Special issue on “Markets in Transition”

The functions of memorable consumption experiences – Case Leijona brand

Roles of consumer-citizens in food waste reduction

Prosuming news in an unbounded media landscape
A study of young adults

Conveying personality traits through product design for a symbolic product

‘There is no doubt that consumers continue to be active’: An Interview with Professor Frank Trentmann

Lectio praecursoria: Evoluutiopsykologia kuluttajatutkijan työkalupakissa

Kansallisena tunnemaiseman rakentuminen: Pelon ja ilon rytim verkkokeskusteluissa
on Kulutustutkimuksen seura ry:n julkaise-
sema monitieteelliseen kulutustutkimuksen keskittyvän tieteellinen lehti. Lehden
julkaisuksessa on edistää kulutuksen, ku-
luttajakäyttäytymisen ja kotitalouden mo-
nitieteistä tutkimusta ja sen käyttöä sekä
siihen perustuvaa keskustelua.

Lehdessä julkaistaan aikaisemmin julkaise-
mattomia, kulutustutkimuksen ajankohtai-
sia kysymyksiä ja teemoja käsitteleviä
empiriisiä, teoreettisia ja metodologisia
tieteellisiä artikkeleita. Julkaistavat kirjoit-
ukset valitaan tieteellisin perustein ja ne
läpikäyvät arviointiprosessin.

Lehden toimituskunta koostuu Kulutustut-
kimuksen seura ry:n hallituksen jäsenistä,
ja lehden päätöimmittajana toimii seuran
hallituksen puheenjohtaja.

Julkaisutavaksi ehdotettavat artikkelia-
käsikirjoitukset lähetetään sähköpostitse
lehden päätöimmittajalle tai kenelle tahansa
lehden toimituskunnan jäsenelle. Kirjoitusohjeet löytyvät tämän lehden
takakannesta ja verkosta osoitteesta
http://www.kulutustutkimus.net

Päätöimmittaja 2018

Outi Uusitalo
professori
Jyväskylän yliopiston kauppakorkeakoulu

Muut toimituskunnan jäsenet

Visa Heinonen
professori
Helsingin yliopisto
kuluttajaekonomian oppiaine

Hanna Leipämaa-Leskinen
apulaisprofessori
Vaasan yliopisto
Kauppatieteellinen tiedekunta
Markkinoinnin laitos

Petteri Repo
yliopistotutkija, dosentti
Helsingin yliopisto
Kuluttajatutkimuskeskus

Elliisa Kylkilähti
tutkija
Helsingin yliopisto

Tarja Hatakka
yliaktuaari
Tilastokeskus

Elina Närvänen
yliopistolehtori
Tampereen yliopiston
johtamiskorkeakoulu

Toimitussihteeri

Tiina Kemppainen
tohtorikoulutettava
Jyväskylän yliopiston kauppakorkeakoulu

ISSN 1797-2345 (Painettu)
ISSN 1797-1985 (Verkkolehti)
Kulutustutkimus. Nyt

Kulutustutkimuksen seuran julkaisu

Editorial

The functions of memorable consumption experiences – Case Leijona brand

Roles of consumer-citizens in food waste reduction

Prosuming news in an unbounded media landscape
A study of young adults

Conveying personality traits through product design for a symbolic product

Kansallisen tunnemaiseman rakentuminen: Pelon ja ilon rytmit verkkokeskusteluissa

‘There is no doubt that consumers continue to be active’: An Interview with Professor Frank Trentmann

Lectio praecursoria: Evoluutiopsykologia kuluttajatutkijan työkalupakissa
Editorial

Special issue on “Markets in Transition”

Hanna Leipämää-Leskinen and Henna Syrjälä

We had the pleasure to host the Nordic Conference on Consumer Research at the University of Vaasa, June 13-14, 2018. This was the fifth time this biennial conference took place, meaning that already for ten years consumer and consumption scientists from different Nordic countries have gathered together. This time, the conference was themed as Markets in Transition referring to the idea that present-day consumer markets are under constant changes stemming from various global megatrends, such as digitalization and sustainability. For us consumer researchers, this poses both pivotal need for research as well as intriguing avenues for exploration.

The current special issue builds mainly on the papers presented in NCCR2018 each of them addressing the conference theme from different angles. First, Turunen and Laaksonen explore how one of the iconic Finnish brands - Leijona watch brand - is able to create memorable brand experiences for the consumers. The authors analyse altogether 1048 written stories that Finnish consumers have produced on their experiences related to Leijona watch. Categorizing the brand experiences according to varied memory functions (self-reflective, social and directive functions), the findings illuminate how the brand meanings can be transferred from past to present day consumption in a very interesting way.

In the second article, Närvänen, Mesiranta and Mattila analyse extant literature to identify three roles of consumer-citizens in food waste reduction. These roles - decision-maker, communal consumer-citizen, and change agent - are further enlightened by three illustrative narratives. Through these fictional narratives authors are able to vividly showcase how each of the roles are entwined in different levels of culture, micro, meso and macro. In their concluding discussion, Närvänen et al. encourage directing attention towards active consumer-citizens capable of driving change on multiple levels of society. Thus, in regard to the special issue on Markets in Transition, this paper emphasizes the possibilities for enhancing sustainability by empowering consumer-citizens and their potentials of mobilizing others.

The third article by Norrgrann, Ravald, Buss, Hjerpe and Storbacka addresses also
the active role of present-day consumers. In particular, they analyse how young adults act as prosumers in the unbound, changing media landscape. They discover six metaphorical prosumer profiles (the Bumblebee, the Window peeker, the Researcher, the Sponge, the Relayer, and the Megaphone) that highlight, for instance, how actively or passively young adults assemble and share news. The article fits especially well in the current theme as it is able to demonstrate the transitional phase of contemporary news consumption, or actually prosumption, in which the supremacy of the professional news producers is constantly being negotiated and novel forms news distribution are produced.

In the fourth article, Jacquemier-Paquin, Pantin-Sohier and Lancelot-Miltgen from France participate in the topical discussions of product design and its influence on consumers’ perception of a product. Taking a unique empirical context, namely flowers, they investigate how the shape of roses and tulips, and the brightness of their colour influence on the consumers’ perceptions of them. The results of the online survey further confirm that the product design stands for an important sensory cue shaping the product image that consumers attach to symbolic products, such as flowers.

In addition to the four inspiring articles presented in NCCR2018, the current issue includes also two additional papers that very well fit into the theme of Markets in Transition. Firstly, Lagus, Pantzar and Ruckenstein explore Finnish consumers’ emotional states and rhythms analysing online discussions from Suomi24 forum (56 millions of messages in total). Applying ‘rhythm analysis’ the authors discuss and visualize consumers’ emotional states emerging in certain time periods. The authors further elaborate the empirical findings in relation to societal level transition processes, such as digitalization and consumer welfare, and bring forward how big data driven analysis focusing on emotional discussions may be utilized when studying the rhythms and disorders of rhythms in the contemporary consumer society.

Secondly, Professor Visa Heinonen has interviewed Professor Frank Trentmann when he visited at the University of Helsinki as a part-time Professor of History of Morality and Consumption in 2018. The headline of the interview starts with a quote: ‘There is no doubt that consumers continue to be active’, which well highlights once more the empowered nature of present-day consumers. The interview begins with an interesting description of Professor Trentmann’s early studies, which actually are situated in early times of consumption research. Basing on these ideas, Trentmann discusses about what consumption actually is, and how it is something that changes over time, and therefore “it is interesting to try to understand, why is it that something like water or energy can be different things in some different periods of time and different cultures.” Relatedly, the interview goes on pondering about urgent matters and how things, such as managing sustainable change, are done all over the globe. The interview indeed showcases how markets can be in transition towards more sustainable future.
This issue ends with an interesting lectio praecursoria written by Samuel Piha who defended his thesis in Turku School of Economics. In his lectio, Piha argues that evolutionary psychology provides novel kinds of instruments to understand and analyse consumers’ behaviour. He also presented his dissertation framework in NCCR2018, which makes the lectio to fit well in the current special issue.

As editors of this special issue, we wish enjoyable reading moments for everyone interested in fresh views on the manners consumer markets are facing variable transformations! We thank all the authors and peer-reviewers for their valuable efforts to actualise this issue of Kulutustutkimus.Nyt!
The functions of memorable consumption experiences – Case Leijona brand

Linda Turunen and Pirjo Laaksonen

ABSTRACT

Although consumers’ brand decisions are influenced by prior experiences via memory, the brand meanings stored in memories have received little attention in marketing and consumer behavior research. This study analyzes brand-related consumption experiences in order to find out what makes these experiences memorable for a consumer. The study was conducted by investigating brand memories from the point of view of the uses or functions of episodic memory. The empirical data consists of 1048 written stories about memorable consumption experiences related to a Finnish watch brand. The empirical data was explored through content analysis with deductive logic to uncover how memory functions (self-reflective, social and directive functions) come into existence in written stories. The findings revealed that the brand is tied to consumers’ life stories in multiple ways, and the meanings of the branded product were created particularly in socially, spatially and temporally specified consumption situations.

Introduction

Consumer decision-making, brand preferences and even brand-related meanings are largely influenced by prior experiences via memory (Keller, 2003; Escalas & Bettman, 2003). Despite the importance and role of memory, previous marketing literature has mainly focused on one aspect of autobiographical memory – semantic memory – while neglecting affect-associated episodic memory (Butler & Berry, 2001). From the marketing point of view, the neglected episodic memory may be more influential when it comes to brand preference and stored brand meanings, as it stores personal memories associated with self-constructs and social functions (Alea & Bluck, 2003).

Past experiences stored up in our episodic memory are linked to brand and product meanings. Our past experiences and information we store in our memory have an influence, albeit often unconsciously, on how we interpret the world around us, how we focus our attention and what brands and products we prefer or regard as meaningful (e.g. Keller, 2003). Memories guide our perceptions and even our actions without us always consciously being aware of this. Particularly memorable experiences related to specific products serve an important role, as they influence our “orientation” towards the brands.
Memories are stored in our minds in the form of stories and narratives (e.g. Woodside et al., 2008; McKee, 2003). The episodic nature of these memories helps us in structuring, interpreting and understanding our experiences and lives (Shankar, Elliott & Goulding, 2001). These memorable experiences might relate to situations, products, brands and people – anything remarkable enough to have left an impression in our memory (Ryynänen & Heinonen, 2017). Besides storing the content of the memory (i.e. memorable experience) in our minds, the way of structuring and sharing it requires narrating (Woodside et al., 2008). From the marketing perspective, it is valuable to know the contents of these memorable experiences, and also the way of narrating the content, as this plays a crucial role in transferring the meanings (Söderlund & Sagfossen, 2015).

Although it is acknowledged that consumption experiences in episodic memory have an influence on the product and brand evaluation (e.g. Brakus et al., 2009), this topic has been neglected in consumer behavior and marketing literature from the memory perspective. This study analyzes brand-related consumption experiences in order to find out what makes these experiences memorable for a consumer. We are interested not only in what consumers remember, but also in what kind of role and meaning they assign to their remembered consumption experience and how the interpreted stories are linked in the present. Episodic memory functions – self-reflective, social and directive functions – are chosen as a theoretical framework for revealing the uses of consumption experience. The objectives of our study are structured according to the three memory functions as follows:

1) How is the branded product connected to the consumer’s self-identity and its constructions in consumption experiences?

2) How is the branded product linked to building and maintaining social relations in consumption experiences?

3) How is the branded product seen to guide reasoning, thinking and behavior in later stages and pursuits of life with respect to consumption experiences?

The empirical analysis dives into written stories of past consumption experiences to shed light on the connection of consumption experience and consumer’s life experience. This is achieved by applying theorizing on episodic memory functions in analyzing brand-related consumption experiences. In this way we hope to shed new insights into the connections between consumer (identity) and brand (identity), as well as bidirectional meaning transfer.

The next section provides a selective review of literature concerning memory functions and brand experiences. Then, the empirical data will be described, and finally the findings related to memory functions will be discussed. Conclusions about memorable consumption experiences, meanings and brand literature will be drawn in the last chapter.
Consumption experiences and memory functions

Memory has been researched extensively in psychology and medicinal sciences, and its influence on everyday life has been pointed out (Addis & Tippet, 2004; Conway et al., 2005). As memory includes a wealth of detailed knowledge that influences and guides behavior, it is also widely acknowledged in marketing literature (e.g. Brakus et al., 2009; Keller, 1987). The general term “memory” often refers to autobiographical memory, which is divided into two components: episodic and semantic (e.g. Piolino et al., 2002; Skowronski & Walker, 2004; Pillemer, 2003; Alea & Bluck, 2003). Semantic memory consists of general knowledge and facts about the individual’s past, e.g., schools attended or names of friends, and also about the whole world. In brand and marketing literature, the emphasis has been on semantic memory, and thus the episodic part of memory has received less attention in consumer behavior and marketing.

Episodic memory contains personal experiences and specific events situated in place and time, e.g., one’s first day at school or a specific birthday party (e.g. Tulving et al., 1988; Conway, 1996; Baddeley, 1992). Episodic memory contains event-specific knowledge and detailed information with sensory-perceptual features (Rice & Rubin, 2011), which are features stored in memory. They are often researched in the context of brand experiences, and particularly in the service context and the tourism industry (Khan & Rahman, 2015; Schmitt, 2009). Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello (2009) conceptualize brand experience as sensations, feelings, cognitions and behavior responses evoked by brand-related stimuli, which can be regarded as features stored in both episodic and semantic memory. As brand-related meaning structures include all descriptive and evaluative brand-related knowledge, and the meanings can be situation-, product- and/or brand-specific (Keller, 2003; Brakus et al., 2009), brand- and product-related consumption experiences are worth investigating from the episodic perspective, linking the branded products to specific socially, spatially and temporally specified situations.

The functions of memorable experiences

Autobiographical memory recollects episodes from an individual’s life, and thus serves three functions: self-representative, social and directive (Williams, Conway & Cohen, 2008). The self-representative function includes personal memories to create and maintain the coherence and continuity of self-identity. A stable self-identity allows for evaluation of past experiences (reflections), which leads to self-insight and self-growth. This self-referring nature of autobiographical memory is the most significant feature that separates autobiographical memory from other types of memory systems (Brewer, 1986). The marketing literature has devoted extensive attention to the self-referring nature of memory in the context of consumer-brand relationships (Fournier, 1998; Levy, 1959). Besides brands’ personal meanings, their roles in terms of identity and personality constructions have been pointed out (Fournier, 1998; Escalas & Bettman, 2005).
Social function, in turn, develops and maintains social bonds. Sharing personal memories with others is a way to facilitate and strengthen social interaction and preexisting bonds. Examples of different types of social functions include intimacy (developing and maintaining relationship bonds), teaching and informing others, and showing empathy (e.g., Cohen, 1998; Hyman & Faries, 1992; Pillemer, 2001; Alea & Bluck, 2003). Brands contain symbolic meanings, and thus their socially relevant meanings have been a topic of research in brand literature (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998; Ligas & Cotte, 1999); however, they have not been studied from the memory perspective.

The third function, namely directive, uses past experiences as a reference for solving current problems and as a guide for our actions in the present and the future. Memories can be used as a basis to create successful models of behavior. (Williams et al., 2008.) For example, in branding literature, it has been suggested that memorable brand experiences clearly influence a consumer’s behaviors and thoughts in the future. Marketing constructs such as brand loyalty – and also service-rooted concepts such as customer engagement, involvement and satisfaction – are often also closely tied to memorable experiences and branding. (Brakus et al., 2009; Khan & Rahman, 2015.)

Previous brand literature has uncovered that brands have personal, social and behavior-directing meanings (Cohen, 1998; Pillemer, 2001). However, so far, these have been approached mainly from a deterministic angle and from a semantic memory perspective. From the consumer research perspective, remembered consumption experiences have often been studied through the lenses of nostalgia (Ryynänen & Heinonen, 2017; Holbrook & Schindler, 2003). However, this study takes a different angle by approaching the brand and consumption experiences from the episodic memory perspective, aiming particularly to shed light on how memorable brand-related consumption experiences function in building identity-related, social and behavioral meanings.

**Methodology: Data description and analysis**

The empirical data consists of stories of consumption experiences related to the Leijona-branded wristwatch. The stories were written by consumers participating in a competition where they were asked to share a memory about their first Leijona watch. The competition was held in 2010 to celebrate the 100-year-old Leijona brand. The possibility of winning a Leijona watch inspired writers all around Finland to share their memorable Leijona experiences. Due to its long heritage and popularity in the Finnish watch market back in the day, the brand is the most well-known brand in Finland (Puustinen, 2015; Perkko, 2014). In addition, research conducted by Taloustutkimus also found out that Leijona has the most positive price perceptions in Finnish watch market with prices varying from 55€ to 159€ (Perkko, 2014).

A data set of memorable consumption experiences has its benefits; as
unforgettable and momentous situations are often emphasized when recalling the past, it is possible to assume that there are close linkages between brand experiences and life experiences. In previous literature, these kinds of memorable experiences have been explored in the field of tourism with respect to consumers’ holiday experiences (e.g., Gunter, 1987). It is also suggested by Aho (2001, p. 45) that lived experiences may take time to mature, and therefore temporal distance can be regarded as bringing value to the data set. What’s more, it gives an opportunity to explore the directive memory function and whether the brand plays a guiding role in later stages of a consumer’s life as well.

Altogether, 1048 consumption stories were received, of which 583 stories were written by women and 465 by men. The stories generated 243 pages of textual data written in Finnish. The competition had no strict instructions and guidelines, only an invitation to share memories concerning one’s first Leijona watch. While the stories were submitted to competition purposes, the background information of the storytellers was limited only to name and contact details. For example, the information about the age of the writers is unknown, but as many stories drew on memories situated in the 50s and 60s, it can be assumed that most of the writers were around 50+ years. The length of the stories varied greatly – from 15 words to 943 words. In addition, the stories were different in style and approach: some were vivid and detailed descriptions including reflections and feelings, while others reported the situation in a general manner without any descriptions of the watch. Most of the stories related to situations, experiences and life itself, while some contained a detailed description of the product. The stories were positioned in the past and are thus applicable for analyzing memory functions.

The empirical data was analyzed at two levels: first, content analysis was conducted to make sense of the stories’ contents, e.g., the analysis identified the actors of the stories, what kind of memorable experiences were told, and how the branded product related to the experiences. The second level of the analysis was conducted using deductive logic: the theory-driven content analysis was applied to identify the categories of self-representative and social memory functions by exploring how the writer experienced the brand in relation to oneself, to an event, situation or to other people. After that the directive function was uncovered by examining whether the story included any descriptions of how the branded product was involved in or guided later behavior.

