical value. On the positive side, to make such a synopsis, a researcher must have a clearly defined research question and contribution points that can be represented as a concise set of bullet points on a power point slide. What is not to love?; or stated conversely, what dangers might lurk in training academics to be predisposed to give an elevator talk or on the audience side, to expect that research will be communicated in such efficient and easily comprehended terms?

A successful elevator talk presupposes a rhetorical continuity between presenters and audiences, taking the form of shared communicative expectations, a common base of knowledge and a shared theoretical vernacular. Those continuities also encourage a more homogenous disciplinary discourse. In other words, a Ph.D. student assumes an additional degree of unwanted systemic risks if his/her theoretical vernacular and questions diverge from orthodox conventions. Translation is a far more complex and time consuming process than speaking in a common vernacular, where communication is further aided by shared body of tacit knowledge.

These neoliberal imperatives also enjoin habits of mind that are conducive to a market-oriented fealty to the established taste of our audience and to operate within those comfortably familiar boundaries. In the elevator talk example, this convention demands that a listener not be pushed too far from his intellectual comfort zone. The "good" elevator talk adds a conceptual or empirical twist upon what the listener already knows and hence, the research story, and its points of theoretical distinction, does not deviate from the tacit assumptions that underlie this state of communicative efficiency and sense of intuitive comprehensibility. An ad campaign from the

¹ This description of the increasingly ubiquitous, performance measurement (and governance) tool Digital Measures succinctly summarizes the problems posed by neoliberalism's reduction of academic life to benchmarking measures: "'Digital measures' document everything and reveal nothing, rendering academic practices as calculable rather than meaningful" (Mountz et al. 2015, 1242).

1980's offers a relevant analogy. In the ad, a nattily dressed, generically handsome man is in a formal restaurant accompanied by an equally well-dressed, and generically pretty women; after glancing at the menu, he proclaims in astonishment "I didn't know Michelob made a light!" And here I suggest, we have the commercial personification of the paradoxical state of unremarkable surprise that results from a successful elevator talk.

This neoliberal-entrepreneurial framing of consumer research (and researchers) is manifest in other interactional rituals that are undertaken throughout the course of our professional lives. For example, a standard ice breaking exchange in academic life is the question of "what you are working on?". If you will allow, I would like to make a slight digression. A few years ago, I was invited (required) to attend a social function to honor a wealthy donor who had made a substantial gift to the school. Upon our initial introduction, the benefactor immediately asks "what are you working on?" I soon realized that this query was not an idle or innocent question. Indeed, this donor really wanted to know what I was working on and as I gave a series of elevator talks, though in this case, "interrogation talks" would be a more fitting description, I could see a cost-benefit calculation going on his head. This wealthy benefactor then repeated this interaction ritual with just about every faculty at the reception as he sought to assess the practical relevance and market value of the research that he was helping to underwrite.

Even when academic peers ask "what are you working on" in a more causal manner at conferences and other like settings, the question is no less fraught with normative expectations and ideological demands. What "are you working on?" is often an invitation to briefly review your "research pipeline," a peculiar trope when you think about, implying that one should have a steady flow of research output and that a break in this flow is quite problematic: my god, your pipeline has run dry! But, the ideological effect is most clearly revealed by considering what is *not* normatively expected – perhaps what you are "working on" is not a research project but a book written by another scholar on a topic that you may or may not eventually study but that broadens your perspective or leads to a reflexive questioning of naturalized beliefs (or that you just found interesting). The neoliberal definition of legitimate work discourages such conversations, rendering such non-instrumental uses of one's work time as taboo. In contrast, the equally relevant question of "what have you read?" (or watched or listened to if we broaden the implied frame-of-reference to include enriching aesthetic experiences) is highly unconventional. The entrepreneurial model frames as legitimate work as the ongoing, individuated production of research and all other activities are rendered as suspect (unproductive) uses of one's time.

There is an emotional complement to the "what are you working on?" question. Passion has become the normatively preferred emotional state of neoliberal entrepreneurs or stated conversely, neoliberal ideologies hail workers to recognize themselves as passionate entrepreneurs (Dilts 2011; McRobbie 2015). Passion is an inducement to efface once sacrosanct boundaries between professional and private life as the career sphere now colonizes time once devoted to leisure and family. Given neoliberalism's instrumental prescriptions, we can add thinking and reflection to this list of temporally displaced activities. Indeed, in the ideal neoliberal world, even recreation should, in some way, build human capital that will further enhance our entrepreneurial acumen.

In this entrepreneurial-neoliberal frame, we are therefore ideologically predisposed to regard our work as the activity that most fascinates us; the domain we want to incessantly talk about; the nexus of questions and ideas that fully occupies our minds when not forced

to attend to other responsibilities and distractions; and as our intellectual sustenance and prime source of self-actualization.

Now, let's flip this ideological script around. We are embedded in a heteroglossic intellectual world where people from all research disciplines study a diversity of issues and grapple with fundamental philosophical questions, seek solutions to pressing societal problems, and generate innovative ways of thinking about the world. Sometimes, we really should be more interested in what others are doing. So, perhaps what we celebrate and valorize as "being passionate about one's research" can also betray an institutionalized tendency toward a narcissistic parochialism.

Through an array of institutional norms and conventional practices, neoliberal habits of mind are subtly propagated as the default option for how one should pursue success in the academic game. Consequently, constraints imposed by this orthodoxy can operate in a naturalized and, hence, unquestioned fashion. Like any ideological system, however, the neoliberalized academic game encompasses a range of institutional goals and countervailing discourses that often create internal inconsistencies and disjunctures (i.e., desires for department bonding and collegiality and the normative ideal of being a good departmental citizen—or serving the communal good through service to the field—can conflict with the ethos of entrepreneurial competitiveness). Such structural gaps also create heterodox spaces where the normative constraints of the entrepreneurial-neoliberal model can be contested and unorthodox practices can be enacted, though these challenges may sometimes be more happenstance than strategic. Nonetheless, they can reveal the limitations implicit to naturalized ideological norms.

My own career path illustrates how such happenstance divergences from the institutional enforcement of neoliberal demands can occur (not once but three times in fact) and how subtle pressures to conform can be resisted, though not without risk. During my Ph.D. program at the University of Tennessee, I had a very significant change of heart regarding the direction I wanted to take my career—a shift from a psychometric/methodological orientation to one that explored the symbolic, experiential, and cultural aspects of consumption (Belk, Sherry, and Wallendorf 1988; Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Levy 1959; McCracken 1986). Fortunately, my faculty advisor was Professor Bill Locander whose career was also in a transitional moment and he afforded me considerable latitude in this exploration which took me deep down the path of Continental philosophy and its more contemporary manifestation in the field of existential-phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty 1962; Sartre 1956)—a journey greatly assisted by the ever generous Professor of Psychology Howard Pollio. For the next few years in my doctoral program—most particularly around the annual review period—I was consistently put on warning for "spending too much time in the library reading and not enough time doing research." Though I never discovered the source from which the faculty gained this knowledge about my unrepentant library patronage, it was an accurate description. This presumed wasteful behavior dramatically contrasted with my peer groups who were actively working with faculty on projects and generating conference papers galore. Ironically enough, and please forgive the blatant self-promotion, I became the most "productive" doctoral student (from a journal publication standpoint) my Ph.D. program had ever produced, aided in large part from the knowledge and viewpoint gained through all that "unproductive" library time.

In hindsight, I fully understand the rationales and well-meant intent behind those orthodox recommendations to become more "productive." There was a system in place for efficiently learning a particular set of research skills and producing a particular kind of research. But, the horizons of opportunity offered by that model were

constrained. Following the normative conventions of being efficient and “productive” cannot get one out of such a proverbial institutional box, it can only anchor one’s habits of mind to those established conditions and the tacit limitations they impose.

