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# Proceedings of the Consumer Culture Theory Conference

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# Activationism: How Tobacco Marketers Hacked Global Youth Culture

**Robert V. Kozinets, Rossella Gambetti, Maribel Suarez, Timothy Dewhirst, Ulrike Gretzel & Caroline Renzulli**

*Abstract* — Expanding on long-term, in-depth research carried out in partnership with the non-profit organization, Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids (CTFK), we conducted a 10-country netnography concerning the use of branded events and social media to market tobacco brands to young people. Our study revealed how youth culture and activist discourse are subverted and transformed through an interlinked series of events, training sessions, sponsorships, branding moves, and recruitments. To distinguish this new form of marketing from activism, we term it “activationism.” Alongside offering an initial definition of the term, this paper broadly outlines some of its contours, theoretical connections, and implications.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Tobacco companies are legally restricted and morally sanctioned regarding the manner in which they are permitted to market their addictive and cancer-causing products to prospective customers—especially to individuals under the legal smoking age. Historically, governments have approached these tobacco control policies in a piecemeal fashion in which particular media of tobacco promotion are prohibited whereas advertising in other media or to other groups remain permissible. These regulatory environments facilitate shifts in promotional spending, whereby partial tobacco advertising bans do not generally result in reduced advertising output, but rather in media substitution and reinvestment (Saffer and Chaloupka 2000). For example, when cigarette advertising was no longer permissible in the broadcast media, as observed in many jurisdictions during the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s, the tobacco industry shifted their promotional spending towards sponsoring broadcast sports events as a means of compensating for lost

broadcast advertising exposure (Blum 1991; Cornwell 1997; Dewhirst 2004).

Thus, these restrictions, intended by governments to reduce smoking behaviors, also have the unintended side effect of drawing tobacco company marketers to innovative, cutting-edge marketing campaigns that allow them to circumvent and/or undermine regulatory interventions. This makes them a fascinating site for the study of the intersection of contemporary consumer culture, new media formations, and marketing techniques and technologies. The use of social media by tobacco company marketers offers an example of how tobacco companies craftily navigate a stringent regulatory environment in order to market tobacco using the latest marketing technology and technique to affect global consumer youth culture.

The cases of marketing and consumer culture infiltration presented in this paper provide intriguing glimpses into the shadowlands where online meets offline, market becomes culture, ethical boundaries blur, and brands merge with activism. These various crossovers have the potential not only to impact

our understanding of contemporary marketing practices but also our conceptualization of marketing systems, activism, and media resistance in a new age of influencers, social media, and brand ambassadorship.

## II. RESEARCH METHOD

The Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids (CTFK) is the leading advocacy organization working to reduce tobacco use in the United States and around the world. Globally, CTFK works in low- and middle-income countries where more than 80 percent of the world's smokers live. Beginning in 2015, CTFK conducted long-term in-depth research revealing that the world's four largest private tobacco companies (Philip Morris International, British American Tobacco, Imperial Brands, and Japan Tobacco International) are actively using social media marketing methods to recruit young people to market tobacco products to their peer networks.

Originally conducted over four months in late 2016, our research expanded the initial investigatory work conducted internally by employees of CTFK. Netnography, the adaptation of ethnographic research to the particularities of mobile and digital communications (Kozinets 2015) constituted the core of the project. We were members of a team that planned, developed, and executed a multi-site, multi-researcher, multi-language ten-country netnography where social media data collection expanded into participant-observation of branded events, online and face-to-face interviews, document analysis, and investigation into major industry players and facilitators. Alongside a number of research partners, and under central direction of our team leadership in California, the research examined social media posts in Russia, the Ukraine, Egypt, Brazil, Uruguay, Italy, Indonesia, the Philippines, Moldova, India, and some other parts of the Middle East, Latin America, and Eurasia.

Our focus in this case was holistic and cultural. Although we began with insiders' viewpoints and knowledge, the project's key objective was to develop a culturally-nuanced and system-level understanding of how tobacco companies around the world are using social media advertising ecosystems to attract and affirm their relationships with young consumers, and to promote cultural interrelationships between young people, their own culture, and branded combustible tobacco consumption. In so doing, we hope to reveal more general understandings about the current state of the global marketing systems in which this tobacco advertising via social media system is embedded. Although different agencies and individuals are involved, along with diffuse layers of responsibility as well as what seem to be deliberate separations of particular elements, we obtained enough complementary information from multiple companies, with enough similarities between them to draw reasonable conclusions about the sophisticated interrelation of these campaigns as well as their organization, intention, and structure. We frame these findings in the current paper as a form of activationism, a type of youth culture hacking in which activist overtones are deployed to

encourage brand recruitment by online and offline layers of paid and unpaid brand ambassadors.

## III. FINDINGS

### A. *The Dynamics of Tobacco's Marketing System*

Our netnographic study of the use of social media to market tobacco brands to young people discovered theoretically intriguing innovations that help contribute to our knowledge of contemporary marketing and consumer culture. We might also think of our investigation as a type of "market system dynamics" study (Giesler and Fischer 2017) in which contemporary tobacco markets are revealed as both discursive negotiations and shared practices of multiple stakeholders including marketing-activated consumers, consumer-activating marketers, government regulators, advertising and public relations agencies, social media platforms and companies, as well as activists and their cultural milieu. In particular, we discovered how both youth culture and activist discourse and practice are subverted and transformed through the market system dynamics of a complex and interlinked series of consumer-activating events, training sessions, sponsorships, branding moves, and recruitments. Although a fuller portrayal is beyond the scope of this paper, in this section we outline some of the general contours of this subversion (or culmination) of tobacco markets' systemic dynamics.

If we consider youth culture to be those aspects of popular culture embraced by young people both locally and globally, the "manifestation of a transnational, market-based ideology" (Kjeldgaard and Askegaard 2006, p. 232) that includes the identity-related functions of flowing cultural "youthscapes" (Lipsitz 2013), then tobacco companies are attempting to hack youth culture, subverting or repurposing elements of it in order to promote their brands and ideals. The way they perform this hacking operation is through an integrated local set of operations in which young people are given the freedom and choice to become subjects in various types of promotional activities. These include: (1) accepting recruitment through social media platforms to become tobacco brand ambassadors; (2) becoming social media promoters through unpaid and/or paid posts that use tobacco company hashtags, parties, event backdrops, and/or products; (3) visiting social media pages and registering for exciting local events; (4) attending local lifestyle-based tobacco-company themed events; and (5) attending or coordinating local brand ambassador training programs. With these integrated tobacco marketing campaign elements, in-person events, social media platform pages, and consumer social media posts intertwine to become local social media promotions for tobacco products and brands.

### B. *Activism and Activationism*

In our study, promotions for embattled tobacco brands like Philip Morris's Marlboro involved the creation of new brands at events and online. In Egypt, for example, Infinity Promotions held #RedMoveNow hashtag-branded events where attractive young (mainly female) ambassadors distributed Marlboro

cigarette packages, socialized with event attendees, handed out printed documents with the #RedMoveNow hashtag, and assisted and encouraged attendees to post messages to their social media accounts with the hashtag. In addition to that, many of the influencers used to attend events and promote #RedMoveNow were actual Egyptian celebrities like fashion bloggers, comedians, and radio DJs. Backdrops for social media photos and selfies were present throughout the events, and these backdrops emphasized not only the #RedMoveNow branding, but also colors, shapes, and design elements from the branded Marlboro cigarette package. In particular, the color and term red were important to the campaign. The color red is associated with the full flavor and higher tar yield version of the Marlboro cigarette, as well as with the Marlboro parent brand. Marketing planning documents from the company also reveal that the color red has the most appeal to youth markets worldwide. Thus, red color-centered campaigns such as the Egyptian #RedMoveNow campaign were not only marketing the Marlboro parent brand, but also the highest tar yield, and most carcinogenic, version of the product to youth.

Our central finding is that the companies and their campaigns marketed much more than high tar yield cigarette—they marketed a new type of commercially colonized cultural resistance. The term activation has recently become a buzzword in marketing vocabulary to signify planned marketing efforts aimed at eliciting consumers' emotional arousal. This arousal is channeled into an immediate call-to-action toward a specific brand (e.g., asking for information, sharing news with peers on the web, visiting a branded store, buying a branded product). In psychological consumer behavior studies (Kroeber-Riel 1979, p. 241), activation has been deemed an inner tension state providing the organism with energy, one that is responsible for the psychological and motor activity of the organism. In this regard, creating forms of brand communications stimuli that are able to arouse consumers' emotional states and encourage immediate action is activation—an important element of marketing plans that utilize the latest persuasion and nudging techniques to gain consumer engagement and market behavior. Activation need not occur on the simple stimulus-response level of psychological intervention. On a cultural level, activation occurs as sophisticated marketers leverage their symbolic proximity to consumers' cultural worlds in order to stoke their desires for various types of meaningful freedoms, such as freedom of expression. In line with this, social media brand strategies deploy an expressive visual rhetoric to reinforce the storytelling capacity of the brand, positioning it as a cultural entity embedded in the worlds of consumers, permeating their lifestyles, and influencing daily rituals, interactions, expression, and all manner of meanings.

Activism is the use of intentional actions to bring about social change, usually involving activity taken against or in conflict with prevailing social structures, organizations, policies or relations (Weaver 2018). Activism thus inevitably includes a type of resistance, and that resistance is to existing institutional forms—regardless of whether those forms are beneficial (or protective) or harmful. To distinguish this new form of marketing from both activism (intentional social acts of

resistance) and activation (marketing aimed at emotional arousal), we term it *activationism*. Activationism is a neologism that represents the blend between “consumer activism” and “brand activation.” With this term we seek to depict the emerging form of technologically-mediated consumer activism encouraged by the current brand activation campaigns of companies such as those we observed undertaken globally by the world's four largest private tobacco marketers. These campaigns make sophisticated use of social media influence, rhetoric, and symbolism to stimulate an immediate, massive and culturally-resonant call-to-action of consumers that benefits the brand.

Unlike traditional activism, activationism by its very nature tends to be mindless, immediate, ephemeral, non-ideological, automatic, and unreflective. It emerges as a manifestation of the contemporary, easily-distracted consumer tribes or brand publics (Arvidsson and Caliandro 2016). Expanding on Mukherjee and Banet-Weiser's (2012) conception of “commodity activism” that reflects on how current facets of commodity culture and consumerism are shaping social activism and change in the current internet age, activationism always occurs between consumers and brands. It only exists inside the networking ecosystem generated by the interactions between brands and consumers. In the case of our study, activationism is the result of a culture hacking strategy conducted by the four largest private global tobacco companies, which subtly plays within the blurred ethical contours of counter-market dynamics such as culture jamming, guerrilla and undercover marketing.