**Findings: recalled consumption experiences**

The stories contained key elements: subject (usually actor, usually a human being), object (watch), context (actual or symbolic, situation, other people, etc.). Most often the actor in the memories was the writer him-/herself, and the stories were told from a personal point of view. There were also stories where the storyteller was an outsider, and these described the owner of the watch (dad, mum, sibling) and the situation in which the watch was so important to the storyteller or remarkable at that time.
"Mum had the most beautiful hands. When I was little, she had a sewing atelier. Hands played a big role in her life and she took very good care of them. (...) When thinking about mum’s hands, my memories also relate to the precious Leijona watch she always wore on her wrist. On busy days she quickly checked the time from it. (...) That watch is my inheritance, and it always reminds me of mum.” *(Woman)*

As can be seen in the quote above, stories operated in multiple temporal frames (see also Ryynänen & Heinonen, 2017); when describing ordinary everyday situations, the watch reminds the storyteller of the distant past. Although the stories were anchored in childhood memories, the narration often linked the story to the present time. These multiple timeframes showed the interpretation process and meaning construction of everyday memories, unveiling how the brand might be unconsciously attached to the consumer’s past in meaningful ways.

Some memories were detailed descriptions of the surroundings and the situation; these stories were contextualized and focused primarily on describing the world back then. The symbolic meanings were often constructed through the rarity and extraordinariness of wristwatches or ordinary everyday memories that reminded the storyteller of family ties. These multilayered interpretations position the stories in two dimensions: both past memories and reflections of today’s world.

As the stories were collected by asking consumers to share memories of their first Leijona watch, it is evident that the descriptions of these experiences emphasize the most unforgettable memories (Gunter, 1987; Aho, 2001). Thus, many of the stories emphasized a change in possession, e.g., memories of receiving, owning and/or losing the watch, and included meaning creation and interpretation by the actor (narrator). Although some memories involved worries and troubles – for example, memories in which the storyteller lost the watch – the stories radiated positive attitude towards the brand.

In conclusion, these stories of recalled experiences can be divided into three different groups: stories that emphasized context description and surroundings, stories that narrated the situation or event involving the watch, and stories that focused mainly on the watch itself and gave a detailed description of it. These are the main approaches emphasized in these shared memories, and in many stories all of these layers co-existed, as most of the memorable experiences were temporally, spatially and socialy positioned. The stories also aptly represented the multi-layered nature of memory; the meanings and emotions (episodic memory) were at the core of the stories, but the stories were enriched with the product characteristics (semantic constructs). Next, the episodic memory structures will be analyzed through three memory functions of self-representativeness, sociality and directedness.
Memory functions: Self-representative function

The self-representative function of the memory was uncovered by identifying the connections between the self and the watch. The storyteller’s first watch was often meaningful to him/her, and it got its value in relation to the temporal context and society: the stories highlighted how the wristwatch was something that was linked to personal transitions and entering adulthood. In particular, some stories described how the wristwatch used to be a childhood dream and it was something only a few peers possessed. Many stories pointed out the exact year, and some stories positioned the situation in a timeframe, describing and shedding light on the historical context in Finland at that time.

The memorable experiences related to something special that the storyteller experienced with the watch, whether a change in the situation (becoming a watch owner or losing the watch) or everyday situations that the storyteller would long for and cherish later. When the watch was received as a gift, it was often linked to a turning point in one’s life: for example, a watch received as a birthday present just before starting school signified trust, and a watch received as a confirmation gift at the age of 15 reminded the recipient of entering adulthood. “Confirmation camp itself prepared me for adulthood, and the brand-new gift watch on my right wrist was a direct sign of being an adult.” (Man.) The watch was regarded as being personally meaningful, because the watch often carried the meaning of a personal transition from childhood to adolescence or from adolescence to adulthood: the watch was a reminder of important transitions in life and of personal growth.

Meaningful transitions in life were also supported through self-gifting, where the watch often signified hard work, one’s first paycheck or career transitions. “When I received my very first pay from my very first real job, I went and bought a Leijona watch. I really felt I had earned it and every day after that I felt like a real career-woman when I had it on my wrist.” (Woman.) In addition to transitions, the Leijona brand was connected to empowerment: The brand symbolized “the strength of a lion” (Man). (Note: the brand name, Leijona, means lion in English.) The watch empowered the owner, and regardless of whether the storyteller had received the watch as a gift or bought it for him-/herself, the memories of the watch were filled with pride and happiness. The watch seemed to be a dream come true for many.

These stories of consumption experiences showed that the self-reflective function relates closely to achievements and accomplishments as well as transitions in life situations. However, it is noteworthy to point out that although the memorable experiences often related to a specific product – a wristwatch – the brand-related meaning structures cannot be strictly separated: for example, back in the day, Leijona was a synonym for a wristwatch in Finland, as few alternative brands were available in the Finnish market in the 50s and 60s. In addition, when the watch was received as a gift, multiple meaning dimensions were attached to the branded product through a high-involvement situation; the first Leijona watch became personally meaningful and a part of life transitions. Thus, the brand-related
meanings contain brand, product and consumption experience related meanings, but it is impossible to clearly differentiate these meaning layers. The stories showed that although the recalled experiences of the distant past related to meanings at the product level, the brand involvement became apparent in later phases of life through other memory functions.

**Memory functions: Social function**

In the narratives, some storytellers even recalled that the Leijona watch served as glue in social relations and both reflected and created social relations. Often, family members, relatives, colleagues, school friends, clockmakers or vendors were mentioned as actors who were involved in highlighting the social importance of the watch:

“I inherited this watch from my beloved grandma ten years ago. (...) My acquaintance who is a clockmaker has tried to buy my watch many times; but it is not for sale. I cannot count its value in money although the clockmaker has highlighted how rare the piece is. (...) Nowadays my granddaughters always want to hear first the tick-toc when we meet. It is our own shared memory. I hope that some day they will value this watch as much as I do.” (Woman)

The symbolic function operated on multiple levels, and besides signaling to the self, signals directed to others also had central communicative uses and roles. The watch carries memories and ties generations together.

Signals concerning the possession of the watch played an important role, but it was not insignificant what kind of watch was possessed. "I waited so much for my birthday; I knew I will get a watch as a gift. (...) The watch I unwrapped was a pocket watch. I was so disappointed! I could not use the watch at school – everyone would have laughed.” (Man.) The story tells how the cultural meanings and surroundings have a huge influence on the meanings a person attaches to the product. In this example, the striving to belong morphed into differentiation and outsider status because the storyteller received the wrong type of watch, i.e., a pocket watch, as a gift.

The symbolic value of a watch was highlighted, and the symbolic signals of the watch had different kinds of meanings: The signals were either lifecycle-related/general (e.g., signal of adulthood) or targeted to show off to specific people, e.g., school friends. "I used the brand-new watch all the time. I wanted everyone to know I knew how to read the time. I felt it made me a man.” (Man.) A wristwatch (regardless of the brand) was an important object for showing status – both economic and intellectual. “Earlier only a few friends of mine had a watch. They came from wealthy families. Receiving a wristwatch as a birthday gift enabled me to belong to this special group at the school.” (Man.)

Especially in situations where a watch was received as a present, it reflected the
relationship between two individuals. It was noteworthy that some of the gift watches were not brand new when received: "receiving the old Leijona watch of my grandfather was more meaningful for me than any other new watch I have ever owned." (Man.) Although the watch was used, it was regarded as being highly precious, even more valuable than a brand-new watch. It carried a memory of the life of the previous owner (often grandmother or father) and tied the gift receiver to the continuum of the family. Often the story related to passing the memory on to children or grandchildren in the form of a Leijona watch.

Although the stories concerned a Leijona-branded product, as set out in the competition guidelines, the recalled memories that related to social bonds and symbolic meanings were seamlessly tied to the product (wristwatch) and brand. For example, stories recalled from the distant past contextualized the memorable consumption experiences in a time and place (e.g., Finland in the 50s and 60s) where a wristwatch itself was a symbolically meaningful artifact. The Leijona brand was the only brand in the market back then, which may have had an influence on the inseparable associations between wristwatches and the Leijona brand.

**Memory functions: Directive function**

The directive functions of memory related to issues regarding how memorable brand experiences were seen to guide reasoning, thinking and behavior in later stages and pursuits of life. At the psychological level, the years spent with one's trustworthy Leijona partner brought encouragement or reminders from the past. The stories with a directive function often operated on two levels; they described a consumption experience situated in the distant past but narrated the storyline in the present time or even described possible practices of the future.

Stories with metaphorical content included directive functions that gave encouragement or directed the storyteller’s life. The Leijona brand helped these people to get through challenging times, as it reminded them of bravery and strength. "Clothes, bags, jackets change, but my Leijona has seen all the best and worst times. (...) Somehow I have felt it has brought me good luck." (Woman.) Due to the feeling of empowerment and confidence, there were also stories related to changing behavior; such stories described how memorable experiences led to repurchase, passing the artifact to younger generations, and changing the status of the gift receiver to gift giver. For instance, one storyteller wrote: "(...) passing the tradition; I received my first Leijona as a confirmation gift. I could not think of any other gift for my godson." (Man.) In addition, usage experiences fostered trust in Finnish quality: "Over the years I have changed only the strap, and the watch has received a face-lift. I could not wish for better quality." (Woman.) Often the stories described how they preferred the Leijona brand in their repurchases after having good experiences of the brand. In other words, the directive functions in the stories revealed how memorable consumption experiences may link to brand loyalty or brand involvement in later stages of life.
Besides the brand loyalty that can be seen as a result of the directive function, the everyday behavior that the Leijona brand encouraged and supported can also be pointed out. The stories highlighted how possessing a Leijona watch guided the storyteller to be punctual and precise as well as to behave in a more trustworthy way. Owning the watch encouraged the storyteller to be on time.

**Conclusions**

The stories of brand-related memories explored through episodic memory functions revealed a variety of meanings tied to the consumer’s life story; they were attached to the self, social relations and behaviors that linked past and present by unveiling brand preferences. The paper contributes to previous brand literature in three ways: first, it expounds the meaning of episodic memory in the consumer-brand relationship construction. Besides brand-related meanings, the meanings emerging from memorable consumption experiences were constructed also at the product and situational levels; these levels cannot be clearly separated from the brand-related meanings (e.g. Fournier, 1998). For example, in the specific temporal context, the wristwatch itself was regarded as a rarity, which contained symbolic meanings at both the personal and societal levels. On the other hand, some stories clearly related to the feelings of empowerment and encouragement provided by one’s first own Leijona watch, and thus the watch was associated with both the consumption situation and the brand and its characteristics. Second, the findings show the intertwined connection between temporality and consumer’s brand relationship. Exploring the memory functions showed that memories are multilayered constructs, and when recalling them, people interpret and reflect them against their present situation (e.g. Ryynänen & Heinonen, 2017). In addition, the stories unveiled how consumption situations play an important role in meaning creation – meanings are not carried solely by the brand. Thus, these stories are intertwined in consumption situations, brand- and product-related meanings that operated at both the personal and social levels, as well as in multiple temporal frames. Past memories in which the Leijona brand was perceived as personally or socially valuable often also linked the stories to the present day and displayed brand attachment and loyalty in the form of repurchase or gifting.

Exploring the memorable brand experiences through the frame of memory functions unveiled how a branded product becomes meaningful for oneself or in social relations. Hence, the paper sheds light on meaning transfer between a consumption object, a consumer and a social context, which constitutes the third theoretical contribution of our study. The study suggests that the meanings related to the consumption situation are transferred to the brand; for example, the Leijona watch was seen to denote adulthood and achievement. Moreover, the characteristics of the Leijona brand were transferred to the owner of the Leijona watch. For instance, the stories highlighted how both the functional characteristics (like precision and punctuality) and symbolic characteristics (like the strength and courage of a lion) of the Leijona watch were seen to be transferred to the watch owner. The findings thus propose that a meaning transfer takes place between the
brand and the consumer in a bidirectional manner. Meaning transfer is a process that has been suggested to occur in culture production processes, and based on semiotic theory it is argued that meanings are linked to products through marketing processes, and that consumers extract these meanings from the products (McCracken, 1988). In line with this suggestion, our study proposes that consumers play a central and active role in meaning creation; the meanings of the Leijona branded product are created through consumption experiences. In addition, the stories contain expressions indicating the transference of meaning both from the Leijona watch to the consumer and vice versa.

This research is not without limitations. First, although using a data set collected for purposes other than research boosts authenticity, it also involves some challenges. For instance, no additional background information is available on factors such as the age of the writers. In addition, the competition set-up and motivational watch prize might have influenced the content of the stories and the positivity towards the brand memories. Second, the deductive logic guiding the data analysis set some boundaries for the findings of this paper. Thus, it would be valuable for future research to explore the data set inductively as well. In addition, it would be interesting to examine in greater depth how high-involvement situations have an influence on the level of brand involvement. For example, it is reasonable to ask to what extent and how the high involvement or extraordinary situations connected with the branded product (personal life transitions; new job, first salary, gift) strengthen and enrich the brand-related memory functions? Further, in a high-involvement situation, can the high situational involvement turn into life-long lasting brand involvement? On the other hand, do the memories connected to everyday situations place a greater emphasis on product-specific involvement, and not necessarily brand involvement?

References


Perkko (2014). Leijona - Suomen tunnetuin rannekello. [online] [cited 08.10.2018]. Available at: <https://www.perkko.fi/tutkimus-leijona-suomen-tunnetuin-rannekello/>


Author information

D.Sc. (Econ.) Linda Turunen is Post-Doctoral researcher at the Centre for Consumer Society Research at University of Helsinki. Email: linda.turunen@helsinki.fi

D.Sc. (Econ.) Pirjo Laaksonen is Dean at the School of Marketing and Communication at University of Vaasa. Email: pirjo.laaksonen@univaasa.fi
Roles of consumer-citizens in food waste reduction

Elina Närvänen, Nina Mesiranta and Malla Mattila

ABSTRACT

This paper describes and analyses the roles of consumer-citizens in reducing food waste. As one of the most crucial sustainability challenges, food waste provides a theoretically interesting context to explore the roles and responsibilities given to and taken by consumer-citizens. Reducing food waste provides opportunities for consumer-citizens to change their own consumption decisions and practices as well as influence others in pursuit of a more sustainable consumer society. We review literature on consumer-citizenship and identify three main roles of consumer-citizens in sustainable consumption at the micro, meso and macro levels: decision-makers, communal consumer-citizens, and change agents. We illustrate the key characteristics of these roles by constructing three narratives based on insights gained from an ongoing qualitative research project that examines consumer-citizens as active reducers of food waste. The paper provides a contribution to research related to sustainable consumption, political consumerism, and food waste. It also has implications for policy-makers.

Introduction

A considerable body of literature in consumer research has paid attention to consumption as a form of citizenship and political engagement (see e.g., Arnould, 2007; Chaudhury & Albinsson, 2015; Rokka & Moisander, 2009; Soper, 2007; Trentmann, 2007). Consequently, consumers are today seen as key subjects in societal transformation (Giesler & Veresiu, 2014). This paper investigates consumer-citizenship in the context of food waste, one of the most crucial global sustainability challenges today. The Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations has estimated in 2011 that globally about one third of food produced for human nutrition is lost or wasted (FAO, 2015). In consumer research, food waste has recently been identified as an important topic for study, creating possibilities to contribute to theory, practice and the society more broadly (Porpino, 2016). In terms of sustainable consumption and lifestyles, food is one of the most impactful areas where changes can be made, alongside transport and energy use (Sahakian & Wilhite, 2014).

Food waste creates environmental and economic, but also social and ethical concerns. From an environmental perspective, the carbon footprint of food waste is almost equal (87%) to global road transport emissions (FAO, 2015). The later in the supply chain food waste occurs, the greater the carbon footprint. Thus,
reducing food waste in the later stages of food supply chain, i.e. at retailers and households, is especially impactful for the environment. Since we all have to eat every day, (potential) food waste concerns most consumers’ daily lives, irrespective of the diet they follow. This is also the reason for why consumer-citizens have been increasingly urged to change their behaviour in order to waste less food (Evans, Welch, & Swaffield, 2017). Compared to many other sustainable consumption practices such as avoiding air travel or purchasing an electric car, reducing food waste can be relatively easy to implement and without major economic or social sacrifices in the consumer’s lifestyle.

The purpose of this paper is to describe and analyse the roles of consumer-citizens in reducing food waste. First, we review previous research related to consumer-citizenship. Then, we introduce three main roles of consumer-citizens: decision-makers, communal consumer-citizens and change agents. These roles operate at different levels (micro, meso, macro) in society and markets, thus offering an illustrative framework for understanding sustainable consumption and consumer-citizenship. We illuminate the characteristics of these roles by constructing three narratives based on insights from an ongoing qualitative research project on food waste. The research materials include blog posts, interviews of food bloggers and “born sustainable” startup representatives, media texts on food waste related initiatives, and political documents. In the conclusion, we discuss the theoretical and policy implications of the study.

Theoretical underpinnings

Unpacking the concept of consumer-citizen

The concept of consumer-citizen (or citizen-consumer) has attained an increasing and multidisciplinary academic interest, becoming a keyword also in discourses on environmental policy and sustainability (Trentmann, 2007). It is a composite of two terms, namely consumer and citizen - and a hyphen separating these two spheres, implicitly emphasising their impact on each other. Put together, the concept brings forward a contrast between pleasure seeking, self-interested utility-maximizing “consumer behaviour” taking place in the market and a willingness to serve the common good through “citizenship” taking place within the context of the nation state and civil society (Chaudhury & Albinsson, 2015).

As argued by the consumption historian Frank Trentmann (2007), citizenship and consumerism used to be positioned in social theory as opposites – the argument being that with the advance of commerce, division of labor and mass marketing, “civic life was in danger of being hollowed out by jostling private interests” (ibid.: 148). Citizenship was considered the sphere of morality and altruism whereas the market was portrayed as an alienating sphere of self-interested exchange and fulfilling individual desires. Furthermore, in the writings of Baudrillard and other critics of consumer society, consumers began to be portrayed as “dupes” or victims of the capitalist system, unable to escape the neverending consumption of
commercial signs (see Arnould, 2007). Consumer researchers have, however, for a long time analysed consumption as a symbolic and expressive activity, much more manifold than either the “dupe/victim” or “economic man” stereotypes suggest (Rokka & Moisander, 2009). It can be argued that the “homo oeconomicus” – the rational, utility-maximizing individual – is and has always been a fictional abstraction (Soper, 2007). Rather than seen as opposites or alternatives, consumer and citizen roles are increasingly overlapping and complementary. The citizen’s altruistic and moral concerns over the environment, for instance, need not be confined to the traditional political sphere of activism. Instead, he or she may engage in “alternative hedonism” (ibid.), consuming products and services that revise the definition of “good life” into a more sustainable one. Thus, altruistic and self-interested motivations are not so clear-cut and ethical consumption practices may be informed by both.