Fast forward a few years more, I am embarking on my career as an assistant professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. I had become reasonably proficient in a research model oriented around existential-phenomenological methods and related analytic constructs. And, not incidentally, it was one that had gained traction in the academic market of ideas—being very well-suited to the study of consumer identity projects and their implications for consumer-market relationships (e.g., Fournier 1998). However, I had begun to expand my conceptual horizons with readings drawing from feminist and poststructural cultural studies, which sparked a pronounced feeling of limitation in my phenomenological research orientation. This dissatisfaction sparked a two and half year process of conceptual re-tooling and a massive reconceptualization and reanalysis of my dissertation. None of these actions were efficient (much less normatively advisable) from a career management standpoint, as this process led to a significant gap in my research pipeline. Fortunately, the institutional cushion of my prior publications afforded me some degree of institutional leeway. But, my annual reviews were fraught with expressions of concern and warnings about my lack of productivity. Under less forgiving institutional circumstance, my fledgling academic career at a top tier research university could have easily met a premature end.

As indicated by my current status as an ACR Fellow, this re-tooling led to a “productive” phase that carried me through the tenure process. Post-tenure, due in large part to the prodding of my colleague Doug Holt, I became increasingly aware of sociological oversights and elisions that were inherent to my culturally-oriented research. Thus, I undertook another phase of re-tooling and synthesizing that, in turn, led to a substantial gap in my research output. Though in a far less tenuous position than in my assistant professor days, this fallow period nonetheless had costs that accrued across my annual reports but, again, this “unproductive” phase, and the new competencies and perspective it afforded, eventually sparked an array of publications that investigated a much different and broader range of consumption issues than in my previous work.

My various divergences from orthodox norms of “productivity” were not calculated. In hindsight, the divergent paths I pursued during my doctoral program and early assistant professor days were grounded in a blissful ignorance about the potential risks or perhaps a willful disregard for these consequences. To quote former NBA bad boy Charles Barkley, “I am not a role model” and my desultory intellectual approach is absolutely not a template for how young scholars should manage their careers. But, the broader point is that once you take such risks (and let me add see eventual rewards), it becomes much easier to push against the constraints of normative expectations at a future point. My core message is that the neoliberalized academic system has more flex than you may think and that professional and personal value can be gained from critically reflecting on you what you do, why you do it, how you might do it differently in order to expand your horizons of possibility and, sometimes, taking the risk of following the unconventional paths that those reflections point toward.

GOING SLOW AS A REVITALIZING DISCONTINUITY

To foster such discontinuities with neoliberal demands for efficiency and productivity, consumer researchers need a disciplinary license to proclaim, “Right now, I am more interested in what these

other folks are doing;” “the stuff I have been working on just isn’t that interesting to me anymore and I am searching for something else to do or a new way to think.” The orientation manifest in such statements of generalized curiosity or restless intellectual exploration is not an efficient one; it does not directly fill a pipeline with ongoing research; it does not impress administrators charged with monitoring and rewarding annual productivity (and punishing a lack thereof); and it does not confer much immediate value in the academic status game. But, it can make for more interesting thinkers and in the longer run, more innovative researchers.

Let us consider a hypothetical world that would be discontinuous with this neoliberal, entrepreneurial model. For example, what if the guiding trope was not the time constrained elevator talk but the extended dinner conversation. If so, how might academic training change?; what new habits of mind might be formed? Such a conversationalist would need to cultivate a polyvocal fluency, a breadth of intellectual interests, a capacity to see connections among disparate domains and ideas, and a keen interest in learning from others and gaining resources for re-assessing established beliefs and deeply held assumptions (which does not mean that one might necessarily change his/her world-view but would become more critically reflexive toward its contingencies and dangers).

This alternative world scenario is likely to spark a skeptical reaction; it is completely unrealistic; no one has time for such conversational exchanges as a steady-state academic practice because we have “real” work to do; such time-investments in building such polyglot skills would offer little in the way of tangible, timely pay-offs and so on. And therein lies my point, the entrepreneurial model, as an ideological force, governs behavior by constraining our horizons of possibility and naturalizing contingent states of the world as inevitabilities; and to inculcate a belief that “there is no alternative,” to borrow Margaret Thatcher’s famous rhetorical enshrinement of neoliberal policies as the only credible political solution to Britain’s economic problems (McLean 2001).

And indeed, there can be no alternatives, until we create a space for imagining different worlds and different arrangements of academic life. While this dinner conversation trope may be discontinuous with entrepreneurial/neoliberal frame, it is quite continuous with a collaborative-collective-communal one.

Happily, one such alternative is being proposed and pursued in various quarters of the academy. Modeled on the Slow Food movement which aims to liberate consumers’ foodways from the McDonaldized sphere of fast food and to create a more reflexive, socially conscious global community of eaters (Petrini 2007), Slow Scholarship seeks to break the neoliberalizing cycles that are reshaping academic life. It argues that academic freedom necessitates a “freedom to think” (Hartman and Darab 2012, 53) that can only be attained by reclaiming and reconfiguring the institutional spaces, temporalities, and administrative-governance mechanisms that have been co-opted by the corporatization of the University. The goal is to create an academic setting that encourages and legitimates a more deliberate and reflexive mode of scholarship where researchers can do “productive work” by reading and listening to colleagues; undertake longer courses of reflection and study before embarking on research projects; enjoy greater autonomy from instrumental publish or perish pressures; and engage in a host of other communal and intellectually enriching activities that currently necessitate finding ways to subvert the prevailing neoliberal system (See Mountz et al. 2015).

The Slow Scholarship movement is not inimical to instrumental justifications, arguing for example, that their alternative practices are ways to engender more effective—rather than efficient—research, teaching, and mentoring (Meyerhoff, Johnson, and Braun 2011).

Proposals for implementing Slow Scholarship include a significant number “the personal-is-political” changes that can be made in one’s daily work routine—such as exiting the email spiral which can consume one’s day with administrative trivialities and aiming for minimum allowable productivity benchmarks. This latter option is an interesting one because it enjoins researchers to become less sensitive to the immediate pressures of the academic status game and to accept, in the shorter run, the consequences of being deemed “less productive” (though still falling within an acceptable institutional range) so as to gain longer term benefits (such as more impactful research and, not to be overlooked, a more rewarding and enjoyable academic life).

Importantly, however, these individuated actions need to be undertaken in support of collective ones whereby academics push their institutions to create work environments and evaluative systems that are more conducive to this alternative model of academic life and a slower and more thoughtful conception of productivity and value (Mountz et. al 2015). Such unconventional, orthodoxy-challenging actions constitute forms of ideological edgework, or what in this context could be more specifically characterized as intellectual edgework, that tests the boundaries of an ideological system and seeks to gradually expand its zones of tolerability and legitimacy (c.f., Thompson and Üstüner 2015).

Such modes of intellectual-ideological edgework could also help to redress a concern routinely expressed in ACR Fellows addresses (among many other discursive forums such as ACR Presidential addresses)—the field of consumer research is not generating “new” ideas or having a sufficient impact beyond our disciplinary borders. From my standpoint, however, those concerns—though related to the issues addressed here—are somewhat misplaced. The communal model reminds that no idea or theorization is completely original but, rather, it derives from prior conceptions, perhaps applied in a novel way or blended with other concepts to create an innovative hybrid conception. In regard to the proposed interdisciplinary shortfalls, other disciplines are also embedded in the neoliberal academic game and have their own incentives to be insular, or more accurately, to not readily acknowledge sub-disciplines that are seen as holding a lower status position in the grand academic hierarchy. Consumer research’s limited impact on base disciplines, has as much, or more to do, with the sociological conditions that reproduce status hierarchies among social factions as it does the relative merits and novelty of our research.

However, the neoliberal-entrepreneurial model fosters an unreflexive contentment with what you know (i.e., your stock of existing intellectual capital) rather than a restlessness over what you don’t know and the forms of intellectual capital that could be garnered through exploration of the broader, heteroglossic collective intelligence. This habit-of-mind prefers the comfort of well-rehearsed routines and skills (which allow for ready displays of technical proficiency) to the inefficient struggles of acquiring new ones. And it is a habit-of-mind that is continuous with the neoliberalized institutional structures. In contrast, practices of intellectual-ideological edgework can cultivate habits of mind that are discontinuous with these socializing and normalizing structures.