### C. *Relation of Activationism to Culture Jamming and Culture Hacking*

Work on culture jamming and hacking describes numerous concepts that help us understand its targeted inversion in the tobacco marketing system's youth hacking (DeLaure and Fink 2017). In order to understand activationism, we must then also understand other related terms, such as culture jamming and culture hacking in particular. The interconnections between these terms are subtle and important, and we develop them in this section.

Dery (1990) defined cultural jamming as artistic “terrorism” directed against contemporary information society. Later, he more broadly defined culture jamming as an “elastic category” that incorporated a range of subcultural, artistic, and semiotic resistance, satirical, and appropriating practices (Dery 1993). Hacking is related to breaking into computer systems and creating programmed viruses which upend existing data structures and subroutines, putting them in the service of the system hacker. We can conceive of culture hacking as related to computer hacking, but undertaken on a cultural level. Culture hacking would thus be the term for an overcoming of institutional and cultural defense systems by decoding and mimicking them in order to alter meaning-related routines and subroutines, putting a culture or aspects of it in the service of the culture hacker.

Activationism is related to these terms, but distinct. It is a type of marketing activation in which culture hacking is

employed to create a marketing campaign with a resistant tone, one emphasizing desire, action, and freedom, encouraging recruitment and the communal elements of grassroots organization that are traditional hallmarks of activism, but are linked to the interest of brands. The resistant tone refers to two different forms of symbolic oppositions that conceive of resistance as an act of freedom against consumption resistance. These forms of opposition embedded in culture hacking occur at both the consumer and brand level, and are described as follows.

First, consumers resist their moral institutional concerns that should prevent them from smoking. This resistance is encouraged and exploited by activationist tobacco campaigns through an appealing and deceptive use of micro-celebrities, visual rhetoric, and symbolic discourse on social media that emphasize empowerment, impulsivity, action, and freedom. Thanks to these campaign elements, consumers feel empowered to think freely and take immediate actions that satisfy their elicited desires of freedom to express and to act (responsibly or irresponsibly, as in this case by choosing to smoke).

Second, brands hold themselves out as role models of resistance by resisting the stringent regulations that restrict them from advertising their tobacco products to consumers who desire them. This resistance, similar to culture jamming counter-advertising discourse, occurs through bottom-up, grassroots consumer recruitment initiatives carried out both on social media and in the streets by brand ambassadors that disguise the illegal promotion of tobacco brands as a form of fancy lifestyle enhancers (e.g., paying influencers to post images on social media with packages of cigarettes, paying ambassadors to distribute packages of cigarettes for free at parties, organizing cool events in fancy places). The two kinds of resistance are symbolically related as brands unveil massive campaigns showcasing their wealth and power to consumers who are encouraged to be similarly subversive and free regarding broaching the cultural regulations that constrain their own individual and collective behavior.

#### *D. Another Example: #TasteTheCity*

A Brazilian example of activationism was developed by Souza Cruz, a subsidiary of British American Tobacco, using the platform and hashtag #TasteTheCity to promote the Dunhill brand. Through events and social media posts, TasteTheCity has the goal of building positive meanings for Dunhill, relating the brand and use to new experiences and pleasurable situations, linking the brand to a young, sophisticated, and trendy lifestyle. TasteTheCity activities most typically take place at upper class venues, parties and events, and occur at the same time as events of national interest. For example, Souza Cruz sponsored different initiatives throughout the Brazilian Indie event and the MECAnhotim Festival, which combined the Inhotim museum's qualities with additional values imported from musical shows, workshops, and the uniqueness of the festival's attendees. With expensive entrance tickets, drinks and meals, these events target young and affluent consumers living in the large Brazilian urban centers. #TasteTheCity initiatives are

promoted throughout Facebook and Instagram, amplifying the Dunhill experiences and meanings as presented at the parties.

The research has also identified activities of digital influencers charged with creating an aura of celebration, sophistication, and fashionable lifestyle among friends. Souza Cruz invited a select group of young people engaged in creative jobs or occupations, such as photographers, fashion models, party producers, or artists, among others, presenting detailed reports of their experience, under the #tastethecity hashtag. TasteTheCity hosted exclusive events, such as a Pool Party, an after party, and DJs performing in the middle of the museum, using special tents and presenting gifts offered to and by the digital influencers. Social media served as a strategic space to display and spread the TasteTheCity aura of cool gentility, creating the impression of an elite group, enjoying experiences not available to common or less affluent people. One of the social media posts following an event, for instance, stated: "tastethecitybr: A weekend occupied by new findings. #TasteTheCity #MECANhotim." The term "Occupied" likely references social movements contesting global financial systems, most notably Wall Street, but which also were spun off into many urban environments around the world merging with local social movements or causes including those in Brazil. TasteTheCity, thus, appropriates the concepts of youthfulness and may question the same establishment thinking and established rules that underscore the "Occupied" movement and its progeny.

If culture hacking can be construed as a type of inverted culture jamming, then activationism is a related but distinct type of activism. The linkages between live events, their provision of backdrops, the affordances of social media platforms, the norms of selfie culture in global youth culture, live ambassadors, the practice of encouraging social media posting, and the carefully designed synergies of branded elements derived from cigarette packages, designs, and hashtags create a self-reinforcing promotional circle that tobacco companies can readily hack in the service of this form of guerilla marketing. This promotional virtuous circle is intensified when tobacco companies engage in co-opting popular hashtags to camouflage their promotional content as social media posts. For example, in Italy, influencers were specifically instructed to include numerous popular hashtags in their promotional posts, not only to make the tobacco-related hashtags less noticeable (a subtle form of undercover marketing), but also to reach the widest possible network of peers by taking over hashtags that ensure the visibility of contents on social media platforms. Co-opted hashtags typically elicited the world of self-expression and lifestyle, evoking passions such as travel, music, and art (see, for instance, #party, #fun, #curious, #dreams, #likeme, #lovetravel, #dj, #technomusic, #artwork, #artshow, etc.) with the aim being to associate these imaginative cultural elements with the freedom to smoke.

#### IV. THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

Not long ago, marketing relied upon a small number of regulated media channels to spread its messages. Under this

historical situation, tobacco companies originally thrived, creating some of the most culturally resonant advertising messages on record. The dangerous nature of their product was exposed afterwards, and litigation in the U.S. revealed the inner workings of the tobacco companies' marketing to children and teenagers. In response, governments tightly regulated tobacco company's media presence through legal settlements, and these corporations began to lose cultural power and influence. However, the rise of social media and its marketing implications opened new doors of marketing opportunity for global tobacco companies. Although they are closely watched in North America and most of Western Europe, they have been conducting experimental incursions into the world of social media marketing to hack global youth culture in a number of other countries around the world. Our research reveals these formerly hidden experiments.

The implications of this effort are significant, not merely for marketing practice, but for an understanding of its ever-changing and underlying dynamics. In his day, Foucault suggested that the West is transforming from the command-and-control discipline necessary in a manufacturing-based economy to a more subtle control of laborer and consumer desires that is necessary to keep a service-based economy functioning (Foucault 2012). The key to managing consumer desire in our current digital economy is a state of what Deleuze (1990, p. 174) called "continuous control and communication," something that fits much easier into a so-called information-based society than a service or manufacturing based one. Under the new state, information and knowledge are unrestricted. Instead, technologies and more open institutions grant consumers and workers almost unlimited access to information and knowledge, which also include emotion-laden imagery, routine-rich interactions, and symbolically-powerful language.

In this regard, the open and participative nature of social media has facilitated and enhanced the development of networks where consumers' ideas and values are created, transformed, spread, and rapidly circulated through webs of informational interactions, but these data networks also affect what consumers do and think (Christakis and Fowler 2009). As Harold (2017, p. 68) put it "what appear as new freedoms also enable business to increasingly modulate every aspect of life". Social media became systems that assist us in our desire to share news and personal updates, but also to assist in the corporate engineering and manipulation of other people's interactions and desires. As Van Dijck (2013) argues, "in order to be able to recognize what people want and like, Facebook and other platforms track desires by coding relationships between people, things, and ideas into algorithms" that create an "automated connectivity" coded by technology (p. 12). Corporations gain a level of control over consumers' daily routines, disguising manipulation under the surface of increasing consumers' technologically-enabled freedom to self-express.

Control and communication are visual, poetic, emotional, and sensory. Bypassing moral and cognitive filters, tobacco marketing hashtags become new brands that appeal directly to young people's socialities, hunger for status, and consumer desire. Using the embedded, simplistic, action-oriented

language of advertising, the names of these new brands focus on the immediacy of behavior and sensory experience, community, transformative possibilities, hip urban gentility, and the liberty of choice. For example, #tastethenight, #tastethecity, #redishere, #pleasureteam, #sublimemovers, and #mydaynow evoke the power of immediate experience, the hedonism of status, and the richness of urban life. Transformative and communitarian ethos are evoked in the new brand hashtags #evolve, #likeus, #nighthunters, and #forwardparty. The new brands #youdecide, #mstart, #stayfree, #staytrue, and #dontbeamaybe focus on decisiveness, choice, and freedom.

Alongside these decisive, transformative, and immediate brand invocations, consumers are spurred to action by visual rhetoric and the authenticity of consumer-generated media. The activationist campaign is designed as a form of immediate resistance, where with one pack of cigarettes consumers can resist the quasi-moral strictures that hold them back from enjoying their liberty and life by breaking the bonds that hold back their choice to smoke. In a code whose decipherment becomes clear when elaborated by further exposure to the brand principles through events and social media, consumers learn that "taste the city" is another way to say taste the Dunhill brand of cigarettes being marketed by British American Tobacco. The words "Stay Free" are a command and a challenge from Japan Tobacco International's Winston brand to think independently when deciding whether to smoke cigarettes or not. The mystique surrounding the NightHunters group is a way to both hunt for fun and adventure in the night, and also to join in Philip Morris's promotions of Iceball cigarettes as a type of underground social actor. Joining the groups who adopt such slogans is a sign of fierce independence, the type of independence celebrated throughout youth culture especially, and consumer culture certainly, but celebrated and affirmed collectively through tobacco company's lavish events and sponsored social media promotions.