Consumption has also gained momentum as a site of political action and mobilization that complicates the strict division between consumer and citizen roles (Trentmann, 2007). Various forms of political consumerism have been studied in consumer research ranging from boycotts and buyouts to consumer resistance movements, anti-consumption and consumer activism (see e.g., Chaudhury & Albinsson, 2015; Halkier & Holm, 2008; Jacobsen, 2017). Hence, the political sphere has been gradually extended from the formal domain of the state toward a renaissance of civil society (Trentmann, 2007). Another influence has been the political neoliberal ideology that has emphasised responsibilising consumers – obliging them to enact their lives through independent and free (consumption) choices rather than as directed by the government or other central authority (Giesler & Veresiu, 2014).

However, finding a balance between consumerism and citizenship can create conflicts (Frank, 2018) as well as contradictions and ideological tensions (Johnston, 2008). For example, the stress induced by consumer-citizen role conflicts can impede consumers from making ethical purchase decisions despite having ethical purchase intentions (Frank, 2018). Identifying with both roles simultaneously is challenging and hence the consumer-citizens must make compromises in their everyday lives in order to navigate these tensions and cope with them (see also Pecoraro & Uusitalo, 2014).

To sum up, in discussing consumer-citizenship, it must be noted that both concepts (consumer and citizen) are continuously contested and unstable. As argued by Trentmann (2007: 151), it may be better to approach citizen-consumers in terms of “multiple identities that are only slowly (and unevenly and incompletely) fused into a universal subject”. For instance, a continuous debate is taking place over who can be considered as a consumer and who can represent the voice of “the consumer” in various public debates (Evans et al., 2017; Trentmann, 2007). Various actors from social movements to businesses to consumer researchers can claim to be speaking for the consumer, protecting and serving their interests without really addressing the question of what exactly these interests are.
Three roles of consumer-citizens in sustainable consumption

With the help of existing literature on consumer-citizens and sustainable consumption, three different roles can be identified: consumer-citizens as decision-makers and choosers, as communal consumer-citizens, and as change agents.

The first role, consumer-citizens as decision-makers, is closest to the rational consumer archetype – consumer-citizens are viewed as making consumption decisions and choices that are more or less sustainable. The rhetoric goes that consumers as autonomous actors are making these decisions individually. The neoliberal discourse promotes this role as it primarily views consumer-citizens as “free” – and simultaneously obligated – to choose (e.g. environmentally sustainable) goods and services (Giesler & Veresiu, 2014). By making more sustainable consumption choices, consumer-citizens can implement change at the individual micro level. Earlier, this role has been identified in a typology of green consumer-citizen involvement and motivation as “the individual green citizen” (Prothero, McDonagh & Dobscha, 2010).

From this perspective, the route to large scale change is for different kinds of authorities and experts to inform and educate consumers about the impact of their individual choices and behaviours (cf. Shove, 2010; Southerton & Evans, 2017). However, it has been questioned whether consumers can actually ‘buy’ themselves into a more sustainable society or is “ethical consumption choice“ framed as such only to promote the commercial interests of companies (Jacobsen, 2017). Also, the decision-making focus relies on cognitive assumptions of consumers (the ABC model – see Shove, 2010) which in reality do not predict actual consumer behaviour very well. Indeed, the existence of the so called attitude-behaviour gap is a well known and researched phenomenon in sustainable consumption studies (Prothero et al., 2011). Even with a strong positive intention to act sustainably, consumers’ actual behaviour does not always reflect this. Furthermore, many argue that the focus has been too much on the acquisition stage of the consumption cycle rather than taking into account usage and disposal as equally important (Geiger, Fischer & Schrader, 2018; Sahakian & Wilhite, 2014). It has also been suggested that a micro-focus “at the expense of a more systematic, structural, and institutional perspectives is insufficient to address the sustainability challenge effectively” (Prothero et al., 2011).

In the food waste context, consumer-citizens as decision-makers can make more sustainable purchasing decisions by shopping discounted food items that have an approaching expiry date or items that are not in perfect condition but still edible. Studies have documented for instance that if the price is right, i.e. an appropriate discount is given, consumers are willing to purchase any type of suboptimal food item from retailers (e.g. odd shape, brown spot, past best-before date, or dented packaging) (de Hooge et al., 2017). In addition, there are currently many start-up companies around the world that offer deformed and suboptimal vegetables and fruit or completely new items made out of surplus food (see e.g.,
A recent study suggests that such value-added surplus foods are becoming an attractive product category of their own (Bhatt et al., 2018).

The second role, communal consumer-citizen, draws from a practice theoretical understanding of consumers (Shove, 2010; Warde, 2014). This understanding has been fruitfully utilised in studying sustainable consumption (Sahakian & Wilhite, 2014; Warde, 2014). These studies have for example focussed on water consumption (Phipps & Ozanne, 2017) and energy consumption (Butler, Parkhill & Pidgeon, 2016). The focus is extended from the consumer as “shopper” toward everyday practices and routines (see also Halkier, 2009). The focus also moves toward taking into account all phases of the consumption cycle: acquisition, use, and disposal (Geiger et al. 2018). According to the proponents of practice theory, it enables looking at (un) sustainable everyday life as dynamic. Furthermore, practices can only be changed through changes in their elements (Phipps & Ozanne, 2017) such as the body, objects and infrastructures that are used in the practice as well as the social and cultural context (Sahakian & Wilhite, 2014). The social nature of practices is emphasised in the role of the communal consumer-citizen, because practices are adopted and learnt in social contexts. Hence, participating in sustainable practices in specific social contexts with peers may be influential in changing an individual’s practices (ibid.: 31).

The potential scale of change from the perspective of this role is broader, extending to meso level of households, communities, and groups that share social practices. In Prothero et al.’s (2010) typology, this role corresponds to the “collective green consumer” who engages in individual consumption choices to improve the wider public and environmental wellbeing. However, even though the scale of change is wider than in the first role, the communal consumer-citizen perspective can still be criticised for not sufficiently taking into account the macro level. While bottom-up changes in consumption practices are needed, changes in public policy and market systems are vital in order to normalise and stabilise more sustainable practices (Prothero et al., 2011).

In the case of food waste, research has found that ordinary practices of everyday life, being able to plan and manage routine aspects of grocery shopping, cooking, food storage, preservation, and display are central (Evans, 2011, 2012; Närvänen, Mesiranta & Hukkanen, 2016). However, the focus has not been on food waste reduction as a communal practice - with the exception of a few studies that discuss social media and blog communities in the context of food waste (Närvänen, Mesiranta & Hukkanen, 2013; Närvänen et al., 2018). These studies suggest that consumer-citizens may collectively inspire each other to change their consumption practices related to food waste.

The third role, consumer-citizens as change agents, draws from the new forms of political consumerism (see Jacobsen, 2017): concerned consumer-citizens may engage in various activities to try to change not only their own behaviour but also that of others and of the society more broadly. Consumers are seen more in their
citizen role as concerned over the environment and the sustainability of the society as a whole. Critically evaluating the current system, consumer-citizens are aware that changes need to be implemented by all actors – companies and politicians included – and the responsibility should not be only on the consumers’ side (Chaudhury & Albinsson, 2015). In the change-agent role, consumer-citizens may be able to push for changes in public policy or markets that would not be made unless there was a strong enough pressure. McShane and Sabadoz (2015) argue that moving away from the ‘choice-as-power view’ is required to question the existing marketplace structures and “link their consumption practices to broader social issues” (549). Examples of phenomena related to the change-agent role are already widely studied in sustainable consumption research, ranging from boycotts (Kozinets & Handelman, 2004) to anti-consumption and voluntary simplicity (Pentina & Amos 2011; Shaw & Newholm, 2002) as well as more recently, alternative market arrangements (Gollnhofer & Schouten, 2017; Chaudhury & Albinsson, 2015).

Earlier studies on food waste have identified consumer-citizens as change agents in the movement of freeganism (e.g. Edwards & Mercer, 2013; Gollnhofer, 2017a; Pentina & Amos, 2011) or food sharing initiatives (Gollnhofer, 2017b). The change agents can also aim at making the often invisible food waste more visible. Examples of this type of activism include highlighting food waste through popular culture (e.g. the movies ‘Just Eat It’ and ‘Wasted - the Story of Food Waste’) as well as campaigns and events promoted by influential food waste movement leaders (e.g. Tristram Stuart and the Feedback organisation).

**Consumer narratives of food waste reduction**

Inspired by the three roles, the authors constructed three fictional narratives illustrating the different roles in food waste reduction. We drew inspiration from the tradition of narrative research (Riessman, 1993; Polkinghorne, 1988) and in particular, narrative analysis (Polkinghorne, 1995) as well as ‘creative analytical processes (CAP) ethnography’ (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005: 962). This approach uses narrative knowing to produce stories that synthesise knowledge (Heikkinen, 2000). Here, our approach is in line with research writing that combines academic and fictional conventions. This kind of writing has been suggested as beneficial for consumer research to better take into account the ‘poetics’ of writing (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006). In this type of research, the ‘truth’ of the narratives is not a meaningful criteria to judge their quality. Instead, the ‘verisimilitude’, the ability of the narrative to capture the reader emotionally and experientially, is at stake (Heikkinen, 2000).

To construct the narratives, we first discussed and decided on the characters and the key elements of the narratives. In deciding the key elements, we utilised recent food waste studies that focus on consumer characteristics (Aschemann-Witzel et al., 2018) and practices (Mattila et al., 2018; Närvänien et al., 2016, 2018). Then, each author independently wrote one narrative. Finally, the authors discussed and
refined the narratives together. Hence, our method resembles a ‘collaborative method’ of writing (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005: 963). As each author used their subjective interpretations gathered from insights and materials generated during the research project, the narratives were socially constructed through language.

**Greg - making more sustainable purchasing decisions to avoid food waste**

Greg is a high-school history teacher in his fifties, and he has become recently widowed. He has two adult children. He lives in a small city, but has always spent summers in the countryside. Greg is an outdoor enthusiast and spends a lot of time fishing and hiking in the nature. After his wife’s recent passing, Greg has had to learn to cook and do the grocery shopping for himself. These household chores have previously been taken care of by his wife.

Recently, Greg noticed in the newspaper an article about the large amount of food waste that is created globally. In the article, the reporter had interviewed researchers who had measured the impact of this food waste on the climate and nature. Greg was shocked to learn about this and went online to look for more information on the issue. After becoming aware of the severity of the problem, he has decided to try to change his own behaviour in order to avoid food waste.

Greg buys a lot of ready-made meals, since he has not been accustomed to cooking. Therefore, he is pleased to note that he actually does not cause a lot of food waste at home. In general, Greg has always been quite a price-sensitive shopper - he has learnt the frugal lifestyle from his own parents. Hence, in order to reduce food waste, he has now begun to purchase discounted food items that have their expiry date approaching. Doing this makes him happy, since he is able to “kill two birds with one stone”: to save money and reduce food waste. He also chooses the single bananas and the vegetables that are perfectly good to eat even if they do not look perfect. He feels that by specifically selecting these products from the grocery store shelves, he is helping retailers address the food waste problem. A week ago, Greg’s grown-up children visited him and told him that there is a new mobile application available where you can purchase and pick-up restaurants’ surplus meals for a discount. Greg is very eager to try out this service, since it would also save him the trouble of cooking.

**Amy - practising food waste reduction in everyday life**

Amy is under 40 years old and lives in a leafy suburb on the outskirts of a big city. She is married and has three children and two dogs. She works as an accounting manager in a subunit of a big multinational forest corporation. Before meeting her husband and establishing a family, in her childhood, she lived in a countryside with her family, including two sisters and brothers. Her parents had a small farm where they grew wheat. In her leisure time, she maintains a food blog. She also participates in different kinds of activities organised by a local dog club.
Amy has always been interested in food. She has lots of good memories of preparing food with her mother for the rest of the family. Her mother was very thrifty and always reminded Amy that all food ingredients were to be fully used and not wasted. This included turning potato peels to crisps as well as utilising the leftovers of a half eaten grilled chicken in next day’s dinner soup and finally in a chicken stock. Also, she feels obliged to eat everything that is on her plate and reminds her children to do so as well.

The amount of food waste in Amy’s household is low, because she pays a lot of attention to the issue. Before going to the store, Amy plans the weekly menu carefully. When shopping, she often wonders why there has to be so much variety in grocery stores and why some fruits need to be available all-year-round. She uses a lot of creativity in cooking, inventing new recipes out of food that is going to expire, and sharing these recipes with the readers of her blog. Also, in assessing whether food is still edible or not, Amy uses her senses: she smells and tastes the food rather than just trusting the date labels. She habitually eats the food left on her childrens’ plates and gives scraps also to the family dogs who are happy to help her in the battle against food waste. Due to her busy lifestyle, sometimes food waste is, however, unavoidable.

Amy has become well known amongst her extended family for organising the sharing of food after family parties so that all the food is taken home rather than thrown away. She also sometimes takes food to her office co-workers. She has discussed the issue of food waste several times with her friends and acquaintances, giving them tips for using leftovers. Amy has participated in food waste related events and challenges in social media.

**Robin - critically communicating about pitfalls of current food system**

Robin is a 32-year old chief development officer in a clean-tech company. He lives with his journalist wife in a big city in a townhouse with a garden where they grow vegetables and keep hens. He refuses to eat factory farmed meat due to ethical and environmental reasons. Over the years, he has also become critical of the existing food system and the amount of food waste created by the system. He became aware of the problems already in his childhood from his parents working as researchers in environmental politics. However, the greatest awakening came when he was working in a grocery store to finance his environmental technology studies. There, he witnessed the piles of edible food being mindlessly thrown away.

More recently, he has established a start-up company with his wife and some of his closest friends. The startup would utilise food that otherwise would end up as waste, for example by brewing beer from wasted bread. He is willing to quit his current job as soon as the startup is up and running. Some of his friends are freegans, and occasionally he organises parties together with his friends that utilise mostly food saved from dumpsters. Even though he understands and supports
freeganism, he sees that more radical changes are required to change the current system.

In his free time, he is an active volunteer worker in an organisation that collects surplus food from supermarkets, cafeterias, and bakeries and directs them to those in need. He also produces humorous Youtube videos with his wife about sustainable lifestyle. These videos occasionally challenge their viewers to change their daily life towards more sustainable. Their videos have received millions of views on Youtube. Recently he received an invitation to give a public speech about his thoughts on alternative food system and food waste in a food waste-related festival together with one of his idols, the Danish food waste activist and movement leader Selina Juul. Having met Selina Juul earlier, he feels privileged to be speaking in the same event with her.

**Discussion and conclusion**

The purpose of this paper was to describe and analyse the roles of consumer-citizens in reducing food waste. Utilising previous research on consumer-citizens and sustainable consumption, we identified three different roles that were then illustrated in the food waste context through three researcher-constructed narratives. The stories of Greg, Amy, and Robin illustrate the different levels at which consumer-citizens may operate in society and markets in order to reduce food waste. Hence, the article offers an illustrative and applicable framework for researchers studying various aspects of sustainable consumption and consumer-citizenship.

Firstly, Greg’s story describes a traditional portrait of the consumer as a decision-maker: after becoming informed and aware of the environmental effects of food waste, he engaged in more sustainable purchasing and consumption decisions. However, his actions mainly take place at the individual or micro level and he operates within the current food system without questioning it.

Amy’s story, on the other hand, depicts a communal consumer-citizen who pays attention to the food waste issue more holistically as part of her everyday life: from planning purchases to shopping, cooking and storing. Furthermore, Amy’s slightly more reflexive attitude toward the food system as a whole has resulted in her participating in different social initiatives to reduce food waste at the meso-level of groups and communities. Amy’s story also reflects the impact of social norms and groups on food waste reduction - one feels more inclined to reduce food waste if their immediate social groups also do so (Van Geffen, Van Herpen & Van Trijp, 2017).

Finally, Robin’s story illustrates the consumer as a change agent: the food waste issue has become a matter of great concern for Robin who devotes many of his pursuits and interests, in both working life and free time, to fixing the issue. His efforts are thus directed at a system level change, manifesting the need to situate
consumer-citizens’ consumption practices in a broader frame where more sustainable practices should be facilitated by transformed infrastructural arrangements (Giesler & Veresiu, 2014; Jacobsen, 2017). Robin’s story also illustrates how social media can provide the means to spread influential messages that come from peers rather than traditional authorities (Närvänen et al., 2018). Robin operates as an agent for change, inspiring many actors instead of just consumer-citizens to participate. Hence, the responsibility for reducing food waste is no longer only on consumer-citizens but on a wider set of stakeholders (see Evans et al., 2017).

Many earlier studies on food waste (see Porpino, 2016) portray an image of a consumer indulging in opportunities created by the market, thus also being a ‘victim’ of the market (e.g. when food waste emerges due to excessive purchasing or blindly following best-before dates). In contrast, our paper draws further attention to the ‘citizen’ part of consumer-citizenship, seeing consumers as capable of driving change on multiple levels (see also Halkier & Holm, 2008). Wider change to more sustainable consumption requires consumer-citizenship to be manifested in everyday practices along educating and mobilizing others (Chaudhury & Albinsson, 2015), therefore highlighting the importance of communal consumer-citizens and active change agents.

The paper also has implications for policy-makers. While many campaigns and initiatives have been implemented in the recent years to inform and educate consumers about food waste (see e.g., Aschemann-Witzel et al., 2017; Principato, 2018), there is still a need for more efficient solutions to address the problem. Recent research has recommended putting more emphasis on the positive aspects of ethical consumption, i.e., empowering the ‘consumer’ more than the ‘citizen’ role (e.g., Frank, 2018; Närvänen et al., 2018). This means focussing less on blaming the consumer through a discourse of citizen’s obligations but rather empowering them through opportunities for sustainable consumption.

Our findings suggest that when trying to affect the food waste related behaviour of consumers, it is important to understand the level on which consumer-citizens are operating. Thus, our paper complements recent approaches of segmenting consumers based on their food (waste) behaviours and lifestyles (Aschemann-Witzel et al., 2018). Many of the past informational campaigns are directed at the consumer as decision-maker - somebody who may not even be aware of the extent of the problem. More initiatives could hence be directed at the communal consumer-citizen in the future, since many consumers are already aware of the food waste problem, but lack the skills or abilities to change their everyday practices (Van Geffen et al., 2017).