SUBVERSIVE DISCONTINUITIES

Periodically, we do encounter colleagues who, for any variety of reasons, diverge from this entrepreneurial-neoliberal orthodoxy. They may be situated in an institutional space where the reach of neoliberal doctrines have not yet extended or they may have found (or created) a haven where such unorthodox actions could flourish (at least temporarily).

In this spirit, I suspect (and indeed hope) that over the course of your academic life, you have been (or will be) have a colleague who embodies this collaborative-collective model. In my own professional life, I can think of no better example than my dear departed friend Per Østergaard. Per was a voracious and eclectic reader who loved to discuss ideas with doctoral students, other faculty members, and geographically dispersed colleagues such as myself. In most cases, these discussions did not directly relate to any specific research project that Per might have been working on. More commonly, these discussions concerned broader ideas and theoretical debates that Per wanted to share and discuss with others or they were motivated by Per’s insatiable interest helping others negotiate conceptual or methodological road blocks.

Per was a quintessential Slow Scholar long before this term entered the academic parlance. And Per’s deliberately-paced, communal orientation also carried an institutional “cost.” He was not a highly productive scholar in terms of the number of papers he published. However, the research he did publish was innovative, provocative, and boundary spanning (Belk, Østergaard, and Groves 1998; Bode and Østergaard 2013; Jantzen, Østergaard, and Vieira 2006; Jantzen, Fitchett, Østergaard, and Vetner 2012; Lindberg Østergaard 2015; Østergaard and Fitchett 2012). And, Per was a great facilitator of research who never hesitated to provide detailed feedback on a colleague’s paper—often pushing the author to think more broadly about the topic and to find a more interesting question lurking within the research context.

Per’s failure to produce published papers on annual basis did create friction with administrators. However, his home institution, Southern Denmark University, had an established, collectivist tradition of assessing research productivity at a unit level and thus, his role as a facilitator of research could be assigned enough institutional value to keep the administrative wolves at bay. And here we can recognize some degrees of freedom that are afforded when at least some institutional credence is given to the logic of the collaborative-collective model. Of course, such an institutional haven is discontinuous with entrepreneurial-neoliberal model and, as we speak, the Scandinavian academic system is also undergoing its own historically contextualized version of neoliberalization (Steensen 2008).

These neoliberalizing changes to academic life are the consequences of much broader socio-political transformations and, they are quite likely to be the structural conditions academically-oriented consumer researchers will be negotiating (and perhaps resisting at times) for years to come, barring dramatic shifts in the broader political sphere. For this reason, I am not celebrating Per’s communal-collaborative orientation as a normative ideal that other consumer researchers should necessarily emulate or, even, as exemplar of how to resist or defy neoliberal imperatives for efficiency and productivity.

Rather, I want to highlight the synergies that exist when an academic institution is able to find ways to create continuities between the collaborative-collective model and the entrepreneurial-neoliberal one. In the case of Per, his communal orientation could in fact, be legitimately interpreted as enacting a subtle entrepreneurial move but one seeking different rewards than those who play the neoliberal academic game in a more orthodox fashion. Per’s approach to academic life existed in a highly functional, complementary relation to his colleagues who were engaged in the conventional quest to build their research records and external reputations (i.e., academic brands) through passionate productivity.

Looking at this synergy in more general sociological terms, we can say that a communal academic engages in activities (i.e., reading, discussions, participating in seminars, reading groups, etc.) that enrich his/her stock of intellectual capital. However, the goal of such

capitalizing activities is not to gain symbolic capital, or status, in the academic publishing game, but to acquire social capital in an academic field (be it a department or a research community). Reciprocally, whenever such conversions of intellectual capital into social capital aid an entrepreneurially oriented colleague in building his/her publication record, this (collective) achievement enhances the value of the social capital circulating in that particular field.

A related lesson that can be drawn from the career of Per Østergaard is that neoliberalism is not a unified, hegemonic order, but instead, it is a nexus of ideals and practices that intersect with established institutional conventions and histories to create what political scientists characterize as “actually existing neoliberalisms” (Brenner and Theodore 2002). And these practical adaptations of the neoliberal project often create institutional ambiguities and contradictions. These messy actualities, in turn, also afford greater degrees of freedom than one might realize to engage in intellectual-ideological edgework (c.f., Thompson and Üstüner 2015) and to liberate one’s habits-of-mind from the constraining demands of the neoliberal academic status game.

Such intellectual discontinuities make it more likely that one will be able to draw connections, discern interesting and novel relationships, and recognize limitations in orthodox frameworks that would likely elude those whose habits of mind are continuous with the prevailing institutional doxa. In a more political vein, such intellectual discontinuities also sustain a critical-reflexive perspective toward institutional norms and status quo conventions (including those that are naturalized as unquestionable structural givens). While such a critical-reflexive awareness may not necessarily lead to wholesale structural changes (i.e., some power relations may not be easily surmounted), it does create pathways and incentives for subverting or reshaping institutional conditions in ways that mitigate some of the restrictive demands of neoliberalized academic life.

HOW TO DO “INTELLECTUAL EDGEWORK”

1. Be less instrumental: In pushing against the limits of the neoliberal-entrepreneurial model, a first step would be to pursue research projects that afford opportunities for enriching one’s stock of intellectual capital. This guideline, in turn, suggests that the research process would also have to encompass the inefficiencies posed by the acquisition of new knowledge.

As consumer researchers, we can always say that such learning outcomes are attained (efficiently) from empirical results—(e.g., from this study, I learned that this variable exerts a moderating effect on this process, given this set of mediating conditions). While such empirical discoveries are, indeed, a kind of (quite legitimate) learning, this process entails adding a new node to an existing network; it therefore constitutes an extension of one’s established knowledge base but it does not significantly expand one’s stock of intellectual capital. Conversely, one might choose a project because it requires them to expand their methodological horizons, explore an unfamiliar theoretical domain or develop in depth knowledge about previously unfamiliar social contexts or issues, such as by reading historical analyses or literary portrayals. The end game is not the research output per se; rather, research becomes the means to push the constraints of one’s established habits of mind and to gain a reflexive and critical perspective on institutional conditions that otherwise demand fidelity to an instrumental vision of “productivity.”

Least this suggestion seem Pollyannaish, this boundary expanding orientation can aligned with the demands of neoliberal evaluative standards by producing multiple papers (i.e., products) that draw from this acquisition of new forms of intellectual capital. The key is

to gain institutional recognition that such theoretical innovations do not necessarily follow the mandates of annual reporting conventions. Slower scholarship serves a longer run vision of impact and when institutional norms militate against such activities, we can see a place where the neoliberal model can be challenged on the countervailing grounds of research impact and entrepreneurial innovation. In other words, neoliberal standards can be subverted in ways that serve a goal of institutional transformation.

2. Be more communal: The process of expanding one’s intellectual horizons affords an outstanding opportunity to attend seminars (hosted by other departments and schools at your University); to attend conferences that might be out of your standard portfolio and to meet and discuss issues with researchers who had, heretofore, not been part of your academic social network. [A much wider gamut of recommendations for incorporating more communal practices into one’s academic life are provided by proponents of Slow Scholarship (see Mountz et al. 2015)].
3. Don’t let passion become an excuse to avoid critical reflections: “Loving what you do” does not absolve a consumer researcher from an ethical responsibility to periodically reflect on the reflexive question “is what I do really worth doing?; “whose interests are being served and to what purpose? Are my actions driven by careerism and instrumentalism or am I doing things that are pushing my habituated intellectual boundaries in ways that allow me to engage in creative intellectual edgework?

Though I am clearly advocating for this horizon expanding criterion (and its subversion of the entrepreneurial-neoliberal model) as a normative guide, there are other logics of normative justification that could be deployed in this reflexive assessments, such as helping to redress major social problems and providing knowledge that can lead to a more equitable and sustainable society. The subfield of transformative consumer research (Mick et al. 2012) is oriented around this justificatory logic. Whether a justification is grounded in an ideal of theoretical innovation, civic virtue, or some other normative model (see for example Boltanski and Thévenot 2006), however, reflexive justifications are not rationalizations. The aim of such critical self-appraisals is to critically assess the merits of our chosen criteria and the degree to which our research practices and their outcomes realize those normative aims.