Positioning participation in tobacco social media marketing as a form of consumer activism is a semiotic move on the part of tobacco companies to disarm moral protest about tobacco's effects by using social media, ambassadorship, and events to subtly position the choice to smoke tobacco not only as a moral right of consumers but as an act of self-empowerment. Don't be a maybe, Marlboro provokes: when it's time to light up with your friends, make a decision to act. Digital activism has been described recently with the trivializing terms "hashtag activism" and "clicktivism" (Bayne 2018). In our field research among the integrated campaigns of hashtags and planned events of global tobacco marketers, we discover a type of "call to action-ism," a belief that brand-related action is its own form of resistance, one that is closely related to hashtag activism, but that transpires in the realm of brand activation and activationism.

Call-to-actionism, hashtag activism, and activationism are new marketing strategies that our fieldwork reveals in hashtag driven campaigns to be inspired, seize the day, taste the city, or become a night hunter. Calling for action at party-like marketing events is an attempt to manage and manipulate

desire. Social media provides companies with new levers to extend these attempts. Party moments, social interactions, and smoking rituals interface with consumers' technologically-enabled freedom to self-express. Tobacco company marketing today benefits immensely from media corporations' influence over consumers', especially young consumers', cultural and digital connectivity.

What we see in these tobacco brand activationism campaigns is the market system dynamic of a new form of technologically-empowered capitalism, which has been defined as technocapitalism: an evolution of market capitalism that is rooted in rapid technological innovation based on corporate power and its exploitation of technological creativity (Suarez-Villa 2009), including consumers' collective creativity (Kozinets, Patterson, and Ashman 2017). This rapid innovation does not just allow consumers to express themselves freely, it also allows tobacco marketers similar liberties to spread their message to youth around the globe. Working hand in hand, marketing and technocapitalism leverage the network society to transform the connectivity of youth culture into a valuable economic resource. As this case exemplifies, the theoretical and pragmatic consequences of these developments are potentially profound. Facebook (and Instagram), LinkedIn, and Twitter further their own interests by increasingly influencing and monetizing consumers' online social experiences, thereby encouraging marketers to take advantage of a new algorithmic social reality. Without increased and better government regulation better suited to the realities of our current times, we are likely to see more of these cutting-edge campaigns that connect hashtags, live events, and brand ambassadors into social media campaigns and which activate the desires of increasingly interconnected, and vulnerable, young consumers around the globe.

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# Learning to function in multiple cultural environments: a study of globally mobile consumers and their banks

Alisa Minina

*Abstract*—This paper contributes to previous literature by showing how repeated consumer movement results in a buildup of accumulated cultural and procedural consumption knowledge. While findings support the view of consumer acculturation as an experiential learning process, they extend previous literature by showing the particularity of acculturation process in condition of serial, as opposed to singular, relocation. Unlike linearly migrating consumers who negotiate cultural codes of home, host and transnational cultures, globally mobile consumers face new sets of acculturation agents with every new relocation, reinitiating the learning process and using accumulated knowledge from different countries to organize their financial services consumption.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of consumer acculturation, reflecting the processes of movement and adaptation of individuals to a consumer cultural environment (Peñaloza 1994) has been a starting point of consumer acculturation research as an independent research tradition.

Along the course of exploration of different consumer groups the literature has discussed consumer acculturation within the context of home and host cultures (Wallendorf & Reilly 1983; Peñaloza 1994), transnational and global cultures (Askegaard et al. 2005; Cleveland & Laroche 2007; Vihalemm & Keller 2011) and cosmopolitan consumer culture (Thompson & Tambyah 1999). Various acculturation influences result in a variety of consumer identity outcomes, such as ethnic identity, shattered identity projects or “torn self” in case of dominated consumer groups (Peñaloza 1994; Ustuner & Holt 2007; Jafari & Goulding 2008) and multi-dimensional identity constructs of consumers subjected to transnational and cosmopolitan influences (Thompson & Tambyah 1999; Askegaard et al. 2005; Hughes & Askegaard 2008). A concept of multiculturalism has been recently introduced by Kipnis, Broderick and Demangeot (2014, p.233) referring to “how consumers may develop

affiliations with one, two or multiple cultures, resulting in various types of cultural identities”.

Looking at the literature that accumulated over the years, it is noticeable that while the starting point of consumer acculturation research was to find out how consumers learn to function in new cultural environments, over time researchers have shifted their main focus towards acculturation outcomes, while consumer learning slowly drifted out of primary research considerations.

This study is an attempt to bring consumer acculturation research to its roots by examining how globally mobile consumers learn to function in multiple cultural environments, focusing on consumer knowledge and the resulting sets of behaviors, rules and skills that emerge as consumers accumulate their knowledge during the acculturation process.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. *Consumer Acculturation and Situationally Dependent Consumption*

Consumer research regards acculturation as an experiential learning process that occurs as migrant consumers develop translation skills that allow them to adapt their previous consumption patterns to the new environment (Peñaloza 1994) or as “a circular system of observation and adaptation” between

migrants and locals (Luedicke 2011, p.240). Consumers can use their knowledge to fit in, engage in culture swapping (Oswald 1999) or use consumption practices to negotiate differences between cultures (Thompson & Tambyah 1999; Askegaard et al. 2005).

The postassimilationist theoretical framework for consumer acculturation has been provided by Peñaloza (1994), who created a multidimensional empirical model of consumer acculturation, taking into consideration individual differences of informants, consumer acculturation agents and consumer acculturation processes, which led to acculturation outcomes of assimilation, maintenance, resistance and segregation. Under the influence of liberatory consumption perspective (Firat & Venkatesh 1995) the movement towards multiplicity of understandings of acculturation has been continued in introducing a range of new theoretical concepts complementing existing acculturation models. Ger & Østergaard (1998) and Oswald (1999) drew attention to the phenomenon of situationally dependent consumption under the influence of diverse cultural forces. In their study of consumption of clothing by Turkish immigrants in Denmark Ger and Østergaard (1998) conceptualized ethnic identity as “the junction of multiple and diverse cultural and subcultural forces, groups, and same-different tensions” (Ger & Østergaard 1998, p.51).

During the last twenty years an increasing number of acculturation researchers turned towards the exploration of cosmopolitanism and transnational consumer culture (Thompson & Tambyah 1999; Askegaard et al. 2005; Kipnis et al. 2014), showing how consumption can be shaped under the influence of forces of globalization regardless of the national origin of consumers. Kipnis, Broderick and Demangeot (2014, p.243) introduced a concept of consumer multiculturalism, defined as “a process of changes in the cultural identification and consumption behaviors of individuals that happen when the individual, social group and/or society as a whole come into continuous contact with multiple cultures”. The authors suggested that consumers may develop affiliations to multiple cultures, resulting in various types of cultural identities without necessarily moving out of their home country.

The study of acculturation through the lens of identity construction becomes problematic if we abandon the assumption that all consumption acts of migrating consumers are motivated by their sense of self. Consumer groups such as globally mobile professionals are united by their function, rather than their ethnicity or geographical position (Field 1971), representing an anomalous context that cannot be explained by current models of situationally dependent consumption. Latest stream of research on consumption in conditions of global mobility recognized consumer movement as a defining influence in shaping consumption of globally mobile professionals (Bardhi et al. 2012; Figueiredo & Uncles 2015), as the need to cope with the challenges of serial relocation overrides the nostalgic attachment to particular cultural settings. As a consumer group, globally mobile professionals’ identity is uncoupled from their culture of origin, nor do they intend to build their lives in their country of residence, as they move to a new country every several years.

In line with the latest research in consumer acculturation this paper focuses on the specifics of the acculturation process as it occurs in the globalized interconnected world of today, where

rather than being subjected to influences of country of origin and country of permanent relocation, serially relocating consumers are subjected to pulls from many different cultures. Among the characteristics frequently attributed to serially relocating consumers are their cosmopolitan orientation (Thompson & Tambyah 1999) as well as the instrumentality and flexibility of their consumption behaviors, as the nostalgic value of possessions fades under the pressure of frequent relocation needs (Bardhi et al. 2012) and consumers organize their present consumption in order to satisfy the needs of their imagined globally mobile future selves (Figueiredo & Uncles 2015). The uncertainty and temporariness associated with global mobility (Bauman 2000) requires from people to be faster, more flexible and adaptable, as their lives become more complex and they need to manage professional and social relations across borders (Elliott & Urry 2010). This study shows how these characteristics of flexibility and instrumentality manifest in the multi-acculturation process of serially relocating consumers resulting in consumer expertise and consumption behaviors uncoupled from feelings of ethnic identity affiliation.

### III.METHOD

The research design of this study has been informed by the Extended Case Method, or ECM (Holt 2002; Kates 2006; Burawoy 2009). It has gained popularity in consumer research during the last two decades, being especially favored by sociocultural marketing scholars who explore topics of globalization, transnational consumer culture and consumption in global mobility (Holt 2002; Cayla & Eckhardt 2008; Bardhi et al. 2012). Guided by the aim to explore consumer acculturation to multiple service contexts, I have chosen to study the skilled globally mobile professionals who have lived in multiple countries in the last 10 years and did not plan to settle down in the country of current residence. From August 2012 to June 2016 I have conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews (McCracken 1988) with 32 globally mobile professionals from different countries that at the moment of the interview resided in Sweden, Italy, Australia, Austria, Germany, Spain, France, United Kingdom, Russia and India. The sample consisted of 15 male and 17 female professionals aged from 24 to 60 years old. Interviews lasted on average 40-90 minutes and were transcribed verbatim. The first step in the analysis involved analytical reduction of data through coding and categorizing the interview transcripts (Holt 2002; Figueiredo 2012). Once I have accumulated a number of quotes in each category, I have proceeded towards the next step of ECM analysis, structuration, going back to the literature in order to understand how consumer mobility becomes a context in itself influencing acculturation of globally mobile individuals. On this stage I have focused on the dialogue between the micro-level of mobile consumers’ personal stories of dealing with financial services providers in different countries and the macrofoundations of the culture of mobility and transnationalism that shaped their international experiences. Finally, on the third stage of analysis, reconstruction of theory (Kates 2006; Burawoy 2009), I have looked at the phenomenon at place in light of existing theories of consumer acculturation.

#### IV. FINDINGS

##### A. Repeated learning process

Data analysis shows that as consumers serially relocate, their movement is accompanied by a continuous learning process. Similar to immigrant consumers going through the processes of movement, translation and adaptation (Peñaloza 1994) upon arrival to a new country, participants of this study faced a number of similar difficulties. They often highlighted the language barrier as an unpleasant obstacle in approaching financial service providers in new locality and shared stories how they got angry at banks lacking an English-language website, how they sometimes needed to wait in the branch office until the bank finds an English-speaking employee or how they sometimes needed to visit several banks before they found one suitable for them. Unless they were employed by the bank like James or Gianni, or aided by a relocation agency arranged by their employer like Richard, upon arrival participants needed to look for the information themselves in order to understand what kind of banks exist in a new country, what are the differences between them and what are the local norms, rules and regulations.