References


Aschemann-Witzel, Jessica, De Hooge, Ilona E., Rohm, Harald, Normann, Anne,


de Hooge, Ilona E., Oostindjer, Marije, Aschemann-Witzel, Jessica, Normann, Anne, Loose, Simone Mueller, & Almli, Valérie Lengard (2017) 'This apple is too ugly for me!: Consumer preferences for suboptimal food products in the supermarket and at home', Food quality and preference, 56(PART A): 80-92.


Author information

Docent, Ph.D. (Bus.Adm.), M.A. Elina Närvänäinen is University Lecturer of Marketing at the Faculty of Management, University of Tampere and the leader of the Wastebusters research project, focused on the reduction of food waste (2016-2019). elina.narvanen@uta.fi

Ph.D. (Bus.Adm.) Nina Mesiranta is currently Postdoctoral Researcher in the Wastebusters research project focusing on food waste reduction at the Faculty of Management, University of Tampere. nina.mesiranta@uta.fi

Ph.D. (Bus.Adm.) Malla Mattila works as University Instructor (Master’s Degree Programme in Leadership for Change) at the Faculty of Management, University of Tampere. malla.mattila@uta.fi
Prosuming news in an unbounded media landscape
A study of young adults

Anu Norrgrann, Annika Ravald, Emma Buss, Erica Hjerpe and Saga-Charlotte Storbacka

ABSTRACT
This paper explores acts of news prosumption in a landscape where traditional business models of media companies are challenged by new consumption patterns. It focuses on young adult consumers of the Internet generation, whose ways to relate to news media can be seen as symptomatic for the broader shift of news consumption from passively received, standardized news to increasingly individualised and socially shared content. This context illuminates nuances of prosumption and provides new theoretical and managerial insight into the activities that consumers engage in when consuming news. The paper draws on data from consumer diaries, followed up with in-depth interviews. A typology of six consumer profiles in news prosumption - metaphorically termed the bumblebee, the window peeker, the researcher, the sponge, the relayer and the megaphone - is presented, highlighting the variety in which consumers engage in personalized assembly, usage and spread of news content.

Introduction
Media consumption is currently undergoing major changes, fuelled by new, unbounded behavioural patterns related to increasing digitalization, implying blurred or even erased borders between producers and consumers of media content. Particularly the so called Internet generation’s (Sirén, Leino & Nissinen, 2018) or generation C, as in content (Hardey, 2011) media consumption is characterised by a multichannel presence of several social and other web-based media, which are used in increasingly individualized and socially interactive ways (Sirén et al, 2018; Hermida, 2010). Young adults thus constitute an interesting target group, both from a conceptual point of view, and for the purpose of managerially responding to changes in media consumption, which is characterized by a shift from commercial news products by professional news agencies to so called participatory (Bowman & Wills, 2003; Goode 2009) or citizen journalism (Gillmor, 2004).

In our study, we approach this changing media landscape and its emerging forms of news consumption though the conceptual lens of prosumption, i.e. seeing production and consumption processes as interrelated (see Toffler, 1980; Ritzer &
Jurgenson, 2010; Ritzer, 2014). We take the perspective of young adult consumers and explore how their news consumption goes beyond passively consuming acts into forms of prosumption. Based on pout findings, we propose a typology of six news prosumption profiles, labelled the Bumblebee, the Window Peek, the Researcher, the Sponge, the Relayer, and the Megaphone. These profiles illuminate how and why consumers engage in personalized assembly, usage and spread of news content. The study contributes to the understanding of the concept of prosumption at a more fine-grained level and demonstrates the variation of prosumption behaviours from active to passive.

The reframed role of consumers in news processes

Boosted by the effects of the technological developments in the last decades, the interest in consumers’ changed roles, productive activities, participation and value (co)creation has received considerable interest among consumer and service scholars (Lusch & Vargo, 2006; Cova & Dalli, 2009; Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010; Arnould et al 2006; Pongsakornrungsilp & Schroeder 2011; Moeller, Ciuchita, Mahr, Odekerken-Schröder & Fassnacht, 2013, and Dong & Sivakumar, 2017). To provide a conceptual background for understanding how news consumption is in change, we will in this section discuss how prior literature has addressed the notion of active and participating consumers, thus making the acts of consumption extend to prosumption.

Consumer work can be seen as taking over productive tasks e.g. in the form of self-service, and participating in innovation or customization (Dujarier, 2016). This implies labour that consumers carry out for the company or for the benefit of its brand in a voluntary and often unpaid manner. Dong & Sivakumar (2017) suggest a categorization into mandatory, replaceable, and voluntary forms of customer participation. In the news context, the interesting dimensions are particularly the last two, i.e. how customers through their voluntary activities can enhance firm-provided services, and/or replace firm-provided parts of the service process or even whole services with their own and their peers’ work; something that prior literature has referred to as self-production (Troye & Supphellen, 2012; Thi Xuan Mai & Otta Olsen (2016).

From a sociological perspective, Dujarier (2016) distinguishes between three types of consumer work: directed self-production, collaborative co-production, and organizational work. The first category refers to self-service activities where the supplier directs production and provides consumers with tools and support for it. Beyond traditional forms of self-service, such work may according to Dujarier (2016) involve enabling and prescribing personalization or dissemination, as well as co-operation with peers using one’s social links. In the news context, this manifests itself in the range of social media sharing buttons that news texts are accompanied by, which encourage consumers to continue the work initiated by firm-provided content. The second category, collaborative coproduction, aligns with the notion of unpaid work, which generates profit for the provider e.g. in the form of user-
generated content. In the news context, this may take the form of e.g. eyewitness footage of events, or the interactive commentaries and discussions among consumers that constitute a supplement to editorial content. What Dujarier (2016) labels as organizational work, implies consumer activity in choosing the right products, services, and suppliers (Schwartz, 2004), or in the case of news, the best and most trustworthy sources of information. In a context where consumption is shifting from ready-packaged newspaper subscriptions and routinely followed broadcasts, this type of compiling activity becomes increasingly interesting to understand, as it like Dujarier (2016) puts it, reverses the traditional business transaction as consumers try to match their requests with the offers available, be they freely available, or services that the customer pays for.

While the emergence and spread of social media has raised the relevance of consumer participation to a completely new level, the theoretical roots of the notions of consumer work, participation and prosumption stretch further beyond these technological developments (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010). Drawing on Toffler (1980) who discussed the societal shift away from separated processes of production and consumption characteristic of the industrial era, Ritzer (2014, p. 132) posits that “we have always been prosumers”, only in different forms today compared to the e.g. pre-industrial era. He even claims that pure production or pure consumption do not even exist without some of the other; that these processes always interpenetrate and thus, he proposes understanding them along a prosumption continuum, ranging from prosumption-as-production to prosumption-as-consumption. (Ibid, p. 10-12).

Indeed, while the present technologies and social media offer rich possibilities for production processes, there is also evidence that not all consumers automatically utilize the possibility to take on the active consumer roles the technologies enable (Heinonen, 2011). Rather, research into user-generated content has suggested a dichotomy of active posters versus passive lurkers (Schlosser, 2005), and identified different uses and motivations for different purposes in participation and content generation (Shao, 2008; Pongsakornrungsilp & Schroeder, 2010; Heinonen, 2011).

The activity of news sharing in social media (e.g. through reposting or retweeting) is a particularly interesting facet of productive activities. Kümpel, Karnowski & Keyling (2015) offer a useful literature review of news sharing studies. In their “diagnosis” of current state of this research and suggestions for future focal areas, they highlight among other things the contradictory perceptions of sharing processes in being both democratized and enabling, and self-serving and status driven, thus raising an interesting paradox to be further studied. Moreover, they conclude that sharing behaviours cannot be explained only by personal traits and the content, but that the personal social networks at large should be more considered. Production activities in the form of sharing, should thus be examined against a broader consumer context, beyond individual acts. Moreover, Kümpel et al. (2015) recognise a lack of cultural context understanding in existing research, calling for more situation sensitive approaches.
The intertwining of the production and consumption processes and blurred roles between consumers, producers and distributors specifically in the news context has also been acknowledged and addressed within communications and journalism research, although under different terminological labels. The journalistic practices of ordinary people in creating, collecting, commenting on, and disseminating news has been termed citizen journalism (Gillmor, 2004), ambient journalism (Hermida, 2010) or participatory journalism (Bowman & Wills, 2003). These highlight horizontal participation in peer-to-peer interactions in interactive media ecosystems (Goode, 2009; Hermida, 2010). Dickens, Coulndry & Fotopoulou (2015) also identify consumer roles beyond mere collection and dissemination of content produced by traditional news agencies.

Consumers acting as “community reporters” imply a structural shift of producer roles within news processes. Such news consumers have according to Dickens et al (2015) an ethos of production that is grounded in critical consumption of news and an evolving practice of skill-sharing and mutual recognition, which resonates with what has also been found within studies of brand communities and consumer empowerment within them (e.g. Pongsakornrungsilp & Schroeder, 2011). Bruns (2008; 2016) addresses this type of more quasi-professional production processes of consumers within a more communal, Web 2.0 context by suggesting produsage as an alternative term to prosumption, emphasising potential participants as (active) users rather than (passive) consumers of content and information. Bruns’s (2016) idea of produsage includes openness to collaboratively develop informational content, multi-headed hierarchy based on contribution-based status, a continuously ongoing development of content and form, and intellectual property based on creative commons.

We conclude that extant research on the changing role of consumers, including attempts to understand how also the act consumption could be reframed, is vast. The term prosumption sets to infuse the act of production with consumption, referring to that consumers by various behaviours engage in the production of a good or a service, often within an ongoing relationship with a service provider. Considering the unboundedness of media consumption among young adults, we propose that in the news media context, the term prosumption implies nuances of combined consumption and production that present conceptualizations perhaps not cover to the full. Tentatively, and for the purpose of this study, we refer to news prosumption as a process where the consumer with varying levels of activity embeds themselves and engages in the news scape. We focus on three aspects of this process; the compilation, use and sharing of news.

**Research approach**

Methodologically, this article applies an inductive research approach where qualitative data was gathered from thirteen informants. Due to the explorative character of this study we departed from a convenience sample of university undergraduates, however with a certain degree of purposefulness (Silvermann
2001, p. 104). We sought the views of young adults with presumably more social and interactive types of media behaviour, but without wishing to impose too strict á priori categorisations. While the informants were fairly homogeneous regarding age and educational level, they exhibited slightly differing backgrounds and interests.

The data that the informants provided is twofold. We call the first part photo-elicited touchpoint documentation. The informants employed media diaries (as a form of consumption diaries, see Bolger, Davis & Rafaeli, 2003; Conrath, Higgins & McClean 1983) to record during a period of three days what type of news they encountered, in which situations and from which sources. Moreover, they were instructed to reflect upon potential retrieving and sharing activities related to news in their online/offline communities. In addition to the written diary notes, the informants took screenshots of specific news posts capturing their attention. In this, documentation adhered to the principles of event-contingent diary designs (Bolger et al. 2003; Heinonen 2011) where informants report occurrences of specific events rather than fixed or random interval assessments. Being focused on news, the diaries also had the character of activity diaries (Vermaas & Van de Wijngaert, 2004) which focus on specified activities only.

This kind of data offers an account of the mundane, practical activities of consumers in how they encounter and share news enabled an ethnographically inspired, emic view. It describes the empirical world through the perspective of the informants and without the researchers imposing their own frameworks early on (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008, p. 138). This documentation thus enabled windows into the informants’ news-related behaviours as they unfolded, where the informants themselves made the analytic judgements of what constituted news and what was significant enough to be included.

In ethnographic research, initial observations from natural settings are often complemented with other data (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008, p. 141). In this study we used the diaries as a springboard for generating the second part of data – the in-depth interviews. That is, the interviews enabled us to use the glimpses of practice documented in the diaries and screenshots as points of reference when deepening our understanding of news prosumption. Accordingly, all interviews followed an individually adapted schema, even if the grounds were similar. The contents of the individual diary entries were discussed in order to gain a more elaborated perception of the context of these photo-elicited touchpoints regarding the informants’ news prosumption. In addition, general background questions relating for instance to media usage habits were also covered to further contextualise the individual informants’ accounts.

The in-depth interviews lasted 30-90 minutes and they were recorded and transcribed. The analytical process in terms of identifying behavioural patterns, similarities and categories in the informant accounts, began already during the interview phase and continued throughout the transcribing, reading, processing and writing stages. Our interpretations of how the informants both actively and/or
passively engaged in news prosumption - the six prosumption profiles - emerged as a result of diving into the consumer cases individually, but also by comparing the similarities and differences between them, following the analytical logic of a combined within-case and cross-case analysis (Eisenhardt, 1989). The script for the analysis was initially rather open-ended in line with our inductive research approach. As the theoretical framing of the study gradually became more precise, it enabled interpretation of the empirical accounts along more conceptually rooted dimensions.

**News prosumption profiles among young adults**

In this section we introduce six news prosumption profiles identified in the empirical data. As a starting point, we first briefly discuss what the informants consider to be news, i.e. what is the object of prosumption that informants describe.

In terms of **content**, the informants regarded news as information a person was not aware of from before. This included novelty and relevance for oneself, e.g. “...News for me is something that I didn’t know before.... I mean...it can be an old piece of news for someone else, but still new to me.”. The scope of relevance varied from the individual to local or global societal levels.

Another dimension of news concerns the **source** of the news – who provides it? As one of the informants concluded: “...the scope of news has become much broader...it is not only professional news agencies and their newspapers or broadcasts anymore...”. Our informants consider peer-provided to be as valid as professional journalism, which corresponds with the notions of the participatory and collective media landscape discussed in communications and journalism research (Goode, 2009; Dickens et al 2015; Hermida, 2010).

The third dimension of the news construct relates to **channels** for the distribution of news. Aligned with the above notion that professional journalists can no longer reserve the right to produce news, the channels where consumers search for news are no longer in the control of traditional professional news agencies – nor public, nor commercial. Many of the informants had clear strategies for where to search for different types of news, having a variety of news flows continuously running on their devices, e.g. applications, sites, social media etc. Interestingly, some informants contested the content in different channels to validate the trustworthiness and accuracy of interesting news topics. This resonates with Hermida’s (2010) description of citizens producing small pieces of content which collectively add up to what can be considered as journalism, and moreover, illustrates the network-level understanding of sharing behaviour, called for by Kümpel et al (2015).

The labels for the six news prosumption profiles are: the Bumblebee, the Window peeker, the Reseacher, the Sponge, the Relayer, and finally, the Megaphone. Each
profile is described below in terms of how the informant engages in the news prosumption process, ranging from passive to active prosumption behaviours. Some of the profiles are vibrant representations of the informants, whereas others are more ambiguous. One of the profiles, the Megaphone, was not represented among the informants themselves. Instead, the profiling of this type of prosumption behaviour is based on the informants’ accounts of other persons in their social communities.

The Bumblebee

“I have notifications, from a few different media sources, and sometimes my whole screen is filled up with them... I follow a lot of social media platforms, but I am not intentionally looking for news there... I like to keep myself updated so I can show off with my knowledge”

The Bumblebee (BB) collects news and shares these as it was its job to do so, just like a bumblebee collecting nectar and pollinating flowers. A BB scans for news and monitors news flows throughout the day in a variety of media channels and sources. The BB enjoys discussing news with friends and family, but seldom shares news on social media to the wider audience. This person is often surrounded by other bumblebees who also distribute news and are willing to debate the content. The BB profile searches for information that helps them stay at the edge of news discourse. They engage in spreading news for a self-related cause, i.e. as a part of building and strengthening their own identity: “...I want to share stuff that tells people around me who I am and what I am interested in....”.

The Window Peeker

“I seldom visit specific websites for information /.../ Instead, I search for news on Google or if I hear something interesting I would probably google it before turning to other news channels /.../I´m not a big sharer of news, I guess.”

The Window Peeker (WP) analyses what is going on in a certain situation by grazing around the internet, compiling news from a wide range of sources and channels to get a nuanced perspective. The WP often uses Google or even other search engines to search for appropriate news content. He/she doesn’t want to be served with news but prefers to exercise control over from what channels the news flow. Accordingly, signing up for news notifications doesn’t align with this consumer profile. Even though the WP is active in assembling their own news’ portfolio, they are rather passive when it comes to spreading and discussing news and tend to keep it within the closest circle of family and friends.

The Researcher

“I want to get an objective presentation of it [news], just because I think
people tend to exaggerate or see things from their own perspectives and therefore, I want to have a more nuanced and objective perspective."

The Researcher (RES) has a critical outlook on most types of information, so also news, and strives to find the objective truth. The RES has no specific routines for reading news, other than turning to professional news agencies when some news topic attracts attention and calls for more in-depth information. The RES profile experiences that people tend to add their own subjective twists on news and events they report or discuss. The RES wants facts and not opinions and carefully selects what news channels to adhere to. Professional news agencies are perceived as reliable sources of trustworthy information.

The Sponge

“I do not want to spend too much effort keeping myself informed... If something big, big, big goes on – I’ll figure it out eventually./.../ I think I’m around a lot of people where I just listen. I just sit there and absorb”

The Sponge (S) gathers news rather unconsciously, "absorbing” relevant information, but without necessarily sharing or following up, unless it awakes special attention and interest. A sponge collects news and information through word-of-mouth and news flows, without actively looking for it and chooses carefully where to put his/her energy and input. The S usually waits for news to show up and feels no need to be up to date with everything. The sponge is also very passive when it comes to sharing news.

The Relayer

“I would never sit down and watch a news report. Instead, I collect my daily share of news through social media channels, Facebook, Twitter etc. I really do like to get the news 24/7. I am a person that want to know NOW and to know FIRST. I want to be the one that tells your buddy.”

A Relayer (REL) builds information bridges between the sources of news and their audiences. He/she picks up news posts and then passes them on to the community. The REL tends to be social and talkative, and shares information in face-to-face conversations as well as on social media. The REL follows several news flows and clicks posts that appear interesting. As this presumption profile wants to be on the edge, and up-to-date with the latest news feeds, news is consumed throughout the day. The REL discusses what he/she heard with friends and sometimes shares opinions but does not necessarily share on a broader scale. This profile participates in the community by liking posts with the purpose of extending the social network. Therefore, the Relayer prefers news channels where news is easily accessible, and where the highlights of a news event are clear and easy to share.
The Megaphone

“Those who share a lot are often people who have a lot of opinions and like to talk and discuss also face-to-face. They get easily stamped with their opinions because they tend to share one type of news and one type of opinion.”