THE INCITEMENTS OF DISCONTINUITY

The institutional discontinuities that frame consumer research can function as incitements to reflection and reflexive assessment, creating potential for change and growth. Habits of mind that align with the entrepreneurial-neoliberal model are not necessarily bad but they harbor hidden dangers when we presume that there is no alternative to such an orientation. Reflexive questioning should engender unrest and unease with patterns set by institutional norms, habits of mind engrained by years of academic training, and the path dependencies established in the course of building one’s academic brand. And, at least some of the time, I suggest that there is much to be gained, institutionally and personally, in diverging from these neoliberal hailings by adopting a more communal, intellectually curious, and non-instrumental approach to scholarship.

I began this decidedly inefficient reflection on the question of “why award an ACR Fellow?” At this juncture, a distinct but related question arises: what does the ACR Fellows Award represent? From a conventional standpoint, this award celebrates achievement and social distinction. ACR Fellows are celebrated for being thought leaders, innovators, and who think differently from the “masses” of

consumer researchers. And this conventional meaning has a mythic function; that is, it masks contradictions and inconsistencies that would otherwise threaten the normative legitimacy unreflexively granted to naturalized institutional norms and practices (Barthes 1972).

This mythic construction obscures that celebrated ACR Fellows are the ideological exceptions who prove the institutionalized norms. This mythic framing suggests that ACR Fellows' inherently possessed discontinuous habits of mind (creative aptitude, intellectual curiosity, penchants for unconventional insights) that enabled them to play the academic more effectively, rather than acknowledging that they were beneficiaries of somewhat anomalous institutional conditions that created opportunities for playing the academic game *differently*. Their distinction hinges on the vast majority of others conforming to the instrumental mandates of the neoliberal-entrepreneurial model. In effect, ACR Fellows have found means to be rewarded for doing parkour while most others are running timed laps around a track.

However, it is possible to subvert the meaning of the ACR Fellows Award and place it in the service of critically assessing the institutional conditions that render these discontinuous habits of mind to be exceptional and in turn, to reconfigure the entrepreneurial-neoliberal status game in ways that would be more conducive to forming habits of mind that are communal, less instrumental in orientation, and predisposed toward critical self-reflection and intellectual edgework. Such institutional shifts would serve to democratize the discontinuous habits of mind, whose currently rarefied distinction now confers distinction in the academic status game.

One could counter this proposal by asking in riposte, "Why make such efforts to diverge from the neoliberal norms that govern our research activities?" Maybe you don't see these dangers as being all the risky and the neoliberal system is working just fine for you. One response, consistent with the ideals of Slow Scholarship, is that such intellectual edgework can afford long term benefits such as building a more diversified portfolio of intellectual capital; generating collaborative connections and synergies; enhancing creativity and afford experiences of enrichment (both experientially and intellectually) that render the (reworked) academic game more meaningful than the atomizing, competitive pressures of the neoliberal-entrepreneurial model.

Another level of response to this question circles back to the first narrative motif of ACR Fellows talks—proposing changes that could potentially enhance the theoretical significance and societal relevance of consumer research. To explain this implication, we also need to look beyond the particularities of the academic status game. And here, I turn to the critical journalist George Monbiot's (2016) discussion of how neoliberal policies—which have helped to generate a radical upward distribution of wealth, rising budget deficits, crisis inducing economic instabilities in global financial markets, and a structural inability to address systemic environmental threats—have retained their hegemonic status in the face of glaring failures:

When laissez-faire economics led to catastrophe in 1929, Keynes devised a comprehensive economic theory to replace it. When Keynesian demand management hit the buffers in the 70s, there was an alternative ready [neoliberalism]. But when neoliberalism fell apart in 2008 there was ... nothing. This is why the zombie walks. The left and center have produced no new general framework of economic thought for 80 years.

While neoliberalism serves the economic interests of those who occupy relatively privileged institutional positions, the destructive

and destabilizing costs of neoliberalism's myriad "externalities" are mounting and becoming more problematic every day. We also stand on the verge of a radical techno-displacement—which is actually well underway—of many conventional occupations as AI and robotic technologies are now becoming capable of performing a wide range of jobs across the blue, pink, and white-collar sectors, encompassing everything from construction work to performing medical diagnoses, legal and financial services, and writing news stories (Keohane 2017). Many technology experts predict that close to 50% of existing jobs will be automated inside of two decades (Morgenstern 2016). The counterbalancing argument is that this in-process technological revolution may generate a surfeit of new jobs whose exact characteristics are difficult to image in the present moment (echoing the historical effects of the industrial revolution) (Whitehouse, Rojanasakul, and Sam 2017). However, the neoliberal political economy, with its commitment to a reduced social safety net, is ill-prepared to the cushion the societal shocks posed by this economic transition (assuming the more optimistic projections hold) and it also harbors the potential to, at least for some time, exacerbate economic inequalities as an elite ownership class profits from low labor costs of production, while a displaced workforce is simultaneously plunged into an impoverished state of perpetual underemployment.

Whether in regard to looming threats of ecological collapse or technodisplacements, these conditions point to a pressing need for new frameworks of economic thought that can offer an alternative to the uncontested hegemonic status of neoliberal doctrines in key policy circles. Such an alternative is not likely to arise so long as social science researchers (including consumer researchers') habits of minds and academic practices mirror these same ideological influences.

Nor can it be piecemeal undertaking from isolated researchers. Neoliberalism arose from a collaborative-communal process of developing an alternative to Keynesian economics, building social capital among policy makers, and diffusing and implementing these ideals through networks of political influence (c.f., Foucault 2008; Giesler and Veresiu 2014). Though still in its nascent stages, an interdisciplinary movement is beginning to coalesce that is seeking to create a viable solutions to the systemic problems (like climate change) that neoliberalism exacerbates through its antipathies toward any regulatory interventions on the market or that its policies have helped to create (such as an ever increasing concentration of the wealth; national debt bombs; hyper volatile investment markets) (see Jones and O'Donnell 2017; Schor 2010). As an interdisciplinary field that studies consumer behaviors as they unfold in market contexts, the consumer behavior field possesses a latent potential to contribute to this communal-collaborative conversation but, to do so, many of our institutionally ingrained, neoliberalized habits of mind will need to be changed. I hope this address might be one small step toward such a change.

And to close on a more personal-retrospective note, the receipt of this ACR Fellow afforded me with an opportunity to reflect on roads taken, those not taken, and perhaps less traveled paths that should be explored. Less than an affirmation, this award has provided instigation and, for that, I will be ever grateful.

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2017 ACR Fellow Address

The Future History of Consumer Research: Will the Discipline Rise to the Opportunity?

Jagdish Sheth, Emory University, USA

INTRODUCTION

I am both honored and grateful to be inducted as ACR Fellow.

Exactly five decades ago (1967) I published my first paper titled “A Review of Buyer Behavior” in *Management Science*. It was a philosophy of science perspective of the extant knowledge of buyer behavior. The paper concluded that buyer behavior as a discipline resembled more like the proverbial five blind men and the elephant. What it needed was a theory that unified the diverse perspectives and provided explanation of why we buy what we buy.

My doctorate is from the University of Pittsburgh. My major was: Individual and Group Behavior. My minor was social psychology and I chose marketing as my applied field. This led to a life transforming and life long relationship with John A. Howard, who became my advisor and my mentor. He invited me to co-author the book *The Theory of Buyer Behavior*, which was published in 1969. The main focus of the theory was to explain why consumers become loyal to a brand and end up buying by habit. The theory was anchored to learning, perception, and information search constructs from psychology. It came to be known as the Howard-Sheth Theory of Buyer Behavior. John Howard and I left University of Pittsburgh in 1963 and came to Columbia University, where I started my academic career in Consumer Behavior. The Howard-Sheth Theory became the foundation for a large-scale longitudinal research called the Columbia Buyer Behavior Project. It attracted great doctoral students including George Day, and eminent faculty including John Farley from Carnegie Mellon University, and Don Lehman from Purdue University.