Some participants asked friends and colleagues for advice, some, like Albert, combined personal visits to different banks with internet research in order to find the best financial institution, and some, like John or Daniel, joined an online community or an expatriate organization that provided members with information about available services in a country. However, unlike consumers who relocate once with the purpose of settling down who go through the learning process once, eventually learning the rules of a new country, for the participants of the study the learning process restarted with every new relocation. As Stephen, one of the participants, put it “you have a feeling it’s your money, and you should be able to do whatever you want with that whenever you want. But when you’re traveling and different kinds of rules apply, different systems apply, really you just have to patient and to trust”. Once they arrived in the new country, they needed to deal with a new language barrier, new local offers and new sets of local norms and rules. Even when in one location they already had their financial services provider set up due to connection with the employer, in previous relocations they still had experiences of looking for information by themselves.

When asked about confusing or surprising situations with their financial services providers, consumers often recollected their first encounter with financial services abroad. During her first time studying abroad in the US after a lifetime in Kazakhstan, Alina didn’t realize that she even needed a bank account. She brought an envelope full of cash, however her host parents, convinced her to go to a bank and eventually she opened an account that she later used in order to get her study stipend as well as to receive money transfers from her parents. A similar situation happened to Svetlana during her first time abroad in France. Coming from Russia, she found out that she couldn’t open a local bank account due to her visa restrictions, so she used her parents’ card as well as cash received from them through Western Union transfers during her time there.

##### B. Accumulation of knowledge

Consumers’ knowledge accumulated as a result of their repeated relocations. The more participants engaged in consumption of financial services along the time of their relocation, the more expert they grew over time. The knowledge mostly came from their previous experiences, other sources of accumulated knowledge included experiences of their friends and colleagues as well as information provided by institutions – work, school, online communities and expatriate organizations. While, some of participants have learned finance at school or dealt with financial affairs at work, most of their competence in financial consumption and relationships with their financial institutions came directly from situations they went through in their past. While it has been previously argued in financial services marketing literature that all consumers grow more expert over time as they gain experience from dealing with their banks (Lee & Marlowe 2003; Bell et al. 2005), this growth in expertise is especially evident in mobile consumers, who repeatedly go through cycles of relationships with their banks – closing old accounts and starting new ones, transferring money, solving problems and then doing it all over again in a new country with a new bank.

The two most frequently recurring types of knowledge in the interviews were the knowledge how the system works and the intercultural competence. The knowledge how the system works referred to the understanding of the range of products and requirements of different banks as well as the procedural expertise, or what, how and when was needed to do in order to for example open an account, close it or deal with unexpected circumstances. The intercultural expertise reflected the knowledge of banking norms in different countries and the ability to navigate these norms to consumers’ own benefit.

With subsequent relocations participants got more and more used to specifics of different financial services as their experience of dealing with the financial services providers increased. Along the course of the interview they often reflected on different norms and rules of financial consumption in different countries, providing comparisons and expressing their judgements of services in every country. As their experience grew, they became more demanding consumers. The best performing service from their previous experience often served as a benchmark, against which they compared all other services. Unlike with other services where mobile consumers can make a rational choice to use a better one in another country (Figueiredo 2012), with financial services they often didn’t have a choice, which at times resulted in dissatisfaction with local providers when their benchmark wasn’t met. For example, Michael didn’t enjoy his stay in Germany because he couldn’t pay by credit card in a lot of places, which he thought was inconvenient and old-fashioned. Albert had an unpleasant experience when he moved to Italy after living in Poland, Switzerland and Germany and realized that he needed to visit the branch whenever he needed to do any kind of operation. He was shocked that it was still quite common in Italy, as he previously thought that “only old people still go to branches”.

When Viktoria lived in Spain she found the local banking system “a little bit...behind... in sort of... time... because you couldn’t do really anything online there”. She also pointed out a difficulty in finding English-speaking employees there. Having previously used financial services in Sweden where almost

everyone speaks English and where most of the operations were automatized and online banking was available everywhere, she found it difficult not to use Sweden as a benchmark for comparing the performance of other financial services abroad. When she later moved to the UK, she still found flaws in the local banking system because they didn't have "an online service to transfer money to an international bank account, which I found quite strange, because, you know, like, we've had this in Sweden for about ten years".

Having previously dealt with the financial services providers in the US where the banks are open until late in the evening, Daniel expressed his dissatisfaction by the working hours of Spanish banks, which he referred to as "relaxed". He also questioned the transparency of local procedures that seemed to confuse him, as "what they told me changed immediately after 6 months, they cancelled the interest, started charging lots of fees, of course.... So I don't really like them that much because they did all of it. Because I see that at least I still have incoming interest in the US, even though it's smaller. And with these guys I've put my money in, and there's something incomprehensible going on, I don't know, a spoof".

Through personal experience of dealing with providers of financial services, participants built their consumer expertise with every new relocation. The knowledge accumulated through the years of their globally mobile lives helped them feel more confident in different service situations in foreign countries as well as back in countries of their legal citizenship. As Stephen put it, "I think having different experiences.... maybe makes you more streetwise, whereas if I had stayed in England and I would go and apply for a mortgage or so, I would be not intimidated, but kinda, you come and you sit and be told. Whereas I think a little bit of these different experiences.... you have more confidence you have more assertiveness in those kind of situations.... I think actually that's another lesson to learn that there's never a question you shouldn't ask. Because if you don't understand something no matter how stupid it may make you seem, if you don't understand it, it's an important issue so you have to ask".

### C. Skills development

Having acquired knowledge from different countries, participants also developed a range of skills, for example the ways to get this knowledge faster and to solve potential problems in the most efficient way. A lot of participants claimed that their global mobility helped them develop better research and problem-solving skills, as well as to become more controlling and organized. As Mohit reflected on learning about different procedures in different countries, he said "It's become easier as I have traveled more and it has become easier and I am not so worried anymore". He came up with his own problem solving technique in order to avoid potential shortcomings in service encounters abroad: "wherever I go I carry my Indian card with me, so I know if I get stuck some where I can just swipe my card".

While research and problem solving skills stood out as being often referred to by the participants, other skills varied from participant to participant depending on their previous experiences. Among the often mentioned skills were increased financial numeracy as well as "being attentive and controlling", "being structured and organized", "knowing your rights", "making informed choices", "patience", "reading contracts

attentively" and. In the financial services marketing literature financial numeracy is defined as "proficiency in comprehending and using financial information" that "arises from two interrelated constructs: financial capacity (i.e. ability to process financial information) and financial literacy (i.e. prior knowledge of financial concepts, services, and products)" (Huhmann & McQuitty 2009, p.273).

A lot of the skills the respondents developed were in a way survival skills. While dealing with challenging financial consumption situations along the course of serial relocation, every time consumers learned something new. When Fiona first came to France, her bank sold her unnecessary housing insurance and started charging monthly fees from her account. Since then, she have become more aware of her rights, and when she decided to close that account and open another one in a new bank, she was reading the documents more carefully. Richard learnt to control his consumption of credit cards after having experienced several years of debt in the past. And Anna, who survived the financial crisis in Ukraine, became more interested in how the bank system works and attributed her skill of making informed choices to her previous experience.

Development and range of their skills was in a way an answer to the demands of the environment that is, their skills emerged as a range of intuitive expert behaviors developed over a course of situational responses based on what experience has previously shown to be successful while dealing with the banks abroad. It was conditioned by the demands of global mobility, such as frequent serial relocation, the lack of stability in organizational commitments (flexible and fixed-term working contracts) and the need to repeatedly and simultaneously manage relationships with different financial institutions in order to function properly in the new local context upon arrival.

### D. Rules of consumption

Financial consumption of study participants was often guided by a set of consumption rules that they set up for themselves. One of the rules that was mentioned most often during the interviews was "You have to be in control of what is going on". After having had to deal with different financial institutions in multiple countries, participants realized the need to be in control, manage their financial affairs and always read the documents they sign. Participants also became more aware of their needs over time, setting up new rules as their relocation experience went on. Other rules mentioned by participants included keeping track of spending, carefully reading all documents in order to avoid unnecessary fees or being sold additional products, keeping separate accounts for separate purposes or as preferring big multinational banks over small local ones in hopes that they will better accommodate their needs for instant access to their economic resources and the possibility to execute all transactions online without being physically present.

Most often, just as the development of consumption skills, consumption rules were based on participants' previous experiences. These consumption rules also varied from informant to informant as they emerged over time as a result of previous encounters with financial services providers in different countries. Alex is a successful advertising executive who is currently based in Moscow, Russia. After having lived in Hong Kong, Australia, Malaysia and Japan, once he found himself on a visit back in the UK, his home country, he went to

his local bank to take out two thousand pounds. To his great surprise, the bank employees started asking him questions such as where did the money come from and what did he need it for. After that experience he has decided to rebuild credit history in the UK, reactivating his old account and setting up a rule for himself to make sure that his UK bank account always had money in it and to have regular contributions in order to avoid potential problems with repatriation.

Having previously worked as a relationship manager on early stages of his banking career, Gianni has developed a rule for himself never to bother his relationship manager, because he knew “what it means to bother a person working. So, my principle is I bother if I really need them, so really if I cannot do anything else to achieve my thing that I need, I will call the branch. Otherwise I try to do myself”. And Fiona, having previously encountered financial difficulties, has decided to introduce a spending limit to herself.

#### E. Multi-acculturation

While being in simultaneous contact with banks in different countries, participants eventually became multi-acculturated to several cultural and service settings at the same time. Originally, multiculturalism was introduced as a concept demonstrating “how consumers may develop affiliations with one, two or multiple cultures, resulting in various types of cultural identities” (Kipnis et al. 2014, p.233), here the multi-acculturation concept is used to refer to consumer acculturation to multiple cultural and service settings that occurs through the development of consumer expertise. Unlike the acculturation outcomes of linearly migrating consumers that are often tied to their identity outcomes within a local context (Oswald 1999; Askegaard et al. 2005; Luedicke 2011), the multi-acculturation of the globally mobile participants of this study mostly manifested in a range of instrumental behaviors suited to a particular given context at a time.