The Megaphone (MP) profile has a different status, as it is not represented by any of the informants themselves but identified as “otherness”. According to the informants, a MP purposefully searches for information with the intention to share it loudly, ensuring that everyone who can hear, listens. The MP thus want to reach also the wider audience, not only people in the near surroundings, by sharing or posting information and opinions in face-to-face conversations as well as in social media channels. The MPs tend to have strong personal opinions that they want to bring forward. In this endeavour, they actively search for information from a broad spectrum of channels and sources, to get a big, but still detailed picture. According to the informants, a MP can however also easily be trapped in a silo, having a narrow outlook on things on the news agenda due to algorithms that provide them a biased information base.

A framework for news prosumption

The profiles depicted above differ from one another to the extent the consumer assembles news updates through more routinized and passive behaviours, versus more actively seeking facets of information on-demand, corresponding to assembling (Canniford & Bajde, 2016) or produsing (Bruns, 2008) news from the resources available. The profiles also exhibit differences in the extent and type of sharing behaviours related to the obtained news, ranging from the diligently monitoring and spreading bumblebees, the sociable and fast relayers, and the highly opinionated megaphones, to the less interactive window peekers and sponges.

We stress that the profiles are not mutually exclusive. Rather, a consumer slides between active and passive prosumption profiles depending on the level of involvement for a news topic as illustrated by the diagonal lines in Figure 1 below. The act of prosumption thus manifests in behaviours corresponding to different profiles. While Relayers and Megaphones are in themselves more active in assembling and sharing a broad array of news, the Researchers and Window Peekers engage in news sharing behaviours only when the personal relevance of a topic makes them reach the tipping point where a passive profile turns into an active one (compare also Ritzer (2014) prosumption continuum).

In this study, we have used the notion of prosumption in the meaning how the consumer a) compiles an individual board of news (production/assembly), b) reads news content (consumption/usage) and if considered relevant and interesting, shares it in the social network (distribution/spread). Correspondingly, the six prosumption profiles can be plotted in a map according to the fine-grained
dimensions of prosumption depicted in Figure 1.

![Graph showing prosumption profiles](image)

**Figure 1. News prosumer profiles – a conceptualization**

The dense illustrations from the empirical data, and the profiles and their respective descriptions provide a fine grained and micro level understanding of how prosumption of news unfolds. The proposed framework further conceptualises how and why young adults engage in news prosumption behaviours.

However, we suggest that extending this methodology to a more heterogeneous data set would add more depth and nuances to the description of the profiles and open the possibility to finding additional ones. A particularly interesting area of further research would be to delve more deeply into the most extreme of the roles, the megaphone, which emerges in our data set only through “otherness” rather than through personal accounts.

An interesting avenue for further research is also related to the challenge to better understand the distributed character of news journalism (Hermida, 2010) also in the more subtle prosumer roles. An assemblage perspective based on a flat ontology (Canniford & Bajde, 2016) could for instance be applicable in addressing what constitutes news in a world where – as our findings hint – consumers’ daily routines contain less and less specific “windows” for purposefully receiving news, but where news is hovering around the consumers constantly in their online and offline worlds. Such a more network level perspective would also answer the call for a better understanding of social media sharing behaviours proposed by Kümpel et al (2015).
Managerial implications for news service providers

The existing media landscape has, due to the ongoing digitalization, resulted in new types of networks, communities, blurred roles and new efficient tools for disseminating information. In this fast changing, uncertain and information-heavy media context it is crucial to quickly adapt to new technologies and stay trustworthy for the customers. One vital part of building successful business models is to understand the consumer behaviour in the new media context and capturing that behaviour was the goal with our research. Being aware of the existence different consumer roles in the current media context can help media distributors to understand and get better insights into the younger generation’s consumer behaviour related to news. As our findings indicate, involvement is very important when it comes to the degree of activity in the continuum of prosumption. News that are perceived as interesting and relevant trigger online engagement. The big challenge that news distributors are facing is therefore to target all readers with interesting and relevant news in a fragmented market. If, and when, a news distributor manages to do this, it is co-creating value with the customer and the customer is then more likely to reuse this news distributor’s offered product or service.

None of the informants in this study was loyal just one news flow or channel, but rather, information was collected from different sources such as search engines, shared posts or conversations. What is common for these three sources is that none of them has a price. For a news distributor this implies major marketing challenges in terms of weak customer loyalty and the (un)preparedness to pay. Therefore, it is important to solve the equation of how to justify the value of the provided news service, resulting in consumers using and paying for it. In our study we saw that the prosumption profiles are coupled with different behaviours. Ideally, the innovative news distributor invests in capabilities and analytical models that leverage consumer intelligence for sustainable equilibrium, or preferably, growth. At the same time as young adults are hard to attract, their traces over the media landscape constitute a rich source for insight. By “listening” to social media and online communities, users with promising prosumption profiles can be identified, targeted and engaged in the co-creation of platforms where the act of news prosumption can prosper, not opting out professional journalist services.

References


Author information

Anu Norrgrann, PhD (econ) works as Assistant Professor at Hanken School of Economics, Department of Marketing in Vaasa. anu.norrgrann@hanken.fi

Annika Raval, PhD (econ) & adjunct professor, works as Associate Professor at Hanken School of Economics, Department of Marketing in Vaasa. annika.raval@hanken.fi

Emma Buss, B.Sc.(econ), is a Master’s student at Hanken School of Economics, Department of Marketing in Vaasa. emma.buss@student.hanken.fi

Erica Hjerpe, B.Sc.(econ) is a Master’s student at Hanken School of Economics, Department of Marketing in Vaasa. erica.hjerpe@student.hanken.fi

Saga-Charlotte Storbacka B.Sc.(econ) is a Master’s student at Hanken School of Economics, Department of Marketing in Vaasa.saga-charlotte.storbacka@student.hanken.fi
Conveying personality traits through product design for a symbolic product

Laure Jacquemier-Paquin, Gaelle Pantin-Sohier and Caroline Lancelot-Miltgen

ABSTRACT

Product design, through its sensory attributes, plays a major role in product perceptions and its consumers’ understanding. These attributes convey rich symbolic associations and contribute to shape a brand image and some personality traits. A natural flower is a singular product, expressive and particularly evocative through its design. The expressive and leaving nature of flowers make us consider them as brands, owing human-like traits. An experiment being run on two flowers’ species (tulips and roses) with 509 French participants shows how the shape of the flower (pointed or rounded petals) and the brightness of its color (pink for the lighter and burgundy for the darker color), influence the perceived flower’s character, with gender as a moderating variable. The findings confirm the power of design to shape consumers’ perceptions, especially for symbolic products such as flowers.

Introduction

A product carries symbolic meanings and brand image through its packaging and its attributes (Underwood, 2003). Modifying the characteristics of such product, for example through its color, shape or typography, triggers certain changes in consumers’ brand associations (Labrecque & Milne, 2012; Orth & Malkewitz, 2008; McCarthy & Mothersbaugh 2002; Underwood & Klein, 2002; Bioch, 2011). Practically, marketers support consumer’s need for self-expression by creating brand associations. Literature suggests that consumers need to express themselves through multiple dimensions (Aaker, 1997). When they use brands for self-expressive purposes, consumers relate to personality traits associated with a brand to enhance their own degree of personality (Fournier, 1998; Sirgy, 1982). Indeed the gender dimensions of personality as referred by Grohmann (2009), appear to be especially relevant to brands that have symbolic value for consumers, such as fragrance, in an attempt to reinforce their own personality.

There is however, a lack of empirical research on the antecedents of brand personality. Previous research has mostly focused on fast-moving consumer goods, exploring the relationship between visual components and brand personality
(Labrecque & Milne, 2012; Orth & Malkewitz, 2008). It has not yet focused on symbolic products for which color and shape could have themselves symbolic meanings. Therefore in this research, we are aiming at better understanding how consumers perceive visual cues such as color and shape for a symbolic product, namely a flower, according to their gender. Only natural and non-artificial flowers have been considered. First, a flower is a singular product that has rarely been studied in marketing (Yue & Bee, 2010), however it is known to convey intrinsically rich symbolic associations (Cosgrove & Daniels, 2002). These symbolic meanings are commonly in French literature, paintings, and in our daily life: a flower enables someone to express or share a feeling. For example, a rose is commonly known to symbolize love, bluebell shyness and a violet faithfulness. Second, this product category is poorly marketed: a flower’s design constitutes its principal and determining cue that characterizes and names it. Indeed, a flower and its species are identified by their visual inputs, their shapes and colors, which defines how consumers interpret them. Finally, individuals have a strong and almost personalized relationship with flowers because of their natural and living attributes. For all these reasons, flowers are as an anthropomorphic product.

In this paper, we therefore explore the symbolic meanings induced by the flower’s design, validating the merit of some culturally known associations. Specifically, this research examines how color (brightness), shape (angular vs round) and type of a flower can forge brand personality (Aaker, 1997) and how gender can temper some identified dominant traits. This type of inferences between visual data inputs and personality traits has not been studied for such a symbolic product. In the following section, we provide an overview of the related literature on product design, its symbolic meanings and present the suggested links between the design dimensions and the brand personality traits, moderated by gender. After the methodology and main findings of our experiment are been exposed. Finally, we conclude with some managerial and theoretical implications and suggestions for future research.

**Design perceptions and brand personality**

**Brand personality traits and symbolic meanings**

A brand’s personality is defined as “the set of human characteristics associated with the brand” (Aaker, 1997). Brand personality is a key tool able to distinguish specific aspects of the brand. It is measured by a scale (validated across a lot of cultures and contexts, Aaker et al., 2001) made up of 42 items describing 15 facets and five dimensions that are ‘Sincerity’, ‘Excitement’, ‘Competence’, ‘Sophistication’ and ‘Ruggedness’ (Aaker, 1997). However the formation of personality traits remains complex. These five dimensions make it possible to define a brand or a product differently. They depict symbolic meanings that characterize a product and make it unique and distinctive in comparison with competitive brands (Freeling & Forbes, 2005). This humanization makes the brand closer to consumers (Fournier, 1998). Most researches focus on the assessment, measurement or comparison of brand images as an input data, for the main purpose of positioning a product (Austin et
al., 2003, Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003; Geuens et al, 2009). However, little academic research have questioned how a brand image is created, specifically through its product design. What are the possible aspects of a product that would contribute to shape a brand image? How can a product design participate in the formation of meanings and symbolic associations?

A significant body of research attests to the key role played by product or package design in favorable consumer responses to a specific brand (Schnurr, 2017; Orth & Malkewitz, 2008; Bloch, 2011; Landwehr et al., 2012; Homburg et al., 2015). For example the product’s shape or color can explain preferences towards one specific brand (Kumar et al., 2015); they convey or create some functional benefits or influence brand categorization (Berkowitz, 1987; Kreuzbauer & Malter, 2005). However, the way the product design influences symbolic associations (Ravasi & Stigliani, 2012) and expresses symbolic meanings (such as associations of sophistication, femininity, elegance, youthfulness, sincerity) (Creusen & Schoormans, 2005; Van Rompay & Pruy, 2011; Brunner et al. 2016) still remains unexplained, even if modifying the characteristics of a product is known to induce changes to brand associations in consumer’s memories. So far few studies have attempted to study the relationships between the extrinsic cues of a product and its symbolic associations, such as brand personality (Czellar & Denis, 2002).

The main purpose of this paper is to bring together both well-known marketing domains and to propose a new approach by considering the brand personality as the direct result of a design manipulation, rather than an outcome as a whole, independently of its antecedents. The specific symbolic associations we want to focus on here are those related to the brand identity of flowers.

**Symbolic meanings of flowers**

The leaving nature of flowers is the main reason for focusing on the flowers’ brand identity and personality traits they express by their designs (Pantin-Sohier et al., 2012). Indeed, flowers belong to our daily lives; they are spoken to, treated like or protected like a human being. It is common to give to a flower the attributes of a person. In this sense, they are anthropomorphic i.e. a flower can be described according to traits that are usually used to describe a human character: healthy, true, modern, audacious, charming, elegant, or even strong. These traits form the basis for evaluating flowers. It is therefore legitimate to question the personality of a flower. Flowers could be considered as social stimuli and could be analyzed through a symbolic interactionism perspective (Solomon, 1983; Fournier, 1998). The strong attachment that individuals display towards flowers evidences a strong and balanced rapport with flowers, playing an active role in the interactive relation. Flowers bring to consumers comfort, friendship, support, emotions as much as individuals bring to the flowers by taking care of them or speaking to them. Because of the living nature and their anthropomorphic character, as well as through the rich record of associations they can evoke, we wish to study flowers as objects of consumption, through the personality traits of a brand (Aaker, 1997).
Even if flowers are not branded, their appearance can convey personality traits as fast-moving consumer goods do, and from there, it is possible to isolate the potential antecedents of their personality (that is its design without the biased effect of the brand). Our research aims to study the potential relationship between gender and personality traits associated to a product category (i.e. flowers in this case), with its perceived differentiation and personality dimensions.

**Product design and brand personality**

The design of a flower is clearly a determining attribute of choice and perceptions. According to Kreuzbauer & Malter (20005), aesthetically attractive products leads to positive brand evaluations. The first visible cue of a flower is its color, which can vary across its three-dimensional components (hue, brightness and saturation). Even though there seems to be little research concerning the floral area (Hula & Flegr, 2016), marketing researches have clearly highlighted how the form or the color of a product can influence consumers’ perceptions in different consumption contexts (Mehta & Zhu, 2009; Cunningham, 2017). Color can indeed be an effective means of creating and sustaining brand and corporate images in customers’ minds (Madden et al., 2000). Aslam (2006) has found that visual branding using sophisticated colors such as black or burgundy symbolizes elegance. Labrecque and Milne (2012) were the first researchers in marketing to establish solid foundations linking color perceptions, shape logo and brand personality. Their study illustrates the link between pink and sincerity, blue and competence, purple and sophistication. They have also demonstrated that the perceived excitement of a brand is positively impacted by red. Their manipulation of saturation underlines the negative effect of dark color on ruggedness. The same applies to flowers. The strength or the kind of love is nuanced by the color or brightness of a rose. For example, a pink rose for friendship or a red one for passion. When it comes to the meaning of flowers, it is common knowledge that tulips evoke more of a sincere love whereas roses more of a passionate one (Cellier & Starosta, 2000). Therefore, it is supposed that people are able to build meaningful personality traits using the brightness dimension of a flowers’ color, hypothesizing that the species and the color of a flower can convey specific personality traits. This exploratory research leads us to restrict the hypothesis to the only links already verified in previously marketing researches.

**H1.** The type of flowers influences brand personality profile as:

(a) A rose will be perceived as more sophisticated than a tulip

(b) A tulip will be perceived as more sincere than a rose.

**H2.** Color brightness influences brand personality profile as:

(a) Flowers’ species with lighter tones (pink) will be perceived as more sincere than products with darker ones (red)
(b) Flowers’ species with darker tones (red) will be perceived as more sophisticated than products with lighter ones (pink)

(c) Flowers’ species with darker tones (red) will be perceived as more excited than products with lighter ones (pink)

Shape can also be considered as a major determining factor in consumers’ choices and may constitute an advantage over competing brands (Bloch, 1995). Until now, studies have mainly been focusing on cognitive responses such as attention, categorization (Kreuzbauer & Malter, 2005) or prototypicality (Veryzer & Hutchinson, 1998). Shape however can also induce emotions and beliefs such as quality (Berkowitz, 1987). Hevner (1935) analyzed the affective significations of the lines of a drawing. His results showed that curves are more sentimental, nostalgic, graceful and serene whereas straight lines are more serious, energetic and robust. For typography, rounded logos can be perceived as more “harmonious” than angular logo (Zhang et al., 2006).

Finally, marketing research on product personality have suggested that products could be gendered (Grohmann, 2009) by its design such as its appearance (shape, proportion), its color and shade (tones or contrast) or even its texture (Van Tilburg et al., 2015). It has therefore been established that consumers use brands for self-expressive purposes (Fournier, 1998; Sirgy, 1982). Some figures can help to express or re-inforce femininity or masculinity and can target specific customer segments. Bruner et al. (2016) have demonstrated that symbolic product design triggers images such as « feminine ». These associations impact on brands judgement. Van den Berg-Weitsel and Van de Laar (2006) have shown that masculinity is associated with angularity, strength and power with sturdiness, crudeness, thickness and wide shapes. Van Tilburg and colleagues (2015) have established that rounded and clear shapes increase femininity impression. Littel and Orth (2013) examined how visual and haptic package design characteristics singularly and jointly affect consumers’ brand impressions. Some characteristics of color and shape can influence product gender. It seems that the lighter colors are perceived as more feminine (and therefore mostly preferred by women) whereas the darker ones as masculine (and therefore preferred by men) (Moss et al., 2006; Van Tilburg et al., 2015). Finally, Labrecque and Milne’s (2012) results related to the combined effect of color and shape of a logo on brand personality have encouraged us to apply this principle also to a flower and see how its shape can increase or alter brand personality for this specific product.

Based on the literature review discussed above, we present two more hypotheses for our study:

H3. Shape influence brand personality profile as:

(a) Flowers’ species with rounded petals will be perceived as more sophisticated than products with pointed petals.
(b) Flowers’ species with pointed petals will be perceived as sturdier than products with rounded petals.

(c) Flowers’ species with pointed petals will be perceived as more exciting than products with rounded petals.

H4. Brand personality profile is modified depending on gender as

(a) Women will perceived flowers’ species as more sophisticated than males

(b) Men will perceived flowers’ species as more exciting than women.

Following the approach of these past studies, the set of supposed links are summarized in Figure 1.

**Figure 1. Conceptual model**

**Methodology**

**Design and sample**

Does the specific design of a flower convey particular associations? How does the product design contribute to create personality traits? How gender interferes in these perceptions? In order to respond to these questions, an experimentation has been executed, aiming at measuring personality traits associated to color and petal shape for two variety of flowers. A quantitative study, with a self-administered questionnaire was designed to examine the direct relationship, as well as the combined effects of three design features - the color shading (dark vs light), the shape of a flower’s petals (pointy vs round) and the type of the flower itself (rose vs tulip) – to the brand personality dimensions, based on a full within-subjects design (2X2X2). It results in eight experimental conditions, varying only on the
criteria of color and shape (Figure 2). As it was difficult to use 8 natural flowers prototypes varying only in color and / or petal shape, we used a visual presentation of the flowers instead, draw up by two graphic designers on the basis of digitized photographs. Participants were randomly presented with one of the 8 figures.