I extended the Howard-Sheth theory to industrial buying behavior and also to family buying behavior with a focus on joint decision making and inherent conflict among the family members due to their divergent goals and perceptions.

My next book in consumer behavior was *Consumption Values and Market Choices* (with Bruce Newman and Barbara Gross,) published in 1991. It articulated that all consumer choices can be attributed to functional, social, emotional, epistemic and situational values provided by the product and brand choices at all three levels of consumption: 1. To consumer or not to consume; 2. If yes, what type to consume; 3. Which brand to consume within a type or category. Based on more than 150 studies of students and homemakers, ranging from playing on pinball machines to marijuana smoking to pizza consumption to choosing brands of shampoo and toothpaste, it provided a structured survey instrument with which to predict future behavior. The accuracy of the future choice behavior was in the nineties across different studies and the determinants of choice varied from functional to social to situational values. This theory was extended to voting for political candidates at the local, state, and national elections with excellent prediction of election outcomes.

My research in consumer behavior shifted to relationship marketing and organizational buying behavior. With the establishment of the Center for Relationship Marketing at Emory University, we began research on why customers engage in a relational exchange and develop a strong vendor loyalty. This led to several articles written with my colleague Atul Paravatyar including a *Handbook of Relationship Marketing* published by Sage in 2000.

In the eighties and the nineties, I wrote two papers on consumer research both published in the *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* (JAMS). The first one reviewed the spectacular growth of consumer research anchored to multi attribute attitude models and information processing. The paper, titled “Surpluses and Shortages in Consumer Behavior Theory and Research” strongly suggested that the discipline needs to broaden out and focus on “irrational” choices as well as on excessive and deviant consumption.

The second paper titled “Acrimony in the Ivory Tower” was a painful plea to be more inclusive and tolerant of alternative perspectives and methods. It suggested that ideological acrimony and personal attacks were not healthy for the progress of the discipline.

I became the President of ACR in 1984. In that year, I also initiated the first international conference. It was held in Singapore in 1985 and hosted by Professor Tan Chin Tiong at the National University of Singapore (NUS). We invited Jim Engel, the Founder of ACR, to be the keynote speaker. The conference was a great success. I am glad that the tradition of hosting an international conference continues even today.

More recently, I have been doing research on cross-cultural consumption. It is based on gene migration theory and provides an explanation for the cultural differences between Northern and Southern Europeans with respect to basic necessities such as food, clothing, and shelter. However, it also provides an explanation for *why* cultures vary with respect to individualism, punctuality, territorialism, friendship, social status, and material possessions. While we know the dimensions of cultural differences, we don't have an explanation as to *why* cultures vary on those dimensions. My most recent book on this topic, *Genes, Climate, and Consumption Culture: Connecting the Dots* (2017), is published by Emerald Publishing.

I have provided a brief history of my personal journey in consumer research. Now, I would like to provide a brief history of consumption and consumer research. Finally, I will suggest seven new areas of research opportunities.

BRIEF HISTORY OF CONSUMPTION, MARKET RESEARCH, AND CONSUMER RESEARCH

Consumption

Consumption is as old as mankind. In the hunters and gatherers stage of human evolution, consumption was highly individualistic and primarily for day to day survival.

At the farming stage of human evolution, consumption expanded beyond food to shelter and clothing. Also, collective living with others in a community developed social norms on consumptions of basic needs. In other words, consumption became partly driven by personal belief systems and partly by social norms of others.

Consumption also expanded from basic necessities such as food, shelter, and clothing to what we refer to as wants and desires. Consumption went beyond day to day survival and into socially desirable and aspirational possessions of products and artifacts.

As the Industrial Revolution shifted the farm based economies into manufacturing based economies, consumption added many new products and services such as electricity, running water, television,

appliances, and automobiles. Today, with the digital revolution and the cellphone economy, consumption has gone beyond anyone's imagination. Today, cellphones and the Internet are as much a necessity as food, shelter and clothing. Also, consumption has gone global after the liberalization of trade in the nineties. Today, I can buy products and even services from anywhere in the world and I can have choices of products and brands in my supermarket and superstores from all over the world. With the advent of eCommerce and online retailers such as Amazon, Alibaba, and Flipkart, the whole world today can buy products and services virtually from any country.

Finally, with the explosive growth of social media such as Facebook, What's App, WeChat, Instagram and whatnot, consumers today communicate and interact in real time and inform and influence each other about products and services. This peer to peer network of information and influence amounts to word of mouth (WOM) gone wild. WOM has transformed from the local neighborhood to global community and it reaches not just neighbors but also total strangers.

Market Research

While consumption is as old as mankind, market research is less than 150 years old. It became a standard function in companies as a way to gather consumer demographics, activities, interests, opinions, and values.

The origins of market research dates back to sampling and tasting of foods and beverages either as pre-product feedback or as post-product experience. Market research, over time, has evolved into a standalone industry consisting of experts and methods. It has also evolved from understanding the consumer to measuring the impact of advertising and communication as well as calculating Return on Marketing Investments (ROMI) and Customer Lifetime Value (CLV). It has also evolved from qualitative research such as focus groups to highly sophisticated analytical techniques such as stochastic models, multivariate statistics, and predictive analytics. It has become a marketing science. Marketing research is mostly empirical and prides in gaining consumer insights from the feedback and behaviors of consumers. It is devoid of theory and therefore, resembles a discovery science.

Consumer Research

Consumer Research is a very young discipline. It is less than fifty years old. It began with explanatory science by focusing not as much on *what* consumers do or believe but *why* they buy what they buy and *why* they become loyal to brands and products as well as *why* they transcend market transactions as expected by theories of self-interest and maximization of utility.

In the fifties, consumer research also began to distance from economic theories of rational choices and instead focused on psychological theories of emotional choices. The basic proposition was that consumers do not behave logically, but they behave psychologically.

Most scholars and practitioners in consumer behavior belonged to Division 23 (Consumer Psychology) of the American Psychological Association (APA). I was inducted as the APA Fellow in 1975 and became the President of Division 23 in 1979.

The members of the Consumer Psychology Division were mostly psychologists and did consumer research on advertising and communication. It was eventually divested by the APA which led to the formation of the Society for Consumer Psychology (SCP) as a standalone membership organization.

Consumer behavior became a standalone discipline with publication of seminal theories such as the Howard-Sheth Theory of Buyer Behavior and Jim Bettman's Theory of Information Processing. It

divorced itself from market research by establishing its own membership organization called the Association for Consumer Research (ACR). Its founder, James Engel, organized the first workshop in 1970 at Ohio State University and co-opted a few of us to become co-founders of ACR. This separate identity was further cemented by having a separate journal called the Journal of Consumer Research (JCR) dedicated to consumer behavior.

In the early days, consumer behavior was driven by what is referred to as motivation research including subconscious and unconscious motivations. The pioneers such as Ernst Dichter and Sidney Levy developed techniques and tools to understand the psychology of choices of brands and products, and what motivates consumers. These qualitative techniques (in-depth interviews and focus groups) were augmented by physiological (or biological) measures such as pupil dilation, galvanic skin pressure, heart rate, and more recently, brain imaging. Finally, consumer research today focuses on laboratory experiments with the protocol of three research studies similar to what psychologists do in experimental and social psychology.

Five Phases of Consumer Research

Over the years, consumer research has evolved into at least five research traditions. The first is referred to as the multi-attribute attitude models. These models provide explanations of how consumer attitudes are developed and whether prior consumer attitudes and intentions predict future behaviors. Most of the research was based on survey research methods with the use of well-defined survey questions. This was followed by research on information processing led by Jacob Jacoby at Purdue University and Jim Bettman at Duke University. Information processing, as the name implies, focused on how consumers engage in selective exposure, selective attention, and selective retention of information and how consumers engage in active search for information.