Knowledge of local norms enabled participants to adapt their behaviors accordingly to several different contexts. When Mohit reflected on his approach towards financial services providers, he said that, unlike in India, in Sweden and in the UK he could “trust the process blindly”.

In India I can't, I read through everything - the documents, the terms and conditions. Because if I am going into a service to a bank or anywhere I can trust the guys to not give me any wrong information and hide anything from me. In India they won't give you wrong information, but they won't tell you what they don't want you to know. Mohit

Snezana, an HR professional based in Italy, told about her strategies for getting the best possible service in different countries:

...in Italy (...) if I want to get someone to find solution for me, I have to be extremely nice to them and to try to make friends with them so that they help me out (...) in Serbia, if you really are a bit arrogant, and you really seem powerful and you seem a bit "bitchy", then most likely they will help you much more, and if you are really nice, then they don't do anything. Snezana

Guillermo, an academic currently based in France, also changed his approach to interacting with financial service providers depending on a country that he was in:

...if you go to a bank in Mexico, you need to act like a boss there. I mean you need to act like you are not going to be taken

advantage of and because most bank employees have this profile; when you act like you are actually worth something in Mexico, they treat you differently. (...) if I do that in Finland, people will just, I mean, they would nicely escort me out of the bank. Guillermo

In these examples we can see how consumers use their knowledge of different cultures and different service provision systems in order to adapt their behaviors accordingly to local contexts in different countries. However, rather than using these behaviors to express their identity, they use them to adapt to the situational demands of the environment with the ultimate goal of getting things done.

#### V. DISCUSSION

Consumer acculturation research has been identity-centric for a while. In fact, while initially the focus of researchers has been on consumer learning to function in new cultural environments and on the ways their consumption patterns change accordingly, over time the focus shifted almost exclusively to consumer identity construction, their self-perception of their imagined ethnicity and the ways they express this ethnicity through consumption, reflecting the broader tendency in consumer research to see all acts of consumption as expressive.

Informants living in condition of global mobility repeatedly engaged in a learning process every time upon arriving to a new country. I contribute to consumer acculturation literature by showing how repeated consumer movement initiates the process of consumer multi-acculturation, resulting in a buildup of accumulated cultural knowledge. The findings support the view of consumer acculturation as an experiential learning process (Peñaloza 1994), however, unlike linearly migrating consumers who negotiate cultural codes of home, host and transnational cultures (Wallendorf & Reilly 1983; Oswald 1999; Bhatia 2002; Askegaard et al. 2005), globally mobile consumers face new sets of acculturation agents with every new relocation, reinitiating the learning process and using accumulated knowledge from different countries to organize their financial services consumption.

It has been argued in previous research that globally mobile consumers go through repeated mobility cycles (Figueiredo & Uncles 2015). Figueiredo conceptualized mobility cycles as new temporal frameworks structured around consumers' recurring mobility patterns that globally mobile professionals develop in order to have points of stability in their lives. The findings of this study extend this work by showing how with every new mobility cycle consumers reinitiate the acculturation process, and how after going through several cycles of mobility and acculturation mobile consumers accumulate knowledge in forms of intercultural competence as well as the procedural knowledge relevant to local contexts that they previously went through, and how this knowledge accumulation results in higher levels of consumer expertise.

The contribution of this study lies in showing how acculturative consumer learning can exist outside of the need of consumers to express ethnic identity affiliation. Study participants showed high adaptability to multiple local contexts along the course of their relocation. As a result of repeatedly going through the acculturation process with every mobility cycle, they became multi-acculturated to services in several

different countries. In contrast to previous acculturation work where acculturation outcomes were tied to a sense of ethnic identity affiliation (Oswald 1999; Askegaard et al. 2005; Luedicke 2011), the multi-acculturation of our participants had a strategic value of getting things done, and was more in line with the liquid, utilitarian and flexible logic of the globally mobile existence (Bauman 2000; Bardhi et al. 2012; Elliott & Urry 2010). In the situation of globally mobile consumers, their acculturation process manifests as development of survival skills that help them achieve their consumption goals. The context of living in global mobility while serially relocating and needing to get reacquainted with a new context every few years demanded increased flexibility from the participants of the study, shaping their consumption skills as an answer to the demands of the environment.

This study has several limitations. First, the conclusions come from the personal narratives of the informants, rather than direct observation of their service consumption along the course of their relocation. While globally mobile professionals represent a hard to reach informant group during their busy schedules and frequent relocation (Bardhi et al. 2012), and on the top of that financial services are a sensitive topic that not all people feel comfortable talking about (Aldridge 1998; Henry 2005), I was not able to follow participants around in order to directly observe their behaviors. Future researchers can potentially attempt using additional research methods, such as the longitudinal shadowing of the informants along the course of their relocation, personal diaries or participant observation of service encounters.

The second limitation of this study is that it presents only one side of the story, that is, the participant view. A potentially interesting direction for future research would lie in exploring the dynamics of consumer as well as marketer acculturation (Peñaloza & Gilly 1999) where the consumers become the carriers of transnationalism (Beaverstock 2005) while the service providers strive to keep up with the challenges of globalization (Wilson et al. 2010; Beaverstock et al. 2011). are examples of tables and figures. Please place tables or figures at the top or bottom of a column and avoid placing them in the middle if possible. Large figures and tables may span across both columns. Place figure captions below the figures. If able, please try to figures and tables *after* they are cited in the text.

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# Second Wave Black Metal: Consuming the Heretical

**Jeffrey S Podoshen**

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The consumption of second wave (aka “true Norwegian”) black metal music in the live context scene has garnered recent attention in the CCT literature (Podoshen et al. 2014). As discussed in (Wallin et al. 2018) both producers and consumers of the scene have been labeled as heretics and the entire scene itself has been associated with church burning, Satanism, murder, animal violence and assault and battery (Podoshen et al. 2018a; 2018b). With the recent release of internationally distributed films such as *Lords of Chaos* (Akerlund, 2018) and books like *Confessions of a Heretic* (Darksi and Eglinton, 2015) and *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground* (Moynihan and Soderlind, 2003), true Norwegian black metal has become a consumption phenomenon, especially in light of the fact that the music is now Norway’s largest musical export (Podoshen, 2013).

This photo exhibit, consisting of live closeup shots taken by a scholar/photographer *in situ* explores the nuances of the heretical nature of second wave black metal and visually examines the specific semiotics used in black metal production and consumption. This exhibit features shots of live performances of Norwegian, Swedish and even Polish bands that utilize a myriad of symbols to denote to a particular disposition and message for the audience to consume and contemplate. Signifiers include the use of actual animal blood where both the producers and consumers are covered in literal fermented blood during a performance. Further signifiers include animal parts that are used as part of a Satanic ritual and/or part of the stage and personal effects. Also examined is the use of corpse paint to signify death, and a myriad of religious symbols and pagan symbols to represent and espouse a rejection of Judeo-Christianity.

The photo essay challenges viewers to contemplate the realities of “leisure activities” in today’s world, such as live music concerts.

Additionally, it elucidates on the realities of second wave black metal – thus challenging conventional notions of heavy metal performance as mere “shock rock” in the vein of Alice Cooper or Ozzy Osbourne, who utilized props and Hollywood

style stage shows to give the illusion of the heretical and the dangerous. The images in this exhibit portray a sharp contrast to the traditional heavy metal theater and demonstrate that consuming second wave black metal exposes the consumer to actual death and actual Satanism.

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# Blockchain technology for systemic value creation in the sharing economy

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Prior research notes that collaborative networks suffer issues of trust, transparency and management that reduce the value created in these networks (Perren and Kozinets 2018; Zervas, Proserpio, and Byers 2017). Blockchain technology claims to address these issues. Blockchain is “an open, distributed ledger that can record transactions between two parties efficiently and in a verifiable and permanent way” (Iansiti and Lakhani 2017, 118). Prior research suggests that software-enabled processes, such as algorithms, play an important role in systemic value creation in collaborative networks and digital platforms (Cullen and Farronato 2015, Ramaswamy and Ozcan 2018). Yet, it is unclear how blockchain technology could mitigate trust issues in collaborative consumer networks and how this would impact value creation for consumers and firms.

Consumers (and many companies) are skeptical about blockchain due to its newness, regulatory uncertainty, and the recent headlines and controversies associated Bitcoin (Lieberman, 2018). Scholars have started to examine the benefits and drawbacks of blockchain for companies (Conick, 2017), yet we lack research on how consumers perceive and use blockchain technology. Particularly, we lack understanding of how blockchain may shape the process of systemic value creation in collaborative networks, where consumers interact to address each other’s social and economic needs (Figueiredo and Scaraboto, 2016; Scaraboto, 2015). Hence, we ask: Can blockchain technology help foster value creation in collaborative networks? How so? With what potential drawbacks?

We conceptualize the role of blockchain in collaborative networks through a systemic perspective, which abandons “the idea of simple, unidirectional, and linear processes of cause and effect in explaining change” (Kloep and Hendry 2011, 58), rather addressing the complex and dynamic flow of heterogeneous elements that shape open systems at any given moment. Value is systemically created when networked participants “integrate and exchange resources to co-create value for themselves and for others” (Akaka et al. 2012, 15). Hence, a systemic approach to value creation frames blockchain technology beyond its role in transactions to become an element of network cultures.

Network cultures develops around a set of consumer-objects assemblages (Hoffman and Novak, 2017) and include the actions, interactions, and microcultural values of its participants (Figueiredo and Scaraboto, 2016). As blockchain succeeds in enabling trustworthy transactions, it “blackboxes” itself (Latour, 1999), becoming increasingly opaque and obscure to consumers. As such, it may become fundamental to the cultural fabric of collaborative networks. As blockchain cannot be changed, it is important to foresee how a network culture may develop and adjust to the role of blockchain to understand the technology’s role in fostering systemic value creation.

Systemic value creation in collaborative networks is the enactment, transvaluation, assessment, and alignment of value-creating actions with the network culture (Figueiredo and Scaraboto, 2016). We propose that blockchain shapes systemic value creation according to this technology’s key characteristics (Sultan, Ruhi and Lakhani, 2018):

**Immutable:** Blockchain creates a permanent record of transactions. This irreversibility of records enhances transvaluation and solidifies cultural patterns.

**Decentralized:** Blockchain produces multiple networked copies of registers. This multiplies the opportunities to derive value outcomes available to network participants through assessment.

**Consensus Driven:** Blockchain operates without central authorities or explicit trust-granting agents. Consensus shapes the alignment process, gearing the network culture towards the values that allow most participants to extract most value from their interactions.