A total of 509 completed on-line questionnaires were returned. The average time of administration was quite short (only 5 minutes 22 seconds on average). All questions were mandatory. The conditions of administration were favorable for completing the questionnaire correctly and totally and obtaining a clean database. The sample was overwhelmingly feminine (70.9% are women). Participants were aged between 15 and 66 years old, but 63% of them were aged between 18 and 24 years old. 53% of the sample was made up of students, 15% were employees and 15% managers. The sample was spread across people leaving in urban (36%), suburban (46%) and rural (18%) areas.

**Stimuli**

We introduced both roses and tulips to oppose two types of feelings and different brand personality's dominant traits already acknowledged in literature, respectively sophistication and sincerity. The pink color has been chosen first as it is common to both types of flowers i.e. within the product category (Labrecque & Milne, 2013) and second because pink is (along with the red) one of the preferred color in flowers (Yue & Behe, 2010). It was expected to find a link between pink and sincerity (Labrecque & Milne, 2012). The brightness was handled using pink for a lighter color and burgundy for a darker one. It was assumed that a darker color could induce more excitement and sophistication traits (Aslam, 2006).

With regards to the shape of the flower, it has been reinforced on computer by either rounding off the petals or, to the opposite, by sharp cutting the edges of the petals to give it a pointed shape. We formulated the hypothesis that an angular form would induce a stricter, more severe, harsher character whereas a rounder shape would evoke more a softer and gentle feeling.

**Scales and statistics treatments**

If flowers, like individuals, could be described with adjectives, personality traits could be adapted to capture perceptions related to flowers. In order to measure these symbolic associations, we have retained the Aaker’s (1997) scale that prevails in marketing literature, for its robustness and ability to produce its similar five factors in different markets and cultures (Aaker et al., 2001). Participants were presented with one of the eight flower pictures. Below the picture, they were instructed to think about the flower as a person and to define the personality traits that best defined it. Participants were asked to rate flower on Aaker’s (1997) 42-items brand personality scale, using a five-points Likert scale from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”.

---

52
We also collected demographic data related to the age, gender and the area of living (town, suburb or countryside). These control variables capture characteristics that could interfered the perceived personality traits.

The proposed model was tested using SPSS 24. An exploratory factor analysis was first completed, followed by a reliability analysis which main purpose was to validate the psychometrics qualities of the Aaker’s scale. Then, the primary statistical undertaking was to run a multivariate analysis of variance, introducing the five dimensions of brand personality as dependent variables and the variety, brightness and shape as co-variables. Demographic characteristics were also integrated as moderator effects. With regards to all these control variables, only gender appeared to influence perceptions. The findings are presented below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ROSES</th>
<th>TULIPS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sharp petal</td>
<td>Rounded petal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dark Color</td>
<td>![Image] 1</td>
<td>![Image] 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light color</td>
<td>![Image] 2</td>
<td>![Image] 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 2. Experimental stimuli manipulated**

**Results**

**Validation of Aaker’s scale structure**

The factorization run on the 42 items of brand personality gives a 5-dimensional structure identical to that of Aaker’s scale. Sincerity is defined using personality traits such as ‘truthful’, ‘sincere’, ‘honest’, ‘genuine’ but also as ‘friendly’. Sophistication is described by characteristics such as ‘womanly’, ‘glamorous’, ‘stylish’, as well as ‘sentimental’. Excitement is characterized with items like ‘trendy’, ‘up-to-date’, ‘imaginative’. Competence is referred to as ‘reliable’, or ‘robust’. Finally, the ruggedness is expressed by the western, ‘exterior’, and provincial character. At the end, 22 items were retained. The reliabilities are
acceptable for all dimensions ($\alpha$(Sincerity) = 0.85; $\alpha$(Sophistication) = 0.86; $\alpha$(Excitement) = 0.81; $\alpha$(competence) = 0.75) except for the ruggedness ($\alpha$(Ruggedness) = 0.61).

**Variations of perceptions**

We conducted an analysis of variance to test the influence of flower's treatments (shape and brightness) on flower's brand personality, using the scores for each personality dimension.

First, in agreement with commonly and culturally known associations, roses are effectively perceived as significantly more sophisticated than tulips ($F=11,208; 0,001$). Tulips are perceived as more sincere ($F=14,004; 0,000$). The hypothesis 1 (a and b) is therefore validated. So, as assumed, both flowers are within their catalogue. A tulip seems to exhibit more noticeably excitement ($F=11,061; 0,001$) and ruggedness ($F=26,394; 0,000$). They also appear to be perceived as more modern compared to roses. They are largely anchored as an 'outdoorsy' type of flower, from the 'countryside', unlike roses. It has also been validated, as already demonstrated by Labrecque and Milne (2012), without formulated first the hypothesis, that sophistication is in direct opposition to ruggedness. However, there has been no noticeable difference between the perceived competence of each one of these flowers.

Second, the color shading (light vs dark) only affects some of the personality traits (Sincerity: $F=10,697; 0,001$; Competence: $F=11,368; 0,001$). Lighter colors are considered as more sincere, whatever the flower. Consistently with Labrecque and Milne's (2012) results, we have validated the second hypothesis which is that pink can be linked to the dimension of sincerity (H2a). Without having expected it, it has also been identified that darker colors are associated with more of a robustness and solidity (competence) than lighter ones. It has also been apparent that dark flowers are more stimulating (H2c) i.e. modern and trendy (Excitement $F=4,365; 0,037$) than lighter colors. However, H2b which suggests that dark colors impacts on sophistication (Aslam, 2006), has not been verified. As the result, the hypothesis H2 has only been partially validated.

Thirdly, the shape of the petal influences perceived personality traits. Indeed, the sharpness of the pointy petals is associated with excitement ($F=4,308; 0,038$) and competence ($F=4,324; 0,038$) (H3 b and c). The flowers with angular forms are perceived as stronger, more robust, and more solid than flowers with rounded petals. The hypothesis 3 is partially validated as the sincerity, sophistication and ruggedness dimensions do not react to the experimental conditions.

Finally, there is no interaction effect between shape, brightness and variety on brand personality traits, except with regards to the combination Brightness x Shape on the competence dimension ($F=9,007; 0,003$). The lighter colors and rounded shapes appears significantly less competent than the darker colors with pointed petals.
Figure 3. Flower Brand Personality by conditions

**Sensitivity by gender**

Other ANOVAs were performed to compare the average scores on the 5 personality factors depending on gender. Despite a sample overwhelmingly feminine, feminine sensitivity offers a significantly different reading to men’s on 4 out of the 5 personality traits (Sincerity, Excitement, Competence – p < 0.05 and Sophistication p=0.056). Differences in brand personality profile by gender have been validated but the ultimate hypothesis H4 is not validated because the links verified are not those expected. Mancovas, with gender as a co-variable, evidence the gender moderation on the Variety-Sincerity link (F=12,378, 0.000), the Variety-Excitement link (F=5,990; 0.015) and the Brightness-Competence link (F=7,866; 0.005). The sincere character of tulips is mostly associated to the fact that most women view tulips as sincere. Contrariwise, the impact of the type of flower to the perception of excitement only holds true for men who tend to perceive tulips as more stimulating than roses. Unlike what was expected, the perceived competence of a flower associated with darker colors is reinforced in women (‘solid’, ‘robust’, ‘reliable’ and ‘confident’). Whereas men do not seem to make any distinction between darker and lighter colors in terms of the competence of a flower.

This result confirms the necessity to differentiate men from women’s perceptions of
flower personality because men and women tend to process information in a very different way (e.g. men tend to use more heuristic cues and women tend to process more detailed product information (Laroche et al., 2000).

**Conclusions**

This experimentation, setting of 509 French respondents, supplements previous research on the subject (Bloch, 1995, 2011; Kreuzbaeur & Malter, 2005; Van Rompay & Pruyn, 2011; Kauppinen Räisänen, 2014; Cunningham, 2017) and provides a better understanding of the way the design influences perceptions, for both dimensions, the product shape and color. More precisely, it has been possible to establish how symbolism of visual data can trigger symbolic associations, related to brand personality. Research on product design and personality traits in the marketing field has been limited so far (Labrecque & Milne, 2012; Orth & Malkewitz, 2008), however, our findings confirm the power of design to shape consumers’ product image. Flowers, different in type, shape and color, express diverse dominant personality traits. Sincerity, excitement and ruggedness apply to tulips, like sophistication applies to roses. Darker colors with a sharper form convey competence. Our findings go in the same direction and conform to those of
Labrecque and Milne (2012). New links between color and excitement were also established, which had not been demonstrated before by these authors. We also succeeded to position gender as an important moderator variable. Product design form itself can reveal important information to and about consumers’ feelings or personality traits (Solomon, 1983).

By establishing this new cause-effect pattern between design and brand personality, this research has been one of the few studies determining visual cues as antecedents to brand personality profile, rather than focusing on brand image as a whole, a referral point to compare or differentiate propositions values. Considering this type of inferences represents an innovative approach and offers, from both a theoretical and managerial point of view, determinant insights to convey and to valuate dominant traits. It provides marketing managers suggestions on how to create a unique personality profile of their product by certain aspects of its design.

Also from a methodological point of view, the anthropomorphic relationship has been evidenced for this product category, strongly charged of symbolic associations. This research therefore broadens the understanding of the creation of brand personality and how to trigger a brand personality change over time. This is particularly relevant to the real impact of a brand personality on significantly greater unique brand associations (Freling & Forbes, 2005) and on brand-related consumer responses (Grohmann, 2009).

Recommendations in terms of product positioning emphasizes on the key role of the design of flowers to express and support the value professionals intend to convey aligned to those commonly expressed by consumers. Working on the personality of flowers as a brand could reinforce the bond a consumer would express towards a flower, which in term, will comfort professionals having difficulties convincing consumers to buy some flowers. Modifying the color or the shape of the petals of a flower could therefore help marketing managers to pinpoint a targeted personality attribute, in an aim to become more competitive. By doing so, as previously done for many other product categories (such as toys, cosmetics, etc...), flowers will also be segmented by gender.

Cultural interpretations of flower meanings and color should be considered in future research in this area. It would also be interesting to explore the role of color and shape on shoppers’ perceptions by subculture as Chebat and Morrin (2007) did, in a retail context. Madden et al. (2000) show cross-cultural patterns of both similarity and dissimilarity in color preferences and color meaning associations. For Aslam (2006), a cross-cultural perspective of color research and application is imperative for developing global marketing strategies. Culture might indeed act as a moderator of the effect of color associations on product evaluation and adoption. It also remains to explore how human personality but also shopping motivations (e.g. shopping for oneself or for the others, utilitarian, hedonic or experiential motivation) could alter the impact of product design on personality traits and,
finally, on product choice. The choice of a kind of flower depends on the message you want to convey and on the reason you wish to buy it. Indeed, if you are intending to offer flowers for a funeral for example (utilitarian motive) and want to express your sincere condolences, you might choose a flower that conveys these personality traits such as a rose which is considered as a flower of remembrance. Flowers play a specific and symbolic role in this situation (Adamson & Holloway, 2013). Furthermore, a new experimentation can manipulate more contrasted and unexpected form and color stimuli to examine the acceptance of innovative products (e.g. with a prototypical distortion; Veryzer & Hutchinson, 1998) in the horticultural sector.

Other sensory data, such as texture or odors, may be considered to more accurately account for all the attributes in the formation of personality traits. Finally, two complementary scales could be used in order to diagnose and describe a given brand’s personality (using BPS, Aaker, 1997) and also quantifying the impact of that brand personality on related consumer perceptions (using BPA, Freling et al., 2011).

References


Author information

Laure Jacquemier-Paquin works as Associate Professor at Aix-Marseille University, CERGAM. Her research interests include consumer behavior, sensory marketing and work commitment. She can be contacted at laure.paquin@univ-amu.fr

Gaelle Pantin-Sohier works as Full Professor at Angers Université, GRANEM. Her research interests include: Consumer Behavior, Sensory Marketing, Design and Packaging. She can be contacted at gaelle.pantin-sohier@univ-angers.fr

Caroline Lancelot-Miltgen works as Professor in Marketing at Audencia Business School, France. Her research interests include: information privacy, technology, innovation and consumer behavior. She can be contacted at clancelot@audencia.com
Kansallisen tunnemaiseman rakentuminen: Pelon ja ilon rytmit verkkokeskusteluissa

Krista Lagus, Mika Pantzar ja Minna Ruckenstein

TIIVISTELMÄ

Tutkimuksellista taustaa


Kuluttajien taloudellista käyttäytymistä tarkastelevan taustatutkimuksen tärkein akateeminen vaikuttaja oli joukkojen psykologian erikoistunut Saksasta maanpakolaisena Yhdysvaltoihin muuttanut George Katona (1901-1981). Hänet valittiin Michiganin yliopiston professoriksi sekä psykologian että taloustieteen


**Verkkokeskustelun rytmianalyysi**

Sentimenttianalyysin lähtökohtia mukaillen tavoitteemme oli selvittää verkkokeskustelualajeiston avulla tunnepuheen ajallista rytmitystä. Tunnepuhe ja -sanasto muodostuvat yhdistelmänä sosiaalisesti hyväksyttyjä ja kollektiivisesti opittuja merkityksiä (esimerkiksi synonyymisanakirja), yksittäisiä vuorovaikutustilanteita joissa tunteita koetaan, ilmaistaan ja nimetään. Mahdollisesti mukaan tulee myös hormonaalisesti sisäisestä tunnepuhe, joka heijastuu kohdellisesti esimerkiksi stressihormonitason nousuna, ja voi olla opittua jo lapsuuden tunnepitoisissa vuorovaikutustilanteissa. Näin ajateltuna tunnepuheella on sekä fysiologinen että kulttuurinen kytkeyänsä.

Työmme tukena on ollut avoimen datan hanke, joka luo verkkokeskustelujen analyysille poikkeuksellisen vakaita tutkimukselliset puitteet. Helsingin yliopistossa toimiva Kuluttajatutkimuskeskus avasi yhteistyössä aineiston omistajan Allerin sekä FIN-CLARIN:n ja CSC:n kanssa Suomi24-verkkokeskustelualajeiston tutkimuskäyttöön. Suomen pitkäaikaisimpään keskustelufoorumiin Suomi24:ään kirjoitetaan päivittäin noin 15000 viestä yli 3000 erilaiselle aihealueelle, lukuista eri syistä ja lähtökohdista (Harju 2018). Runsaan 15 vuoden aikana viestejä on tallentunut noin 80 miljoonaa, josta tutkimisaineistona on tässä esiteltyjä

---

analyseysejä varten ollut käytettävissä noin 56 miljoonaa viestiä (mm. moderaattoreiden poistamat viestit puuttuvat aineistosta, ks. aineistokuvaus Lagus, Pantzar, Ruckenstein & Ylisiruva 2016).


Menetelmällisen työskentelymme päämääränä on ollut kehittää verkon tunnepuhetta ja tunteiden aaltoilua tunnistavia tutkimustapoja. Aineistoesimerkkien rytmianalyysin keskittyvy erityisesti pelkoon ja iloon liittyvien


Kuvaamme seuraavassa miten pelon ja ilon tunnekategorioihin liittyvät piirresanastot koostettiin sanakirjan ehdotamana synonymyjmoukkoa karsimalla ja laajentamalla. Sen jälkeen esitämme pelkoon ja ilon liittyvien sanojen frekvenssien mukaan laskettuja aikasarjoja. Aineistoanalyysin lopuksi pohdimme, missä määrin tunnepuhettta kuvastava sanafrekvenssitarkastelut edustaa tunteisiin ja niiden kokemiseen liittyviä merkityksiä sekä miten analyysiä voisi kehitettä, jotta ymmärätäisimme miten tunteet tai ideat tarttuvat keskustelijasta ja keskustelusta toiseen.

**Tunnepuheen tunnistaminen käsitelähtöisesti**

Verkkokeskustelun tunnepuheen laskennallisen tunnistamisen menetelmän voi ajatella koostuvan kolmesta toisistaan seuraavasta vaiheesta. Analyysin lähtökohtana ovat tutkijan tunnistamat kiinnostavat ja merkitykselliset


Valitsimme käsitetunnistimien rakentamiseen kaksi selkeästi toisiistaan eroavaa ja ikään kuin vastakkaista tunnetila, pelon ("Pelko-Huoli") ja ilon ("Ilo-Onni"). Ilon- Onni oli ilmeinen valinta positiivista tunnetilaa kuvaavaksi käsitetunnistimeksi. Pelon ja huolen lisäksi kielteisiä ja huolentäytyeisiä tunnetiloja ovat myös viha tai suru. Pelko ja huoli valittiin lähtökohtaksi, koska ajattelimme niiden muodostavan konteksteiltaan surua tai vihaa moni-ilmeisemmän ja siten rikkaamman analyysin kohteen. Sen ymmärtämisen mikä ihmisä huolestuttaa tai pelottaa voi edesauttaa yhteiskunnallisten ilmiöiden, kuten syrjäytymisen tai ääriäikiiden syntytekiijöiden hahmottamista. Huolestunut mielentila tai ilmapiiri saattaisi olla luonteenomaisemi riskinottoa kaihtavalle, supistuvalle ja varovaiselle toiminnalle, ei niinkään uutta luovalle, kasvua ja laajenemista edustavalle toiminnalle, olisaksirkkilökohtaisen elämän valinnoista tai laajemmasta yhteisöistä tai...
organisaatioista.

Lähestyimme tunteiden tunnistamista laadullisesti ja sanakirjaphõjaisesti, eli muodostamalla synonyymisanakirjan avulla kullekin valitulle tunteelle piirrejoukon. Piirrejoukkoon pyrittiin lisäämään sanoja, joiden perusmuodoilla tehty haku aineistosta tuottaisi mahdollisimman paljon ”puhtaita” esimerkkejä kyseisestä tunnetilasta ja samalla mahdollisimman vähän virheellisiä esimerkkejä. Alustava sanajoukko sovitettiin tutkimuksen kohteena olevaan puhekieliseen Suomi24-aineistoon karsimalla vääriä, harvinaisia tai epätarkkoja piirteitä, jotka olisivat tuottaneet sanahuusa runsaasti vääriä osumia.