Information processing research shifted from survey research to experimental research in behavioral labs located in psychology departments and in business schools. The subjects were students and sample sizes were small compared to household research on multi-attribute attitude models.

Both of these research traditions were challenged because they reflected only partial reality. Also, they focused on the buyers as opposed to the users. It led to the third and the fourth traditions. They are referred to as Odyssey Research and Transformative Consumer Research. Odyssey Research, led by Russel Belk, resembled the anthropological tradition of immersing into and experiencing the cultures of consumption. It believed in theory in use which was anchored to grounded reality; and it resembled more like group safaris. The fourth tradition called Transformative Research began to focus on the world of music and movies and emotive aspects of consumer behavior. This tradition was led by Morris Holbrook and eventually it led to focusing on several other neglected areas in consumer research such as cross-cultural consumer research and consumer policy research.

Behavioral Economics

The fifth and current tradition is what is referred to as behavioral economics. It is mostly experimental research focused on exposure and manipulation of stimuli to evoke hypothesized consumer responses with respect to brand or product choices. It is following the typical protocol of three studies (Study 1, Study 2, Study 3) with scientific rigor to establish a causal relationship between the experimental treatment and the predicted outcome while controlling for moderator variables.

Behavioral economics is also transforming the discipline of economics. Indeed, several non-economists such as Herbert Simon and Daniel Kahneman have been awarded the Nobel Prize in economics for bringing the psychological or behavioral perspectives in the economic behavior of markets, consumers, and organizations. The most recent 2017 award was given to Richard Thaler “for his contributions to behavioral economics.”

Over time, the field of consumer research has become narrow both in its perspective and in its methodology. I refer to this as the *discipline myopia*. In my view, consumer research needs to become more eclectic both with respect to perspective and with respect to methodology. I think the discipline needs to promote the big tent mentality and encourage diverse perspectives and methods.

THE FUTURE OF CONSUMER RESEARCH

There are seven great opportunities to broaden the scope and nature of consumer research. They are depicted in the pie chart below:

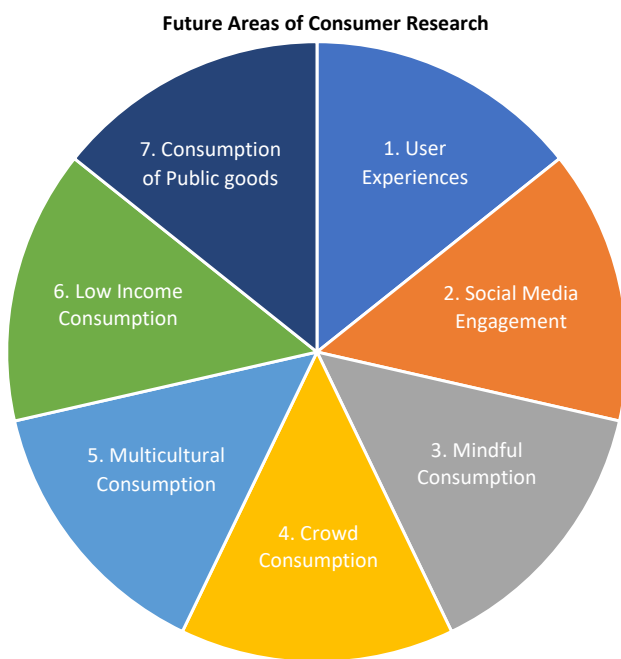


Figure 1. Seven Great Opportunities

User Experiences

First, we need to redefine who is the consumer. The consumer is not just a buyer; he or she is also a user and a payer. Most of consumer research in all five traditions I have described above is focused on the consumer as a buyer. This is due to our roots in marketing that have been primarily interested in the buying behavior. Most consumer research scholars are faculty in the marketing departments.

Consumer as user, however, is a more critical and relevant area to study. It shifts the focus from buying and choice making to usage and post-purchase experience. It is interesting to note that most R&D departments in companies focus on the user and not the buyer whether it is automobiles, appliances, cellphones, or prescription medicine. The customer as user is obvious in service industries where consumer experience matters. This is becoming even more relevant now that users report their experiences on social media.

Similarly, consumer as payer is not studied well. This includes family budgets, credit history, debt obligations and monthly

cash flow management. It was the corner stone of thinking by John Maynard Keynes in what he articulated as propensity to save vs propensity to consume; and how discretionary income, interest rates, and tax rate mattered in propensity to consume. In other words, it is not just the willingness to pay but the ability to pay. Following the micro economics tradition, the discipline of home economics focused on family issues of budgets, savings, and cash flow. It needs to be included and encouraged in consumer research.

Social Media Engagement

The largest nation in the world is not China or India. It is the Facebook nation with a population of more than two billion. In the monarchy era, it would be declared as the largest global empire probably as big, if not bigger than the Roman and the British Empire. This social media nation has global reach with very rich content revolving around consumption, if you define social activities as acts of consumption. The impact of social media and peer to peer information sharing and influencing is key for future research in consumer behavior. It is WOM gone wild and can champion or destroy a world class brand including personality brands. Fortunately, social media data are publicly available for research. It will, however, require learning new methods of analysis and the language of text messages. The evolution of natural language processing (NLP) as a tool is based on cognitive psychology and seems very suitable for research in consumer behavior.

Of course, social media engagement by consumers is not limited to Facebook. You have WeChat, What’s App, Snapchat, Instagram, etc. The masses love social media and social media need the masses to scale up. This symbiotic relationship is likely to last for a long time barring regulation, policy intervention, or anti-globalization sentiments. It will definitely transform consumer behavior in the way we gather information, share our experiences, and transact our buying behavior. It will rekindle consumerism as a movement not led by one person such as Ralph Nader but by the grass root movements. Crowdsourcing of consumerism is an interesting area of new research opportunity.

Mindful Consumption

Mindful Consumption is a growing area of research interest for policy makers as well as marketers. Consumers in advanced countries are beginning to appreciate that carbon footprint is global and borderless. Also, it is simply not possible for mother nature to regenerate itself quickly enough to provide resources for more than three billion people from the emerging markets of China, India, and Africa who all want to buy branded products rather than make them at home.

Mindful Consumption means consciousness about how consumption impacts the environment from the time consumers procure the product, store it for future consumption, and dispose of as waste. It is estimated that more than seventy percent of the carbon footprint happens at home and not in the factory. It is the home, the refrigerator, the freezer, and the automobile which are responsible for increased carbon in the atmosphere. As consumers become more aware of the unintended consequences of their consumption, they are searching for ways they can minimize the side effects of consumption. This is particularly key with respect to the storage of foods, presence of large homes, and inefficient waste collection and disposal.

More companies are realizing that consumers today are looking for meaning in consumption and that they are serving the society through their consumption. It is “doing well by doing good.” Today, therefore, marketers are all trying to associate some social cause with their brands.

Crowd Consumption

The Internet's increased reach is unprecedented. There are no more six degrees of separation. Today, there is no degree or only one degree of separation. Therefore, it is possible to galvanize a crowd on any issue or problem. This has been very evident in crowd sourcing and crowd funding. For example, it was social media and viral marketing that led to the unprecedented success of the Ice Bucket Challenge for increasing awareness and raising funds for ALS.

I believe crowd consumption is a potentially very important area of research. Crowd Consumption is similar to the band wagon effect of the ice cream man who attracts children from the neighborhood. It is more than viral events or unplanned gathering of friends; and its scope is simply massive.

What motivates people to join the crowd? How does crowd consumption get organized? What is the life cycle of crowd consumption? Is it similar to trends in fashion?

Crowd Consumption, like Woodstock in the Seventies and New Year's Eve at Times Square, requires managing supply chain and dynamic pricing.