**Transparent:** Blockchain allows anyone to access and audit transaction records. This impacts the assessment and alignment stages of systemic value creation, extending the value potential of every single (inter)action held in the network, eventually replacing negotiated trust for faith.

The focus on how blockchain shapes value creation advances theories of consumer-objects assemblages (e.g. Novak and Hoffman 2017), which highlight the agentic role of objects, by addressing how blockchain acts as a blackboxed object-network that shapes network cultures and, consequently, how networks create value.



# Discursive interactions shaping the “happily ever after” in Virtual Brand Discourse Communities

Vitor Lima, Luís Pessôa

*Abstract*— In this working in progress, our aim is to propose the early foundations for the concept of the Virtual Brand Discourse Community (VBDC). To do so, we present arguments based on the linguistic construction of reality and, hence, different types of discursive interactions that shape its dynamic. To build the case for such consumption community, since 2015, we have been conducting a netnography on a Disney-related Facebook group, and, so far, have found initial evidence for the following five dimensions: (1) agreed set of goals mediated through utterances; (2) members' thematic roles; (3) regimes of discursive interactions; (4) genres and its lexis; (5) and horizons of expectations which can be seen as narratives of consumption.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

More and more, consumers are becoming entangled with the digital world (Belk, 2013), which presupposes their construction of reality being grounded by consumption of the digital content and online interactions.

In this scenario, the practices of posting, sharing, liking, and so forth are ways of establishing social relationships in a given digital context. As the networked individuals are constantly influenced by meanings and values exchanged on social media (Kozinets, Patterson, & Ashman, 2017), the practice of interacting (e.g., posting, liking, sharing) and relying on the online community to forge an experience has become common behavior (Iqani & Schroeder, 2016). Although consumer researchers have been exploring the concept of consumption communities on the internet throughout a plethora of perspectives (e.g., Weijo, Bean, & Rintamäki, 2019; Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2016), so far, there is little consideration about how that locus of consumption is discursively constructed. In this sense, assuming language as the basic vehicle by which a shared reality is constructed (Shankar, Elliott, & Goulding, 2001; Hirschman & Holbrook, 1992), we propose the Virtual Brand Discourse Community conceptualization.

## II. VIRTUAL BRAND DISCOURSE COMMUNITY

Brand communities have been widely explored and are found to contribute to the formation of enduring social bonds around brands, sustaining common identities and experiences (Almeida et al., 2017; Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001). The act of sharing stories, doubts, complaints, and achievements is what helps in the construction of narratives that give meaning to the existence of the community. From a semiotic perspective, each act of communication (e.g., posting, liking, sharing) is taken as an enunciation, which together forms a discourse (Greimas & Courtés, 1983). And so, discourses are constructed based on the enunciative actions of addressers and addressees, which in turn could be seen as discursive interactions about being, doing, having in a given context (Landowski, 2006).

Focusing on what is spoken and written collectively about a given topic, the proposal of a brand community based on the word is drawn on Swales’ (1990, 2016) works. In this scenario, discourse communities are groups in which individuals identify with each other through occupational characteristics, knowledge and/or personal preferences. Individuals belonging to such a community dominate not only a particular repertoire of discursive genres, habits, and experiences in common but also maintain a relation of approximation with other members by their communicational acts (Swales, 1990, 2016).

Therefore, based on an adaptation of Swales’ proposal (1990, 2016), a Virtual Brand Discourse Community (VBDC)

comprises five dimensions: (1) agreed set of goals mediated through utterances within virtual platforms, such as Facebook groups; (2) members’ thematic roles; (3) regimes of discursive interactions that shape community’s dynamics; (4) genres and its lexis (verbal and non-verbal); (5) and horizons of expectations which can be seen as narratives of consumption.

III.METHODS AND RESEARCH CONTEXT

Since October 2015, we have been conducting a netnography (Kozinets, 2015) in the Orlando Stuff group, a Disney-related Facebook community with more than one 300 thousand members. Once a week, the first author accesses the group to read entrees, take notes, and select excerpts by the principle of interdiscursivity (Greimas & Courtés, 1983). So far, 500 posts and 3,000 replies to them were selected for the discourse analysis procedure (Greimas & Courtés, 1983) in order to build the case for the VBDC conceptualization.

IV.INITIAL FINDINGS

A. Defining the addresser and addressee in VBDC:

Given our semiotic approach, it is fundamental to determine the utterance situation. For the first dimension, we addressed the position of enunciation by an adaptation of the scales of observation proposed by Desjeux (1996) and Cova and Cova (2002). First, there is the macro-social level composed by cultural elements and linguistic structures that support meanings; second, the meso-social level, in which one can observe Disney as a major addresser with macro-narratives of consumption; third, the micro-social level composed by administrators and members, and their discursive interactions, as shown in Figure 1.

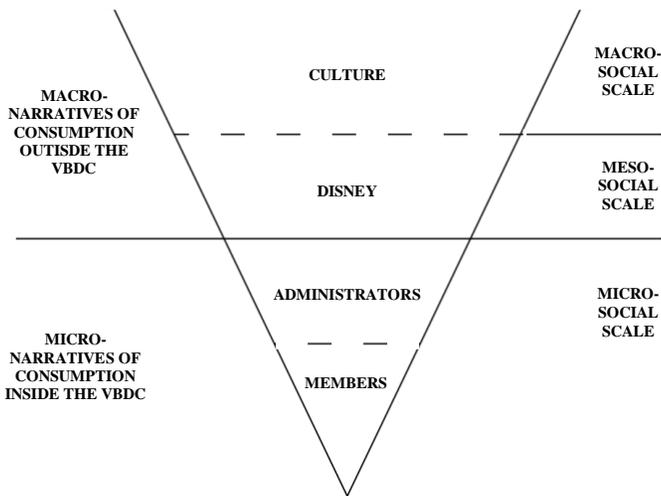


Figure 1. Scale of observation. Source: Based on Desjeux (1996) and Cova and Cova (2002).

B. Defining the framework of thematic roles in VBDC::

As the second dimension of the VBDC, building on Greimas and Courtés (1983) and Kozinets (1999), we identified four types of members’ thematic roles: (1) the Companion; (2) the Dreamer; (3) the Planner; (4) the Conqueror, as shown in Figure 2.

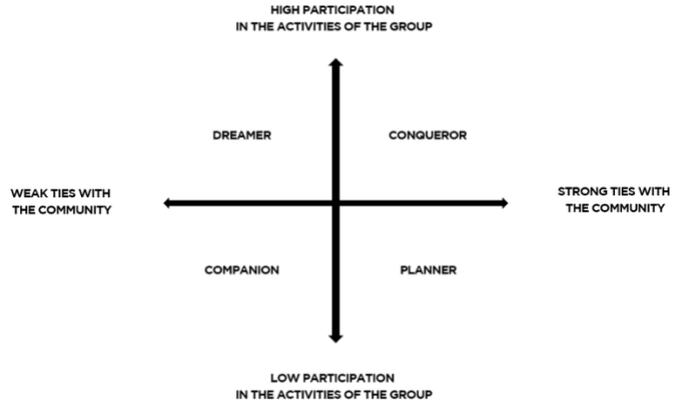


Figure 2. Members’ thematic roles. Source: Based on Greimas and Courtés (1983) and Kozinets (1999).

C. Regimes of interaction in VBDC:

For the third dimension, regarding the VBDC dynamics and Regime of Interactions (Landowski, 2006), the *Manipulation* regime can be seen in posts that clearly are based on persuasion, such as communications posted by the administrators when trying to moderate debates. Discourses derived from constant manipulation practices, long term, tend to become common behaviors and standard narratives of being in the world. In the case of the Orlando Stuff Facebook group, the regime of *Programming*, which is comprised of the logic of regularity, is perceived in each of the identified members’ thematic roles.

The regime of *Adjustment* is based not on social roles nor persuasion strategies, but on the esthetic capability of the individual (Landowski, 2006). In this case, the process of adjustment in VBDC derives not from the direct contact between individuals on a face-to-face meeting, but by their discourses that are simulacrum of a given micro-narrative of consumption (Pessôa, 2011). The last regime is *Accident*. Since discursive interactions have been discussed as a focal object, the accident is those unpredictable communicational situations which can be exemplified, as declared in the About section, by two main rules: do not offend or disrespect another member; advertising is not allowed since it is not the purpose of the group.

Figure 3 summarizes the proposition.