Ensimmäisessä vaiheessa synonyymisanakirjasta www.synonyymit.fi katsottiin pelko-sanan synonyymien joukko:

aruus, hätä, huolestuneisuus, huoli, kammo, kauhistus, kauhu, kaulin, levottomuus, mielen ahdistus, murheenpito, pelästys, säikähdys, tuska, ahdistus, kauhu, hirmu, turvottomuus, temere, scared, aichmophobia, peor, peur, aquaphobia, frightening, crainite, furcht, uhkkauva

Sanalistan rosoisuudesta päätellen sanasto on tuotettu automaattisesti monikielisestä aineistosta, ja oli ilmeistä, ettei sanasto toisi käyttää sellaisenaan. Sanalistasta karsittiin vierskieliset sanat. Lisäksi poistettiin kaulin ilmeisenä virheenä, sekä sanayahdistelmä mielen ahdistus, koska ahdistus oli jo listattu. Näin saatitiin karsittu lista:

aruus, hätä, huolestuneisuus, huoli, kammo, kauhistus, kauhu, kaulin, levottomuus, mielen ahdistus, murheenpito, pelästys, säikähdys, tuska, ahdistus, kauhu, hirmu, turvottomuus, temere, scared, aichmophobia, peor, peur, aquaphobia, frightening, crainite, furcht, uhkkauva


Karsintojen jälkeen sanalistaa täydennettiin munu muassa lisäämällä sanojen verbimuotoja. Tunnetilan kokeminen on usein aktiivista tekemistä tai tapahtumista. Näin lista täydentyi sanoilla pelätä, huoletustaa, säikähtää, ahdistua, ahdistaa, pelottaa, kauhistua. Lisäsimme myös adjektiivimuotoja kuten turvaton sekä pelon äärimmäinen muoto paniikki. Uusien sanahdokkaiden yleisyys ja tarkkuus tarkistettiin Korp-haun avulla. Lopulta tuloksenha oli lista:

pelko, pelätä, pelottaa, pelästys, hätä, tuska, ahdistaa, ahdistus, ahdistua,
huolestua uhka, paniikki, kauhu, kauhistua, säikähtää, turvaton,
turvattomuus, levoton, levottomuus

Vastaavalla tavalla luotiin myös ”Ilo-Onni” sanasto:

ilo, iloinen, ihana, ihanuus, onni, onnellinen, hauska, hauskus, tyytyväinen,
tyytyväisyys, viihtyä, viihtyisä, huomori, riemu, autuas, autuus


**Tunnepuheen rytmit visualisoituina**


Sanaston osuus on pysynyt suurin piirtein samanlaisena viidentoista vuoden ajan (Kuva 1). Samaan aikaan Ilo-Onni sanaston suhteellinen osuus on dramaattisesti laskenut. Siltä tähän voi vain arvalla: Onko kyseessä keskustelijoiden vaihtuminen


Syyskuun Pelko-piikki ja samanaikainen Ilo-Onni-käyrän melko matala taso herättävät kysymäään onko muissa tutkimuksissa havaittu syyskuun olevan erityisen huolestuttavaa tai henkisesti vaativaa aikaa suomalaisessa arjessa.

Myös viikonpäivät ovat tunnerymteiltään erilaisia (Kuva 3). Sunnuntaisin kirjoitetaan eniten sekä Ilo-Onnesta että Pelko-Huolesta. Vähäisimmillään Ilo-Onni viestintä on torstaina ja vastaavasti Pelko-Huoli lauantaina. Torstain erityisyystä voi
spekuloida esimerkiksi aiemmassa rytmityötämisessä tehdystä havainnosta, että torstaina on pankkipäivä, jolloin maksetaan laskuja (Pantzar & Lammi 2017). Lauantai-illan tulojia voi suhteuttaa alkoholin käytön viikkorytmiiin. Onko esimerkiksi lauantai-illan erityinen ilopikki noin yhdeksän aikaan merkki nousuhumalasta, ja lauantaiyön huolipikki puolestaan laskuhumalasta?


Tavoittavatko sanastot tunnepuheen?


Kohti keskusteluketjujen tunnedynamiiikkaa

Verkkokeskustelut kertovat yhteiskunnallisten vuorovaikutussuhteiden moninaisista takaisinkytkennöistä ja intensiivisyystä viihteluista. Tunnepuhe syntyy yhdistelmänä lyhytt- ja pitkäkestoista dynamiiikkaa sisältävästä ilmiöstä niin yksilössä kuin keskusteluun osallistuvassa yhteisössä. Tunteet eivät siis ole vain yksilön ominaisuuksia vaan ne ilmenevät ja uusiintuvat sosiaalisessa todellisuudessa.

Edellä esitetyn analyysin keskittyminen aggregaattiaisteojen tunnekilpailuvoihin kertoo ensisijaisesti tutkimusaineiston ulkopuolelta, *eksogeenisesti* määrittyvistä rymteistä. Esimerkiksi vuosirytmien liittyy auringon lämmittävä vaikutus tai yhtäläilla palakkatyöitä määrittävät lomarytmit. Heinäkuussa tunnepuhe on


Lefebvre rytmianalyysi jäi kuitenkin puolitse, jos sen avulla hakee vain työelämää sääteltevien rytmien heijastumia verkkokeskusteluista. Jatkossa kiinnostavaa on tunnistaa laskennallisesti keskustelutuljien sisästä tunteiden rytmitystä ja vuorovaikutusverkostojen toimintaa. Tutkimus on tällä saralla vasta alkuvaiheessa ja tutkimuksellisia esikuvia on toistaiseksi vähän.

Verkon keskustelujen ja sosiaalisen median aineistojen analyysin näkökulmasta on kiinnostavaa, kuinka tunneilmakset seuraavat toisiaan keskustelun edetessä. Miten keskustelutuljuen aloituksen tunnepisältöennakoiko tai vahvistaa ketjussa myöhemmin esintyyviä tunnemaisuja? Tarttuvatko tunteet ketjun aloittajalta jatkokeskustelijoille? Vetääkö ketjun aloituspuheenvuoro keskusteluun mukaan keskustelijoita, jotka haluavat alleviivata, vahvistaa tai vastustaa tunnetiloja?
Tutkimisen arvoisia olisivat myös ketjun edetessä tapahtuvat tunnedynamian muutokset. Mitä keskusteluissa tapahtuu, kun pääosin huolipuheena alkanut keskusteluketju muuntuu kohti neutraalia tunnelmaisua tai positiivisempaa onnipuhetta? Mitä positiiviset tai toisaalta negatiiviset siirtymät kertoivat tunteiden tartumisesta tai talttumisesta?


**Tukiälyä laskennallisilla menetelmillä**

lähestymistapamme poikkeaa lähes kaikesta aiemmin tehdystä sentimenttianalyysistä.


Edistämämme lähestymistapa on menetelmällisesti vähemmän käytetty kuin puhdas aineistoläättöisyys, puhdas teoriapohjaisuus tai pelkkä laadullinen analyysi asiantuntijatietoon nojaten. Oman kokemuksemme perusteella vältämme erilaisten otteiden yhdistelyn tuottavan pidemmällä tähtäimellä sekä parempia menetelmiä että edustavampia tutkimustuloksia. Toisin kuin tekoälyn itsoperipuuden idealeja korostettaessa, tutkijaa ei pyritä ulkoistamaan tutkimuksen teon prosessista, vaan tavoitteena on löytää laadullisen tutkijan uusi rooli laajoihin aineistomassoihin ja niiden analyysien nojaavassa työssä. Aineistoanalyysimenetelmät muodostavat itsenäisen tekoälyn sijaan tukiälyn tutkijan ollessa aktiivinen koneen ohjaaja.

**Johtopäätöksiä**

Tutkimuskokeilumme osoittaa rytmianalyyyttisen otteen käyttökelpoisuuden laskennallisten menetelmien hyödyntämisessä ja kehittämisessä. Lisäksi artikkelin tavoitteena ollut osoittaa rytmianalyysin kytköksiä tunnetutkimukseen ja kulutustutkimukseen. Kulutuskulttuuri mukautuu tuotannon ja jakelun ajallisiin rytmeihin ja ohjailee niitä. Lefebvren rytmianalyysin tuotannollisiin rakenteisiin


lukeminenn voi riittää tunnetilan tarttumiseen.


Oman tutkimuksemme tavoitteena on kehittää verkkokeskusteluaineistojen analyysiä tavalla, joka suhtautuu kriittisesti hallinnan perinteeseen sekä kansalaisten ja kuluttajien yksisuuntaiseen seurantaan ja ylhäältä ohjailuun niin politiikassa kuin markkinoinnissakin. Rytmianalyysi antaa välineitä tutkimuksen hahmottamiseen ajan ja tilan rakentumisen näkökulmasta. Näin se voi myös osoittaa kuinka arjen rytmit ovat kynnyksissä erilaissai aika- ja hyvinvointivajeisiin. Rytmianalyysi voi käyttää sen täsmentämiseen minkälaisia tutkimuskäytäntöjä, prosesseja ja koulutusta tarvitaan, jotta digitaalisten analyysimenetelmien ja teknologioiden kehitys tukee yhteiskunnan suotuisaa uudistumista, eikä johda esimerkiksi entistä vahvempaan valvontayhteiskuntaan, jossa valta kerätä ja analysoida digitaalisia aineistoja kasaantuu yhä harvemmille.


Tunneaaltojen näkökulmasta tärkeää on, ettei tunteita pyritä vain löytämään ja valjastamaan eri tarkoituksiin vaan myös se, että tunnepuheen monitahoisuus, kielen rikkaus ja kielellisen vuorovaikutuksen alati muuntuvat muodot tunnistetaan. Sosiaalinen media tuottaa tietynlaista puhetta, jota ei ehkä ollut olemassa vielä parikymmentä vuotta sitten, ja vastaavasti tämä puhe edistää uudenlaisia teknisiä ja institutionaalisia vuorovaikutuksen muotoja, kuten aikaisemmin yksityisen arkipuheen muuntumista näkyväksi ja jaetuksi. Sosiaalinen media uudistaa prosessia, jolla tuotemme ajatteluja kollektiivista, jota kutsutaan ’yhteiskunnaksi’. Myös se mitä kutsutaan talousajattelussa kulutukseksi tai markkinoiksi on ikään kuin tullut aikaisempaa realiaikaisemmaksi, näkyvämmäksi, kosketeltavammaksi ja konkreettisemmaksi.

Lähteet


---

**Kirjoittajatiedot**

Krista Lagus työskentelee digitaalisten yhteiskuntatieteiden professorina Helsingin yliopiston Valtiotieteellisessä tiedekunnassa. Hän tutkii tapoja jolla suuren datan analytiikkaa voidaan soveltaa ihmisten ja vuorovaikutusyhteisöjen ymmärtämiseen.

Mika Pantzar on Kuluttajatutkimuksen professori erikoistumisalueenaan kuluttajakansalaisuus. Hän on julkaissut laajasti aihealueinaan mm. teknologiahistoria, rytmiyhteisyydet, datatalous, käyttäjätieteen ja evolutionaarinen taloustiede.

English abstract

Assembling a national emotional landscape: the rhythms of fear and joy in online discussions

Krista Lagus, Mika Pantzar and Minna Ruckenstein
Consumer Society Research Center, University of Helsinki

In the analysis of emotional rhythms, online discussions provide a unique window for consumption research. This study outlines briefly the historical background for sentiment analysis, then describes emotional discussion rhythms with the support of Finland24 online material and a purpose-developed sentiment analysis tools. The theoretical support is offered by Henri Lefebvre’s rhythm analysis, which tunes us to recognize the daily, weekly and yearly variation of our 56 million message material. We explore emotional utterances by means of vocabularies and visualisations, focusing on the quantitative prevalence of words related to fear and joy. The emotional rhythms tell of complex individual and social interactions, the patterns of which are roughly described by our emotional aggregates. We end our paper by considering how to develop and utilize research on emotional speech utterances in the study of consumption rhythms and arrhythmias.
‘There is no doubt that consumers continue to be active’: An Interview with Professor Frank Trentmann

Visa Heinonen

Introduction

Professor Frank Trentmann has studied at the University of Hamburg, London School of Economics and Harvard University where he received his PhD in 1999. He worked as an Assistant professor at Princeton University before he was nominated as Professor of History at Birkbeck College, University of London 2006. Professor Trentmann is a very multidisciplinary scholar, which one can easily observe by looking at the themes of his publications. During 2002–2007 Professor Trentmann was the director of the Cultures of Consumption research programme, where 68 experts from different fields of science from law, geography and management to fashion and history formed a research community and which was co-funded by the British research councils, ESRC and AHRC with £5 million. Trentmann has also been a research fellow and a visiting professor of many European and US Universities.

Trentmann’s list of publication is very extensive and includes books, 15 co-edited volumes, journal articles and chapters in edited publications. His studies deal with consumer culture (Brewer & Trentmann 2006), consumer identity (Trentmann 2006), citizens and consumption (Bevir & Trentmann 2007; Soper & Trentmann 2007), materiality and history (Nützenadel & Trentmann 2008), free trade and fair trade (Trentmann 2008) and consumption in everyday life (Shove, Trentmann & Wilk 2009). In the Oxford Handbook of the History of Consumption (Trentmann 2012) one finds chapters written by 35 leading experts of consumption. Trentmann’s latest book Empire of Things, which tells the story of consumption from the 16th century to the present, (Trentmann 2016) was widely praised by peer-reviewers and in the public press. It has been chosen four times book of the year and is also appearing in German, Italian, Chinese and Russian language.

Professor Frank Trentmann was called to the University of Helsinki to be a part-time Professor of the History of Morality and Consumption and started in the beginning of 2018.
An Interview with Professor Frank Trentmann

- VH: You studied history at the University of Hamburg and University of London and then at the University of Harvard, where your doctoral dissertation about the erosion of free trade in Britain around the turn of the 19th and 20th century was examined in 1999. How did you become interested in consumption and consumer societies? Why is it important to study consumption?

- FT: It was not my original plan to study consumption. As I was working on free trade and the popularity of free trade in Britain in the years around 1900 I had to somehow explain, how it was that a policy which is now seen mainly as a policy of bankers and corporate interests just over hundred years ago had a mass popular following. What did people see in free trade that made it almost a religion? As I was going through the sources in the archives, I also suddenly noticed that the term ‘consumer’ started to come up. So, both workers and early women’s movement but also people in the Treasury – the Finance Ministry – were suddenly appealing to this person ‘the consumer’ and were saying things: “The consumer is the public interest. We must defend the consumer”. Then as I was doing more research...
another term came up: The citizen-consumer.

I thought that was quite interesting after a while. I had not seen references to consumers in historical studies of politics. So, when did it start? Why did people talk of themselves as consumers, as a joint public interest group? And that then led me to ask questions about the origin of consumers in politics. I traced how the identity of the consumer became more prominent in modern history. And then there is a short step to asking: Is it just about people or shouldn’t we also try to have historical understanding of the kinds of consumption that became normal in the modern period. I moved from the citizen-consumer to what people consumed and why their consumption changed.

- VH: If you look back to your career as a researcher, what have been your main interests and central research themes? Could you, please, explain the transformation of the focus of your research.

- FT: So, I started fairly much concerned with the political discourses of the consumer. From there I asked myself, what were the actual battlegrounds, in which consumers became active themselves. Then I became interested in what we now call consumer movements. But in the 19th and early 20th century they weren’t national movements. They emerged in particular zones of conflict. I became for instance interested in battles over water and access to water, and that also became connected to questions of gender politics.

Today we tend to think of the early consumer advocates as housewives and women. That is of course important. They were the main shoppers at the time. Parallel there were also middle-class propertied men, who argued that as consumers... They were consumers, because they payed taxes. Thus, they should have entitlement to certain services like running water. So, that was my second interest. And from there I became interested in the combination between infrastructures – that’s what we call materiality – and what people do. Effectively, thinking of consumers not just as people who go to battle over meanings or interests but in fact whose lives and understandings are always connected to material processes. So, in the case of water this became a battleground partly, because cities started having entirely new infrastructures: piped water that now connected households. So, people were networked materially and that helped them also being networked politically.

- VH: Isn’t that a little bit strange idea that you must pay for water which used to be there for everybody?

- FT: Well, that was one of the debates in the 19th century. The question was: What is water? Is it a gift of God or is it a commodity with a price? The battleground was over that essential question. But then a second battle in this war over water was about the question, what are basic needs? What is basic? Is it two or three litres of water a day or is it hundred-fifty litres or as much as you want?
And off course that changed as people’s understanding changed of what is normal or should be normal. The minutes bathing and bath water became seen as a normal part of civilized life. The conflict between the water providers and water consumers was inevitable, because the water providers said: “Look, a generation ago people were fine with two litres. That’s basic.”

- VH: Yes, and it’s certainly an urban phenomenon. Because if you live in the countryside, you can go swimming in a lake.

- FT: In defence of the water companies...Their argument was: “Fine. If you don’t want to pay for water, go to the lake. But if you do want water to come into your house and be on tap 24 hours, then you need to understand that it just doesn’t happen naturally. It’s part of investment in pipes, pumping stations, filtering installations and so forth.” And that’s what you pay for. You pay for the service.

But it is a big question, which took me not just to the water but into many other commodities and services. Energy for example where you have early on similar debates: What is electricity? Is it a good? Is it a commodity or is it just there? Can you steal electricity? There were legal and political clashes over this question, can you be fined for taking electricity by hooking up a wire to your house? Is this illegal? Because what are you taking is not a loaf of bread. It is a current. Can this also be consumption? So, the interesting thing is: What is consumption? What is taken as given or moves into a market economy and has a price attached to it. That changes over time. So, for this story it is interesting to try to understand, why is it that something like water or energy can be different things in some different periods of time and different cultures.

- VH: Thank you. Since the 1980s, we have seen a strong rise of interest in multidisciplinary consumption studies. Sociologists, anthropologists, social psychologists, media researchers, historians, scholars representing cultural studies and marketing researchers have shown growing interest in consumption. What do you consider to be the most important methodological approaches in the multidisciplinary field? Do you identify new promising research methods in the area?

- FT: That’s a very good question. I’m sure that different disciplines would probably give slightly different answers. If we step back and look at the enormous explosion of studies of consumption since the late-1970s or early 1980s, many of them and certainly the influential ones can be grouped under the label ‘material culture’. But what that material culture is, has changed significantly. In the early years, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s, material culture meant for many people the meaning and representation of things. So, consumption studies were strongly connected to identity: The emergence of women’s politics. The recognition that shopping wasn’t just something frivolous but provided meaning, and that department stores offered representations of objects, places and atmospheres that people were enjoying. There the emphasis was that people use things to change
their own status and sense of being in everyday life.

But the things were always treated as if they were a medium for self-expression. So, the emphasis was very cultural. What we have seen in the last decade is much greater emphasis on the ‘material aspect’ of the material culture. A sense that it really does matter, what things are composed of. That mattered to people for instance that cotton has different properties than wool. You can do, because cotton is different: It can be printed in vibrant colours. It washes differently. It feels different on your skin. Those are not just representations. They are partly about the materiality of the stuff. So, the second movement of material culture – the emphasis on materiality – also meant that people payed attention to objects of consumption that weren’t particularly fancy. Often banal objects that we just took for granted.