Multi-Cultural Consumption

As ethnic diversity is rising all over the world, it is becoming increasingly important to study consumption differences between subcultures of a nation. For example, California is already a multicultural state with a non-white majority. So will be Texas and Florida, which are the next two largest states in terms of population size. Therefore, taking the WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) perspective is becoming increasingly myopic and may lead to missed opportunities. In my own research, I find that, today, minorities are the opinion makers and influence the consumption by the white majority. For example, African Americans lead in music and fashion. In the United Kingdom, fish and chips is replaced with chicken tandoori with increased immigration from South Asia. In the United States, potato chips are replaced by tortilla chips, and ketchup by salsa. Indeed, it seems that minorities gain acceptance in the U.S. by the majority consuming minority culture's products and services and thereby becoming good followers. In other words, opinion leadership theory is turned upside down. Minorities are the new opinion leaders. They now also include Asians such as Korean, Indian, and Chinese consumers.

Low Income Consumption

Low Income Consumers are growing faster than the average as the middle class is shrinking and extreme income groups are rising. The Base of the Pyramid (BOP) market defined as those who earn less than two dollars a day income totally represents a \$5 trillion economy. Low Income Consumers consume products and services just as all consumers do. However, we have not studied their decision-making process. Since their needs and wants are the same, what matters most is, therefore, to study their resource constraints including income, time, and expertise.

What matters most to low income consumers is affordability, accessibility, and awareness to such critical issues as health and economic well-being. As of today, we do not have a well-accepted theory or a paradigm for low income consumers. Scientific research on their brand choices and use of products and services may be very valuable for public policy, economic development, and corporate social responsibility (CSR).

Consumption of Public Goods

Public goods are shared goods. Generally, they are free or heavily subsidized. It is estimated that more than fifty percent of consumption is directly related to public goods. These include highways, airports, schools, education, parks and recreation, arts and cultural festivals, and public health.

Since the market mechanism with price as the mediator between the supply and the demand (at a point in time or at the equilibrium) often fails in public goods, it is important to discover or develop concepts and theories of public goods consumption. For example, how does shared consumption impact consumer attitudes and behaviors? Why do consumers engage in road rage? Is road rage also relevant in air travel or at the grocery store? Is collective consumption culture bound? Why does it do well in Scandinavia and not so well in other cultures? These are just a few areas of research. This research does not have to be just experimental (three studies in a laboratory), it can also be qualitative or empirical in nature.

To conclude, I believe consumer research needs to consciously broaden out from the current narrow focus on three experimental laboratory studies on a microscopic aspect of consumption. Instead, it can dwell on issues that are vastly more impactful and that will benefit society at large from scientific (versus anecdotal) findings.

2017 ACR Fellow Address

Our Collective Journey

Debbie MacInnis, University of Southern California, USA

Thank you for such an amazing introduction Russ. I am deeply honored to stand here with two eminent colleagues (Jag Sheth and Craig Thompson) to give an ACR Fellows address, and I am so happy to have my husband and so many friends here to share in this special occasion.

I thought my ACR Fellows Address would be an appropriate time to take a broad view of the field and look at how we are evolving over time. Our field's founders, people like Jim Bettman, Jag Sheth, Gerry Zaltman, Hal Kassarian, Joel Cohen, Russ Belk, Morris Holbrook, Jack Jacoby and others staked out a view of consumer behavior that was broad and deep.

CONSUMER BEHAVIOR AS DECISION MAKING

Jack Jacoby aptly captures this broad vision in what is now regarded as a widely held definition of consumer behavior. Consumer behavior includes not just decisions about *what* people consume, but also decisions about whether, when, where, why, how, how much and how often people engage in consumption. Importantly, the field of consumer behavior is differentiated from allied disciplines by virtue of its focus on *consumption*, where consumption includes all means of acquiring, using and disposing of marketplace offerings. Consumer behavior is not restricted to the consumption of *products*. It includes myriad entities, including brands, services, ideas, people, places, gifts, and experiences. Decision making units include not just the *decider* but the information gatherers, users, and influencers like friends, family, communities, and other reference groups who exert normative or informational information in person or virtually. Moreover, consumer decision making is conceived as varying *across time*, whether in units of seconds, hours, seasons, or life stages.

If we look carefully at this definition, we realize that at its core, consumer behavior has been defined in terms of *consumption decisions*. That is, while we are interested in a broad array of topics like consumer experiences, emotions, brand relationships, or how consumers are influenced by celebrities and other opinion leaders, the lens through which we view them is the lens of decision making.

This focus on decision making in a consumption context is not surprising. After all, decisions about acquisition, usage and disposition link consumer behavior to marketing and economics. Moreover, consumption provides a rich context in which we can explore decision making from a multidisciplinary perspective. Indeed, our field has been greatly enriched by perspectives from psychology, sociology, anthropology, history and other core disciplines. Nor is it surprising that decision making in a consumption context is a focal part of the definition of the field. Indeed, the birth of the field of consumer behavior coincided with highly influential works by decision making experts inside and outside our field. Consider, for example, Howard and Sheth's *Theory of Buyer Behavior*, Jim Bettman's "*An Information Processing Theory of Consumer Choice*". Kahneman and Tversky's *Judgment under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases*, and Herb Simon's work on bounded rationality.

Moreover, we've learned a lot about consumer decision making since the birth of ACR. We've learned that consumers make different *types* of decisions depending on whether they are motivated by functional, symbolic, and hedonic goals. These decisions can be described in terms of a goal hierarchy and they can influence or be in-

fluenced by emotions. We've studied a set of *dimensions* along which decisions can be described, among which include the degree to which decisions are effortful, the degree to which they are objective vs. biased, and the extent to which they are made with a greater vs. a lower sense of decision commitment. We've learned that consumer decisions span a *journey* that includes myriad processes like search, attention, sensory perception, categorization and more. We've learned that decisions can have *paradoxical outcomes* or effects, as when the decisions we make in the short term can have negative effects over the long term. Or when reliance on a technological product can make us feel powerful when it works but powerless when it doesn't. We've studied how the *portfolio* of products consumers have like special possessions, collections, and heirlooms reflect one's identity. Moreover, once they are owned, we may be reluctant to part with them, and demand a higher selling price than what they are objectively worth. And we've learned that consumer decisions are *contingent*. They're impacted by, among other things, the physical environment consumers are in, the physical states of their bodies, who they are with, and the socio/cultural context in which they've embedded.

A NEW/OLD FOCAL DOMAIN: CONSUMER BEHAVIOR AND RESOURCES

These insights are obvious to us. But what may be less obvious is I think field is rallying around another focal domain. And one that also has a great bearing on consumption decisions. Like consumer decision making, this domain can also be described in terms of dimensions, processes, paradoxes and portfolios. But because work in this other domain is sometimes done in circles of influence that don't always intersect, it may not be immediately obvious to people that this other domain is becoming more and more focal. What is this focal domain? It's centered around the idea of "Resources". What is a resource? One definition is that a resource is "an asset that helps to achieve a desirable end state".

The concept of resources is not new. In fact, it's been relatively foundational to marketing. Specifically, consumers enter the marketplace spending time and money in return for a good or service that provides value. This perspective underlies our concepts of willingness to pay, willingness to spend, and value. Moreover, when it comes to consumption decisions, consumers give up resources so as to gain other resources. Resources given up, and those gained can occur at any stage of the consumption cycle, from acquisition, to usage, to disposition.

But as I see it, the concept of a resource is gaining greater attention and it is being conceptualized more broadly. As case in point, Zaltman and Zaltman's recent book on marketing metaphor suggests that the concept of "resources is one of the 7 deep metaphors that guides consumers' thinking. What is a deep metaphor? It's a way of thinking about the world that serves as a lens for which we look at everything. Although these deep metaphors are largely unconscious, they influence how we express our thoughts and feelings, and they influence how we think and respond to things emotionally. It's interesting to consider that while the academic study of consumer behavior uses the lens of decision making, consumers view their own world through the lens of resources.

Zaltman and Zaltman identify things beyond money, goods, services, and time that consumers think about as resources. Among them include brands/companies, wisdom, or the mind, the environment, relationships and health. Yet, I think we, as a discipline are considering an even broader set of factors that consumers might regard as resources. Among them include status and power, information, attention, access, physical space, and more.