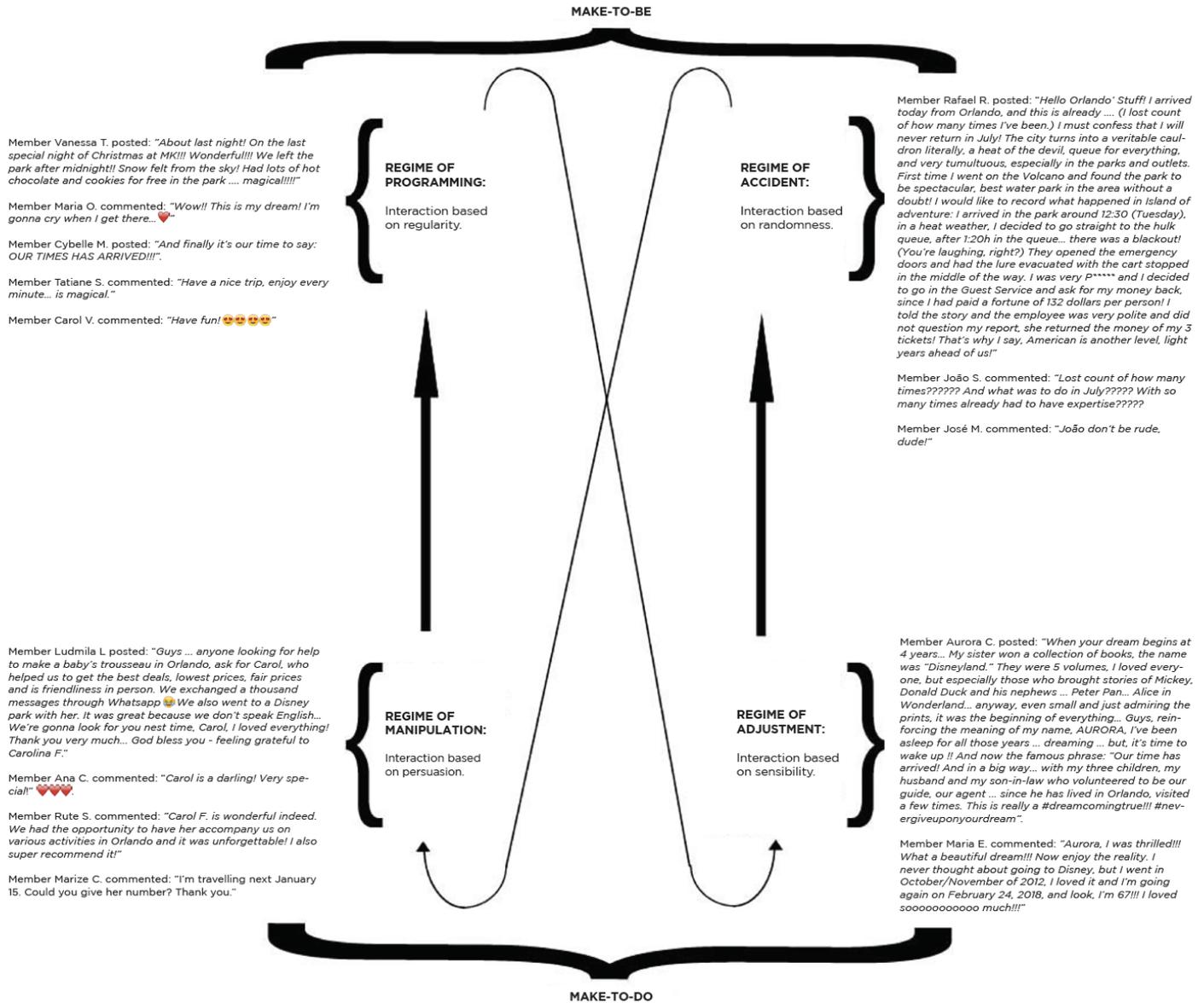


Figure 3. Regimes of interaction.  
Source: Based on Landowski (2006).

V. FUTURE STEPS AND EXPECTATIONS

As this research is still under development, our next step is to articulate the remaining two dimensions initially found for VBDC, and propose an integrative framework. In doing so, our case for that new conceptualization of the consumption community could contribute to the theoretical notion of brand community, and marketers understanding about discourses and its outcomes for the brand in virtual environments.

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# From “Sick Man” to “Strong Man” of Asia: Consumer Culture and National Identity in China

I-Chieh Michelle Yang, Christina Lee & Juliana French

**Abstract** — In this study, the nexus between consumer culture and national identity in China is explored. The phenomenal development of China’s economy and consumer culture has received considerable scholarly attention in recent years. Using international tourism as the consumption context, this study argues that engaging in international tourism allows Chinese citizens to negotiate their national identity – what it means to be a Chinese in this modern world. Nineteen Chinese citizens were interviewed, field notes and participant observations were also obtained during the data collection. It is revealed international tourism is employed as an avenue to affirm and express their national identity

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## I. INTRODUCTION

*“Shame! Shame! Shame! This great China, which for many centuries has hailed as the Celestial Empire by neighbors, is now reduced to a fourth-rate nation! The foreigners call us the Sick Man of East Asia, call us barbaric, inferior race.”*  
~ (Chen Tien Hua, as cited in Wang, 2014, pp. 358-359)

This phrase depicts China’s national identity crisis since the late nineteenth century, when the Qing Empire was facing growing external threats and internal instability (Gries, 2004). However, the 21<sup>st</sup> century has seen China’s rise from its previous hardships to become one of the largest economies in the world. The “reform and opening” policy (*gaige kaifang*) inaugurated by Deng Xiaoping in 1978 was aimed at opening China’s doors to foreign investments as well as international communications. Since then, China’s economy phenomenally developed and the middle-class has greatly expanded. Consumerism in China, too, has exponentially expanded, with strong demands for consumer goods and luxury products, making it the world’s largest consumer market. Nevertheless, China’s fall from centuries of imperialism to a series of foreign invasions, internal turmoil and rising from its past hardships have resulted in drastic identity transformations that may precipitate an identity crisis amongst Chinese citizens.

Unique to China’s “Socialism with Chinese Characteristics”, Gerth (2003) observed that consumer culture plays a potent role in China’s nation-making. Increasingly, China’s national identity and consumer culture serve as two parallel social forces that define each other. The Chinese government vehemently encouraged consumption and one’s loyalty and full membership to the nation is defined by their capacity to consume and contribute to economic growth (Kuever, 2018). According to Dong and Tian (2009), Chinese consumers see consumption as primary means to define themselves as citizens of a powerful and modern nation by consuming a continuum of products and services. While the remarkable rise of Chinese consumers as the world’s largest consumer has amassed substantial scholarly interest in recent decades, there is a noticeable dearth of insights on the sociological aspect of the phenomenon, such as consumer identity projects (Li, 2016). As highlighted by Kuever (2018), the Chinese example is unique amongst modern nation-states as it is an authoritarian and socialist regime with a paradoxically flourishing consumer culture. The existing bulk of literature has lopsidedly focused on the typical Western capitalist markets, such as the American society, with limited attention on the world’s largest consumer market – China. Therefore, this paper seeks to understand how consumer culture is used by Chinese citizens to negotiate their national identity in this modern world.

Further, this paper departs from a conventional focus on the consumption of consumer goods to focus on international tourism. The rationale for choosing international tourism as the research context owes to the phenomenal rise of Chinese outbound tourism in recent years. Hsu et al. (2007) underscored that leisure travel was traditionally seen as a luxurious activity reserved for the rich and powerful, however, with the rapid development of China's economy, international tourism is increasingly seen as a popular leisure activity for the rising middle-class (Li, 2016). As the world's largest tourist-generating market, an estimate of 100 million outbound Chinese tourists would travel internationally by 2020. Nevertheless, there is limited studies that use international tourism as a consumption context in existing CCT literature. Anchoring on this research gap, as well as the theme of the 2019 CCT conference – future, this study argues that it is timely and apt to explore how international tourism is used to facilitate identity negotiation by Chinese citizens. In so doing, it seeks to advance the important research stream of consumer identity projects.

## II. CONSUMER IDENTITY PROJECTS

Fundamentally, CCT is concerned with how consumers structure their lives around consumption to experience multiple realities in their social world (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). As one of the principal pillars in CCT, consumer identity projects accentuates the co-constitutive and co-productive ways that consumers adopt, along with marketer-generated materials to forge a sense of self (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Belk, 1988). A plethora of studies has established that consumption plays a significant role in consumers role and identity negotiation projects (Scaraboto & Fischer, 2013). Individuals and collectives attach symbolic meaning to consumption which facilitates identity negotiation and allow individuals to construct their respective narratives of identity for varying reasons (Belk, 1988; Thompson & Hirschman, 1995).

Leisure activities are gaining traction as an important consumption activity that enables symbolic expression, as individuals consume an array of activities to express and affirm their true or desired identities (Dimanche & Samdahl, 1994). Therefore, as a prominent form of leisure activity, tourism is increasingly recognized as an important instrument for identity negotiation. In this paradigm, tourism is seen as a significant avenue where experiences and symbols are consumed. Importantly, tourism entails consumption outside of one's regular social environment, the opportunity that tourism offers for identity expression and symbolic representations is often more conspicuous and preferred (Colton, 1987). Dimanche and Samdahl (1994) correspondingly noted that the rapid growth of the tourism industry deserves greater scholarly attention to explore how leisure consumption facilitates identity negotiation.

Munt (1994) discussed how tourism consumption is used for identity construction, in particular, how postmodern tourists (new middle class) construct their new middle-class identities by traveling to Third World destinations such as Ghana and Latin American countries. Accordingly, the new middle class is characterized by an "hegemonic struggle" for cultural and class superiority (p. 110), and tourism offers a platform for them to

negotiate their authentic identities. Particularly in those less developed destinations, travel experiences produce a feeling of "uniqueness" (p. 108), allowing these individuals, specifically the younger tourists to assert their middle-class identities. In this instance, tourism consumption is an instrument to reimagine one's identity. The aforementioned studies are pivotal towards developing an understanding of how tourism consumption is used for identity works and offers the evidence that tourism can be important and meaningful to people's lives, rather than just being hedonistic.

## III. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted qualitative means such as in-depth interviews, field notes and participant observations to collect the necessary data. Data collection was conducted between January and December in 2018 in two phases. During the first phase, the researcher participated in two different bus tours with Chinese tourists who were visiting Malaysia. A total of 11 interviews were collected in-situ, along with field notes and participant observations. The second phase was conducted through individual face-to-face interviews with 8 Chinese citizens who have traveled to Malaysia. All 19 interviews were conducted with informants aged between 21 to 72, in Mandarin. All interviews were audio-taped with permission granted by the informants and transcribed verbatim in Chinese and subsequently translated to English. The findings are based on approximately 9 hours of interviews that resulted in 310 pages of transcripts and fieldnotes. The data was analyzed using descriptive coding and thematic analysis. As a common approach in qualitative studies, thematic analysis relies on the researcher to "identify, analyze and report themes within data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.79).

## IV. FINDINGS

The analysis identified three themes associated with the identity negotiation of Chinese tourists – China's great rejuvenation, China's soft power and patriotism. The following section will be discussed vis-à-vis the respective subthemes. In addition, a thematic map (Figure 1) is also developed based on the findings to better illustrate the key themes and how they address the research question.

### A. China's Great Rejuvenation

The first key theme that emerged from the data is "rejuvenation". It appears that, through traveling to another country, Chinese citizens are able to see China's "rejuvenation" from its decades of national hardship. Three subthemes were identified, namely, (1) overcoming hardship, (2) comparison with other countries and (3) prejudice of other countries. Several informants, specifically the senior tourists shared how China has managed to overcome national hardship in recent years. As Grandpa Wang shared, "*our China overcame the hardship to get to where we are, I experienced this whole progress personally, I was born in 1947, I grew up with People's Republic of China... Quality of life has been improving, this is truly happening in China, I am not lying. We started off we RMB 38, now it has increased to RMB 4000.*"

Similarly, Li also compared with his past experiences. *“Living in China, it is definitely better than in the 60s or 70s, we live in peace and work happily now, we can do whatever we want based on our will, we can travel to many different countries, we are more relaxed now.”*

As the informants are predominantly senior tourists, many of them witnessed China’s economic miracle and testified how the communist party led the country out of its protracted suffering, noting how quality of life has significantly improved. The informants also highlighted that China’s economic growth has greatly improved the economic status of its people, giving them the ability to consume luxury services, such as traveling abroad. According to the findings, traveling abroad also allow Chinese citizens to realize and witness the extent of China’s developments. During their trip to Malaysia, some informants noticed the large-scale Chinese investments in the country. *“I went to Genting this time, the casino and the big theme park. The theme park was built by a Chinese, Mr. Lin, and in just more than a year, when the big theme park is open for business, we would visit Malaysia again.”* (Lin). One of the younger informants, Wu, also expressed his pride when he found out that one of the Malaysian national cars has been acquired by a Chinese company.