I already mentioned water. You know, in the old days water was studied by urban historians, but they asked very different questions. People did not really include it, when talking about consumption or consumer culture. It was something very basic like fresh air. What we’ve seen recently is partly connected to a growing interest to sustainable consumption and worries about climate change... is that people have become much more attentive to the material resources that enable our everyday life. So, everything from water to coal, to gas and to ordinary activities like commuting and other mobility patterns. How houses are designed? Whether that favours or restricts forms of consumption? We have moved away from the very representational form and glossy nature of consumption to the material fabric of lived daily life.

- VH: Yes, thank you very much. Next I would like to ask you about the economists. They used to be interested in consumption, but it seems that general economists are not any more so interested as they used to be. Do you think that the rise of behavioural economics (Daniel Kahneman, Amos Tversky, Richard Thaler) is going to change this and in which way?

- FT: Well, I’m sure it would change it. The question is: Change it for whom? I think that behavioural economics is a step into the right direction. It certainly made economic analysis more complex, somewhat more empirical and also more appreciative of the variety of human action. The problem is that a lot of behavioural economics continues to treat behaviour as an individual category. So, people are put in a certain situation and then ‘Visa’, ‘Frank’ or ‘Mika’ behave in a certain way. To historians and social scientists that’s of course a little bit suspect, because people do not exist as individuals. They are parts of households, communities and nations and so forth. People’s lives both interact with these larger structures. But there are also people’s actions – probably a better word than behaviour – that carry with them the imprint of their society.

Some of the things that we do... Let’s say having breakfast. They are not a part of individual behaviour. They are social customs. These customs aren’t natural or
inevitable. They are different in different cultures and they come and they go. They change. Behavioural economics is right that in very particular situations people make decisions by different kinds of reasons – some of that is deliberative and some just stubborn and routine. In Societies what is seen as areas were individuals can make decisions is not actually individuals.

The problem with the behavioural economics model is: things are seen as individual. The policy remedies... the so-called nudging approach tends to focus on small interventions that will make individuals empty their loft or change their decision about the pension policy or so. That’s nice, but it is a limited repertoire. It ignores that there are also political and social forces or drivers that shape our everyday life. If you want to really make a difference in people’s daily lives, then you need to have much more comprehensive interventions that really try and change social customs and norms. You can’t just deal with individuals.

- VH: It sounds that the problem is that mostly behavioural economics’ ideas take for granted the model of psychology and especially the kind of psychology of the 1950s. Don’t many psychologists still study mostly individuals and skip the social side of human existence? Maybe they should listen more to sociologists and social scientists.

- FT: That is of course an interesting question, why in policy areas that is not the case. One very simple answer would be that behavioural economics is attractive, because it offers policy makers the appeal or illusion of intervention without serious political costs. The advice behavioural economists would give you is: if you want to deal with the problem of obesity, you can change the size of plates. And then individuals may put less food on their plate. That might be a nudging exercise. But sociologists would place obesity in the context of many other factors that impinge on how people eat: eating norms, ideals of beauty, mobility patterns etc. For a policy maker that’s frustrating, because they don’t get a simple and quick policy tool. Sociologists would probably come up with a program of interventions. Half of them would be seen as an intrusion in people’s lifestyles. So, nudging is easy politics.

- VH: And then there are sociologists or political scientists, who say that: let’s abolish capitalism. That’s the solution. Next I would like to discuss with you a little bit about the rising economic power of China. China is breaking all the conventional ‘rules’ of economic development. Can the materialized economic growth and increase of material consumption continue as it has done for almost 30 years already? Do you think that the Chinese can solve the problems caused by economic growth and increased material consumption on the one hand and the growth of social inequality on the other hand?

- FT: Firstly, I am not a sinologist, a China-expert. So, I see China and China’s development very much as a sympathetic critic from the outside. I’m conscious that some China-experts with whom I’ve talked and whose work I appreciate would
say: Well, this idea that China can’t possibly continue its own trajectory just shows a kind of Western provincialism or the assumption that everything will be like the West. I understand that. Nonetheless, I think that there are several serious challenges that China and the world is facing.

I think that the first is, whether growth is sustainable. We have already seen a decline in the growth rate in China in the last year or two. There is the question, whether the economy even now can possibly grow at six, eight or nine per cent in the future. That is quite fast. The problem is: If China grows at less than five per cent, that may not be enough growth to satisfy all the demand and the rise in prosperity and urbanization and so forth that has become accepted or under which it will become a pressure cook-up.

This leads me to the second point. And that’s about the role of consumers. So far, China has developed a very interesting compromise between private individual or social satisfaction in the material zone on the one hand and a willingness of those people to forgo citizen rights in the liberal tradition in the political sphere. So there has been a trade-off. And the trade-off has worked... One of my suggestions would be that it has been possible to do so, because many people in the new consumer class either personally remember the famine and the tremendous suffering of the Cultural Revolution or they know enough from their parents. They are quite happy or not happy but willing for the sake of stability to sacrifice their individual citizen rights. If that is the case, then the stability is very shaky in the long term. Because we are now in the 2018 and the further we move away from the memory of the famine and the Cultural Revolution the less powerful the hold of that fear of crisis will be. I would suspect that in the next ten or twenty year there will in fact be more vocal consumers and people who are prepared to challenge the monopoly of the party. There will be people who will mobilize over scarce resources, inequality or any other issue. There will be politicization of consumption, and it will be more difficult for the party state to control that.

The third is the ecological question. China has been very interesting, because the absence of democracy has enabled the state to force through innovation and sustainable technologies at the speed and comprehensiveness that are just impossible in a liberal democracy. For instance, in energy it is a very interesting contrast between China and India. In a lot of rural China and India households were cooking with heavy smoking cook stoves often charcoal with very poor of no ventilation: I think the second biggest killer in terms of public health in the world. Both countries have tried to introduce clean cook stoves, cleaner technologies and cleaner fuels. The contrast between the two is absolutely stunning. In the case of India NGOs and government initiatives have tried to get rid of these dirty and polluting cook stoves in the countryside for 30 or 40 years. Hundreds of thousands of well-intentioned NGO activists have been to India, and I don’t know how much money has been spent. However, the success has been very, very limited compared to China. In China the state officials at the local level went to people’s homes and they just ripped out the old cook stoves, whether people liked it or not. They were
given clean cook stoves. That’s how it was done.

As a more autocratic state you can really force change at a level that liberal democracies find much more difficult, because they are left then with nudging. One has to say that on the plus side. Thus, in short, I would be worried about the political stability. However, in terms of environment China has actually been pretty progressive.

- VH: I would like to add: What about the United States that still is an important actor in the world economy but as a nation consumes really a lot? What kind of role could Europe have in the strivings towards a more sustainable future?

- FT: Well, the United States has a serious dilemma, because you have both rising inequality except for a few people in and around San Francisco in digital communication and digital technologies and you don’t really have that much growth in sectors that generate a lot of employment. American companies like Google and so forth may be worth billions of dollars but that wealth is increasingly shared in unequal ways. So, in the United States you have a growing problem of potential underconsumption. The concentration of wealth among the rich effectively means less demand in aggregate terms. So, that’s a serious problem. I think that protectionism doesn’t help that but makes it worse. America will continue to move down the ranks of consumer society from where it used to be the vanguard of consumption at being a sort of second division almost.

Talking about Europe: Will Europe even manage to remain a united Europe? Brussels has been both good and bad for consumers and consumption. It has been very good along the regulatory end. A lot of regulation has assisted standards and public health. There is some also on the sustainable front. But, in the last 20 or 25 years consumption has become heavily grouped as a market phenomenon. Consumer policy has come to mean competition policy: Do people get competitive prices? Is there fair competition? That is important. People benefit of course, if they don’t have to pay ridiculous prices when using mobile phone in another European country. That’s good. No doubt about that.

But I think the problem for Europe is that while consumers have benefited at a huge amount, people don’t see Europe really as a champion of consumers. Cheaper prices and lower duties on goods are not connected to a bigger question of collective consumer interests. That’s a problem, because Europe has lost an important ally and friend in the political arena. People just see consumption as a market phenomenon. So, markets do this. There is very little discussion about could consumers as a group play a bigger role be it in ethical consumption questions and sustainable consumption questions. That delegation to the market has in fact weakened a potential political force.

- VH: One example that comes to my mind is smoking. Smoking policy of the European Union is a good example of successful control policy. We know about the
health problems that smoking causes. And now smoking is declining in all of the European countries.

Finally, I would like to discuss with you about, what could be done to guide consumers to enhance responsibility for sustainable future? Are consumers as actors and consumer movements powerful enough to solve the growing problems related to the climate change and environmental destructions? How could consumers as an interest group put pressure on business and legislators?

- FT: There are so many ways. There is no doubt that consumers continue to be active. So, you have fair trade groups, consumers who are campaigning for organic farming and veganism. All sorts of issues. There are consumers against child labour in foreign countries and slow fashion supporters. There is a lot going on and a lot of it is very good. People should be encouraged to fight for their interests. I think that the problem is that consumer politics has become quite fragmented. There are all these different issues, but they don’t join up into one powerful voice. They are kind of ‘one issue movements’. That means unfortunately that consumer interests can be easily marginalized by better organized economic or political actors including corporations.

If you are a big company and if there is a boycott over some particular issue like pollution of the countryside because of some spillage or so. That is bad. Most companies are big and powerful, and they can write this out. It’s like a little thorn in your skin. You just accept that, you pull it out and then you go on. The fragmentation of consumption has meant that the ability for consumers to actually have a long-term impact on the environment or on everyday life is by definition limited. I think that one has to be pragmatic about that. And one has to remember that a lot of changes in consumption haven’t come about, because consumers were active in the streets but because states and governments have intervened in daily life.

If you think about, how we live today: Apartment blocks with central heating, water and leisure facilities et cetera. That has not fallen from the sky. It is not necessarily that Mr and Mrs Smith said: “We want all this. Give it to us.” These were interventions of public health groups, architects, social reformers, organized housewives, finance ministers, etc. They have changed the way how we consume at least as much as markets. I think that’s were the potential for change really is: Consumers should remind the official authorities and city authorities that they actually have shaped the way we consumed in the past. That means, they also have some responsibilities. Our lifestyles which are causing climate change aren’t just our individual problems: They are collective problems.

Cities, national governments and international organizations should step up to the plate and realize that they have been quite interventionist in the past. There is no reason, why they should think that they can’t intervene now. There is this great fear in especially liberal democracies that governments say: “Oh, to intervene... We
can’t do that because then we are trying to dictate, how people live.” They are afraid of being socialistic. You want to say: “Well, that is what governments have done in the past.” So, you should take a realistic approach to lifestyle change. That involves intervention by public authorities.

Kirjoittajatiedot

Visa Heinonen on kuluttajaekonomian professori. Helsingin yliopisto.
Lectio praecursoria: Evoluutiopsykologia kuluttajatutkijan työkalupakissa

Samuel Piha

Arvoisa kustos, arvoisa vastaväittäjä, arvoisat kuulijat!


Mutta haluan nyt olla tiedeyhteisön edessä rehellinen. Vessat, hyönteisruoka ja seksivälineet ovat ilman muuta kiehtovia, käytännöllisesti relevantteja ja älyllisestikin stimuloivia aiheita. Ne ovat varmasti tutkimukseni mieleenpainuva osuus, kiiltokuva – tutkimukseni se osa, joka sävyttää. Ne ovat tarttumapinta, josta on helppo kirjoittaa suurelle yleisölle, josta saa hyviä illalliskeskustelujen aiheita ja josta minulle voi keksiä vessamaisterin kaltaisia lempinimiä.

Minulle vessat, hyönteiset ja seksivälineet ovat kuitenkin myös paljon muuta. Ne ovat kaivoja – kaivoja, joista olen kauhonut vettä tieteellisen työni rakennusaineeksi. Ne ovat kaivoja, joihin laskeutumalla olen päässyt polskuttelemaan kuluttajatutkimuksen hämästyttävässä, joskus myös hieman
tukehduuttavassa, maailmassa. Mutta vasta kun olin tyhjentänyt nämä kaivot vedestä ja nähnyt pohjamudat, ajattelin löytäneeni innoituksen todellisen lähteen. Veden alta paljastui ravinneis maaperä, joka tulisi olemaan kasvualusta sille työlle, jonka tänään teille esitän.


Juoksin, lenkkein, pitkin suomalaisten kehtoa, Aurajoen ikiaikaista jokilaaksoa Halisten takamailla. 18-vuotias nuorukainen oli silloin hyvää vauhtia matkalla fyysisen kuntonsa huipulle. Tämä huipu on nyt 26-vuotiaana perheenisänä jo jäänyt taakseni, mutta täytyy muistaa, että 19-vuotiaana tekemäni Cooperin testin tulos on voimassa koko lopun ikäni.


En enää muista tarkkaan, mitä kirjan tekijä, markkinoinnin professori Henriikki Tikkanen – täysin tuntematon nimi minulle tuolloin – tuohon hieman puisevaan teokseensa oli painattanut. Muistan kuitenkin oman mieleni liihottaneen kaikenlaisiin pohdintoihin, jotka voineen tilivistää seuraaviin kysymyksiin:

Miten markkinoinnin vaikutusta voisi mitata – tarkasti? Voisiko sitä mitata kenties samalla eksaktiudella kuin nyt mitattaamme veriarvoja, lämpötilaa tai Cooperin testien tuloksia? Voisiko ihmisen käyttäytymistä tutkia luonnontieteellisellä erehtymättömyydyllä?

Näin tulin istuttaneeksi kauaskantoisen ajatuksen pähänni, mutta opiskelijaelämää, fyysisen kunnon kohottamisen ja parisuhteen solmimisen vevät muutamiksi vuosiksi huomioni elämän tärkeisiin asiioihin.

Kolme vuotta myöhemmin, heinäkuussa vuonna 2013, istuin puolisoni Elinan kanssa kauan suunnitellulla Norden Runt -reppureissulla junassa matkalla Uumajasta Kööpenhaminaan. Olin valinnut hyvää matkalukemista, Edward O.


Se oli superteoria nimeltä evoluutiopsykologia.


Paradigmapelin mukaan tutkija ei ole koskaan teoriansa renki. Hänen ei tarvitse sovittaa kaikkea ajatteluun teorian mukaiseksi. Sen sijaan teoriat ovat aina tutkijan renkejä. Edelleen, teorioita yhdistävät paradigmat ovat kuin pelejä, joita kuka tahansa voi pelata, jos vain tuntee kunkin pelin säännöt. Voin siis yhdessä
tutkimuksessani soveltaa positivistista evoluutiopsykologialta, toisessa relativistista kulutuskulttuuritutkimusta. Minä voin tehdä sen, ja se auttaa minua näkemään asiat kokonaisuksinsa.


Maalariin lailla tieteenkijän on tunnettava tutkimuskohteenä läpikotaisin. Hänen on osattava katsoa sitä jokaisesta suunnasta, jotta hän pystyisi muodostamaan siitä yhteen, rajattuun näkökulmaan perustuvan tutkimuksen. Mutta tämän rajatun näkökulman pitää myös kunnioittaa kaikkia muitakin näkökulmia, talu menen esittää tutkimuskohteenä auttamatta valheellisesti.

Tämä on myös väitöskirjani teoreettinen ja tieteenfilosofinen ydin. Tätä yhdintä voidaan kutsua instrumentalismiksi. Instrumentalismi on tieteenfilosofia, joka on hyvin läheellä ajatusta paradigmapelistä. Siinä teoriot ovat työkaluja, jotka sopivat ratkaisemaan erilaisia ongelmia. Vasaralla voivat nauhata, ruuvimeisseli sopii ruuvaamiseen, ja saha sopii sahaamiseen.


Olen tieteellisessä ajattelussani tullut pitkähkö matkan, kun olen mielessäni alentanut evoluutiopsykologian superteoriasta vain yhdessä työkaluksi tutkijan työkalupakissa. Mutta samalla tavalla kuin voimme keskittyä harjoittamaan itselämme yhden työkalun käyttämisen mestariksi, voimme tieteellisessä työssämme keskittyä harjaannuttamaan vain yhden teorian tuntemusta.

Nämä teen tässä evoluutiopsykologialta soveltavassa väitöskirjassani, jonka
tarkoituksena on esittää evoluutiopsykologia ihmisen käyttäytymistä selittävänä instrumentaalisenä työkaluna, jonka avulla jokainen ihminen voi parantaa itsetuntemusta ja tuntee itseään voimakkaamaksi. Vältöskirjassani en siis tarjoa evoluutiopsykologiaa vain tutkijoiden työkalupakkiin, vaan jokaisen ihmisen, jokaisen kuluttajan, työkalupakkiin.

Palataanpa kaivoihin. Minusta tuntuu siltä, että olen ryöstänyt ne vedestä tyhjiksi, olen päässyt pohjalle, olen tunkenut käteni pohjamutaan, olen kuopinut nämä pohjamutad, olen istuttanut maaperälle siemenen ja olen kasvattanut puun, joka alkaa ehkä pikkulihja muistuttaa väitöskirjaa kooltaan ja näältään. Mutta olenko löytänyt sitä läheddä, jota olen alusta asti etsinyt ja joskus jo luullut löytäneeni?


Arvoisa kustos, arvoisa vastaväittäjä, arvoisat kuulijat!

Käsillä alkaa olla hetki, jota olen kuin pikku poika odottanut siitä asti, kun mielessäni ensimmäistä kertaa viipylä ajatus väitöskirjan kirjoittamisesta. En muista tarkkaan, milloin se tapahtui, mutta kai samoihin aikoihin, kun juoksin Aurajokilaakson esihistoriallisissa maisemissa.

Käsillä on hetki, kun kaiken muodollisuuden saattelemana kutsun minua huomattavasti kokeneemman tieteentekijän laskeutumaan tyhjentämäni kaivoon – kaivoon, jossa seisoval miini vastaamaan hänen kysymyksinsä ja lopulta valmiina kuuntelemaan hänen arvovaltaisen arvionsa siitä, onko kasvattamani puu jo väitöskirja.

Käsillä on siis hetki, kun sanon etiketin mukaan: Pyydän Teitä, arvoisa professori Harri Luomala, Turun kauppakorkeakoulun määräämänä vastaväittäjänä esittämään ne muistutukset, joihin katsotte väitöskirjani antavan aihetta.

**Kirjoittajatiedot**

Kauppatieteiden tohtori Samuel Pihan markkinoinnin alaan kuuluva väitöskirja ”Evolutionary psychology for consumers: Awareness of ultimate explanations as a self-reflective tool for consumer empowerment” tarkastettiin perjantaina 26.10.2018 Turun yliopiston kauppakorkeakoulussa. E-mail: samuel.piha@utu.fi.