Resources and Markets

What makes this more expanded view of resources interesting? First, a more expansive view of resources can more readily accommodate the types of markets that consumers find themselves in. That is, those in which they give something with the expectation of return. Clearly, we have markets that include the market for goods and services, the health care market, and the financial services market. But an expanded view of consumer resources includes other types of markets, including those that might not always be so obvious to us. Among them include the dating marketing, the market for experimental drugs, the spirituality market, and the philanthropy market. This expanded view of resources also extends to markets where what the “giver” gives may be non-monetary. Examples include the endorser market, the organ donor market and the volunteer market. But what else does a more expansive view of “resources” offer our field?

Resources as A Big Tent for Consumer Researchers

A resource view also accommodates various perspectives on the different types of relationships consumers have with brands. As my dear friend and colleague CW Park noted in his ACR Fellows address last year, when consumers are attached to brands they devote resources like time, money and reputation to the brand, and they also co-opt the brand’s resources as their own. Moreover, if we take a look at the content of our journals, it is clear that many of us are studying resources. But because our field is broad, people who study one type of resource, for example time, might not look at papers published by others who focus on a different resource—say attention, or power, relationships or technology. But thinking broadly about all of these entities as “resources” makes the notion of “resources” a construct that can link disparate research areas. *It makes the construct of resources highly foundational to consumer behavior.*

New Areas of Study

Moreover, in the same way that decisions can be described in terms of dimensions or processes so too can resources be similarly described. In fact, we, as a field are learning more and more about these foundational dimensions and processes associated with resources. *Thinking broadly about what constitutes a “resource” allows us to ask comparative questions that can help us understand whether all resources operate in similar ways.* For example, not having enough money makes us plan and stretch our resources, which we see as rather painful and costly. Yet, not having enough money can also increase creativity, as it requires us to think more broadly about how we can get what we want given the money we have. One wonders, do we observe similar effects when the resource that is scarce is health, or peace of mind?

Some of our most vulnerable populations—the poor, the illiterate the homeless -- are characterized by a lack of resources and a dependency on others for access to resources. Are there other vulnerable populations. Or consider the elderly, who might have a lifetime of goods, insurance that gives them peace of mind, and all the time in the world. But these populations are vulnerable in different ways—lack of access to transportation, declining knowledge, failing health, and a tendency to view technology as a curse vs. a blessing.

Can vulnerability be used broadly to describe any population characterized by a lack of resources and dependency on others? Is the college graduate, who lives at home and who is dependent on parents for money, and goods, while also having limited privacy, space, and power also a member of a vulnerable population?

Whereas being dependent on others for resources sounds like a bad thing, communities of consumers, like the long-distance running community, are preserved when community members depend on community members for social and economic support. Are there other contexts where resource dependencies create stability in consumption contexts?

We know that we’re more likely to buy impulsively, eat more and exercise less when our physical and mental resources, are depleted. Does the same principle hold when resources like power or hope are depleted? Is sharing of information motivated by similar or different things than sharing money, sharing time, or power?

Consumers behave differently depending on how resources are categorized. We behave differently when we categorize time as “work time”, “leisure time”, “personal time”, or “family time”. We budget differently when we categorize a year as involving 12 months or 365 days. Categorizing relationships as “communal” vs “exchange” has a huge impact on whether we expect immediate reciprocity from an exchange partner or not, as well expectations of reciprocity of the same resource vs. a different one. Do consumers have mental categories for things like nature, technology, or status? How would these categories change their consumption behavior?

ACR is a perfect time to talk about ACR’s new journal JACR. As many of you have undoubtedly seen, Chris Janiszewski and Luc Warlop co-edited a special issue of this journal focusing on the topic of how consumers *value resources*. Understanding resource valuation is critical to understanding consumer decision making. What influences how one resource is valued vis a vis another? While time is money, what makes people value time more than money? How does one compare the value of having health vs. having power? When will consumers value nature over technology?

Resources (or lack thereof) As Drivers of Consumer Decision Making

But more fundamentally, while an understanding of resources is foundational to decision making, I think a resource perspective focuses our attention less on the offering than on consumers themselves. It makes the lens through which consumers are viewing the world more focal. Our classic choice models show that consumers’ choices are focused on comparing brands along a set of features or attributes, with attribute importance being a driver of choice. But I’m not sure we’ve given enough attention to *the portfolio* of the consumer’s resources and *how it affects their choices*. In fact, it’s easy to imagine various consumer choices that have nothing to do with the characteristics of a brand or even the competitive landscape in which that brand operates. A consumer may refuse to buy a new car and to instead get around using Lyft and public transportation. This decision is not based on the fact that there are no good brands on the market. Rather, it’s based on the fact that from the consumer’s standpoint, this decision gives her more resources, time, money, and perhaps greater feelings of power and control. I think that the world is changing in such a way that it is forcing consumers to think more deeply about the resources they have and don’t have. *As a result, I think that resource considerations are figuring more prominently into consumers’ decisions.*

Resource Paradoxes and Trade-offs

One reason why is that these resources can have paradoxical effects on other resources. For example, it's clear that investment in technology can make us more connected to others in a virtual environment. However, such investments can come at a cost of weakening other resources, like personal relationships. Having more stuff also means having less space. Having more space to accommodate all the stuff means bigger houses on larger lots, which, in turn, means less opportunities to form relationships with neighbor, not to mention greater outlays of money. Acquiring information on the web often means giving up aspects of our privacy, which can leave us feeling less secure. Acquiring information from the news should make us more informed. But stories about fake news make us wonder. Moreover, the content of that information, like nuclear threats, unstable political leaders, and stories about powerful men who abuse women is definitively reducing the resource of peace of mind. I think these tradeoffs are causing consumers to take more categories of resources into consideration in their decision making. As such, consumer decision making may be becoming more and more complex.

Resource Portfolios. Moreover, we've historically thought about resources *in terms of a specific transaction*—that is, what the consumer is willing to give up in order to get a resource in return. We've focused on things like willingness to pay, search costs, and the like. But maybe what we really need to focus on is what drives consumers to the market in the first place. Perhaps what drives consumers to the marketplace are the resources in which they feel deficient. Maybe we will learn more about decision making if we consider the portfolio of resources consumers have and the resource domains in which they feel flush or constrained. Resource constraints bring people to the marketplace, while resource surpluses may influence what we're willing to exchange to obtain that resource.

Resources and Other Deep Metaphors

Zaltman and Zaltman's work on metaphors identifies other deep metaphors that guide consumers' thinking. These metaphors are

shown in red here. For example, consumers regard having *connections* to others as a foundational resource. Having resources provides consumers with some sense of *control*. Consumers keep resources in a *container*, whether that container is a bank, a wallet, or a mental account. Consumers' *journey* to the marketplace and make decisions that have the potential to *transform* them. This transformation results in a state of *balance*, perhaps by rectifying a resource deficiency. Thinking about how all of these deep metaphors operate on consumers thoughts about consumption is quite interesting.

Resources and Happiness

Thinking about consumer behavior in terms of one's portfolio of resources also has the potential to help us understand what it means to be happy. Whereas one might argue that we are most happy when we have a surplus of all types of resources, the paradoxical nature of resources that I just described suggests that such a state is impossible to achieve. Maybe happiness is not a state marked by having more of every resource. It's a state of equilibrium where one's current portfolio of resources leaves us not wanting for more.

Final Thought

Let me leave you with one final thought that brings my presentation full circle. Looking back on the definition of consumer behavior, coupled with the increasing attention being devoted to resources makes me wonder...Should consumer behavior be more broadly defined so as to explicitly include resources and their influence on decision making? Should our definition of consumer be changed in such a way to reflect the totality of decisions about the allocation of resources regarding the consumption of an offering by decision making units over time

While I wish I could say more, my time is up, my own resources are depleted, and, just as we've benefitted greatly from Craig's remarks, I know that Jag will undoubtedly have incredibly interesting thing say. Thank you for the resources you have given me—most notably, your time and attention. Thank you!