*“I saw China Construction Bank, many aunties would tell me that oh, this place is a Chinese investment, that road is built by some Chinese businessman. These made me realize that Chinese people are not just developing and investing domestically, they have also ventured out of the country. Also, I think one of the Malaysian national cars is sold to Chinese... I was just joking about it a few days ago when I saw one. I said that it is actually a Chinese car now.”*

The informants in this study has expressed much pride about their country’s strong global influences. *“when your country is powerful, they can arrange for resources anytime they need to, in times of emergency. You are not constrained by capitalist systems, for instance, some airlines in other countries might be financially constrained to send out planes so quickly.”* (Yi).

The Chinese government’s global influence provides them with a sense of security and assurance when they travel abroad. *“There are so many Chinese traveling out for tourism or to work in other countries, China is a powerful country, and this deeply assures me... not too long ago, there were some problems in Indonesia and Africa... our government immediately sent out planes or ships to rescue our citizens”* (Lin). The global presence of Chinese embassies and how they can rely on the government in case of emergency. *“Our China is now powerful, when we travel abroad, our embassy and consular office would be contactable with just a phone call to provide us with assistance.”* (Pan). Informants drew examples from the recent events where the Chinese government rescued Chinese citizens who were stranded in other countries, for example, in 2017, the Chinese government arranged for planes to bring Chinese citizens home within a short period of time when Mount Agung, a volcano in Bali island of Indonesia erupted, paralyzing all forms of aviation travel.

Interestingly, during the interview with Grandpa Hao, a fellow tour member interrupted and asked: *“have you seen Wolf Warrior? It has brought the country so much pride... so many Chinese were stranded there, and our government managed to bring all of them home.”* Importantly, Wolf Warrior is a Chinese-made movie that featured how a Chinese soldier rescued Chinese nationals from all over the world. The movie was an immense hit in Chinese cinema, and many citizens believe the movie to be factual. It is noteworthy that tourists may be subjected to various forms of travel risks during travel, and the belief that one’s country is powerful, can offer protection and a sense of assurance to these tourists.

Furthermore, while the informants highlighted that traveling abroad has given them the opportunity to experience different cultures, it has, more importantly allowed Chinese citizens to observe the level of advancements in China. Uncle Li elaborated that traveling provided him with the ability to compare China with other countries, and in so doing, allow him to understand China’s rejuvenation.

*“I travel to observe the economic progress of other countries and to compare it with our economy. We would focus on how civilized a society is, its infrastructural development and the issues related to China”.*

More importantly, as Tang noted, *“when we are in China, we tend to focus on the inadequacies of our country and we would resent the government or to criticize them, but when you travel abroad.... You will realize, wow, China is actually the world leader in so many aspects of development.”* Mainly, traveling provided a platform for these informants to draw comparisons with other countries. In comparing China with other countries, these informants were able to understand how far China has progressed and surpassed other nations, for example, Grandpa Hao illustrated his travel experience in Malaysia, and noted that in comparison to China, the standard of living in Malaysia seems to be lower than that of China, *“the people here seem to be suffering more”*. In addition, many of the informants also mentioned about concerns about safety during travel. An informant recounted an incident whereby one of the tour members was nearly robbed in the capital city of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur. The victim, a younger member of the tour group, revealed that the robbers attempted to grab his gold necklace, but he was responsive enough to fight them off. The unfortunate incident left a negative impression of Malaysia amongst Chinese citizens.

Wen, for instance, highlighted that *“In comparison, Malaysia’s safety is a great concern... in China, the law and order is stricter, even though there are still criminal activities, they would not brazenly commit crimes, in Malaysia, it is different.”* The findings suggest an association between crime rate and social progress. As the informants in this study seemed to associate a country’s crime rate to its social progress. As they encounter or receive information about the crime rates in Malaysia, these Chinese citizens agreed that China has better social progress with relatively lower crime rates.

Ye, on the other hand, made reference to Malaysia's standard of living. *"Other than the capital city Kuala Lumpur, I think Malaysia still lacks in the overall convenience or accessibility in daily life, it is not as convenient as it is in China or in Singapore... but you have to understand that that is probably how Malaysians are, they are slower, unlike the Chinese who are a lot more efficient."*

It is interesting to note that some informants have drew comparison to China's greatest competitor – America. As grandpa Wang shared, *"I travelled to America, it is a country that is so different from China, to see how great America is... after I arrived, I was really disappointed. America is nothing like China"*. A similar viewpoint is shared by a younger informant, Wu, *"I visited Los Angeles, you would often see in the news that the United States is the most powerful country in the world... however once you have visited, you would realize, even their roads are not properly fixed, it is almost like deserts along the freeways, unlike our Shenzhen, there is green sceneries along the freeway, with flowers, lanterns, everything is beautiful."* He further elaborated on issues related to safety in America. *"In America, when you walk in the streets at night, you would not feel safe. In China, at least in Shenzhen, I can proudly tell you that if I were to walk in the streets at night, I would feel safe, however, when I was in Los Angeles... I always felt that I had to fasten my pace or to refrain from going out... visiting there made me realize that China is indeed good."*

### B. China's Soft Power

Under this theme, two subthemes were identified – (1) spread of Chinese culture, (2) consumption power of Chinese and (3) ability to help poor countries. During the trips to Malaysia and other countries, the informants observed that their local tour guides were fluent in Mandarin Chinese and seemed to have a profound knowledge of China. As Uncle Lin observed, *"this tour guide is pretty good, at least he has a profound knowledge about Chinese culture, the geographical aspect and everything."* To the Chinese tourists, when a foreign country shows an effort to understand Chinese language or culture, it implies that China is becoming an important country and market for other countries. In addition, grandpa Hao also proudly claimed that foreign tourists love to visit the Tiananmen Square because they are attracted to the Chinese culture. *"Why do foreigners like to come to Tiananmen Square in Beijing? It is because they like our culture, that Chinese people are friendly and hospitable"*.

Some others also noted that Chinese online payment systems such as Alipay and WeChat are now broadly accepted in countries such as Japan and Singapore. The informants perceive this to be a sign that Chinese tourists are an important market. Uncle Pan asserted that *"in Singapore and some places in Malaysia, we can use Alipay... In Japan, Alipay is supported everywhere, very convenient"*. Wu described his sentiment when more countries accept Chinese payment systems: *"From what I know, no other cities in the world has a fully-running phone payment system, most of them still use cards. But what I am most proud of as a Chinese is that many of these cities are starting to install and support WeChat and Alipay, this means*

*that they are aware of the importance of such payment systems. It is because such payment systems are only used by the Chinese people and would bring convenience to only Chinese people, not other nationals. This makes me really proud to be a Chinese, because it is not that we are adapting to them, it is the reverse, they are learning to adapt to us, learning how to make us feel comfortable when visiting their country."*

On a more interesting note, some of the informants also highlighted the pitfalls of the wealth and affluence of Chinese people. Drawing reference to his travel experience in Korea, Wu noted how Korean salesperson tend to overcharge Chinese tourists. *"When you go to a country and they know that you are from China, you might end up spending more than other tourists. It is because they know that you are a Chinese and Chinese people are often richer, therefore they would charge a higher price."* Tang correspondingly noted that the wealth of Chinese people sometimes put them at risk asserting that Chinese people are easy targets because they are rich. *"It is a miso-affluence mentality, because China is developing rapidly, and more Chinese people are becoming wealthy. When they travel to Europe, they tend to purchase a lot of luxury products and many times these locals would question 'why are you able to develop so quickly? You were once such a backward country; how dare you attain such development within twenty-thirty years?"*

On the other hand, China's ability to help other nations signifies China's strong international influences. To many of the informants, the act of traveling can be seen as *"helping the poor"*. Grandpa Hao viewed traveling to Malaysia as helping a poorer country. *"I heard from our tour guide that Malaysia and China have good relations, that is a good thing. Chinese are always willing to help the poor, we would try to help as much as we can... as Han Chinese, there are so many of us all over the world now. We love to help poor people and let them get rich too."* It should, however, be noted that this intention to help a "poor" country may be motivated by the desire to exhibit China's new-found power, rather than for altruistic motives. As aunty Cai averred, *"China is powerful now, unlike in the past, where Chinese people were despised by others, I think Chinese people's voice can finally be heard now"*.

### C. Patriotism

The final theme identified in this study is "patriotism". Under this emergent theme, traveling abroad allow them to feel proud of their country and to express their patriotism. Three subthemes emerged in the data: (1) favoring allies of China, (2) protecting China's dignity and honor as well as (3) representing China.

Informants have shared that they prefer to visit countries with friendly diplomatic ties with China, more importantly, countries that shared similar history and communist ideology were viewed as allies, for example, the strong ties between Russia and China have created a positive impression amongst Chinese citizens, especially for senior citizens who have a deeper recognition of Russia as a former communist state, the open-door policy and ability to travel abroad allows them to

visit their ally to foster a stronger tie. Grandpa Hao asserted that he would like to take his wife to Russia and North Korea, but he would not “dare to” visit America as he is just a commoner and he does not feel safe in a rivalry state. To further exemplify, the majority of the informants also draw upon the shared history, such as the atrocities by the Japanese during the Second World War, as well as disputes with the United States to further showcase their animosity to these countries. Many have directly expressed that they would not visit Japan due to the past and recent disputes.

*“I would not go to Japan, I would not... I really dislike Japanese and their cultures. Especially with what they did to our motherland, during the second World War, the brutality and massacre, the negative impression is entrenched, I would not go to this country.”* (Lin)

*“The pain associated with that generation is still there, especially our older generation. Those painful experiences are not erasable because it is ingrained in us, even more so for our generation, it is etched in their memories”.* (Cai)

Furthermore, informants see the ability to travel as power and allows these citizens to protect the country’s honor and dignity, demonstrating their patriotism and express their national identity. To illustrate, auntie Liu commented that she used to want to visit Korea, but the dispute with China over the installation of the THAAD system has desisted her from going. *“I want to protect my country’s honor and dignity.”* This sentiment is also shared by many others:

*“I saw in the news that some countries, such as the Philippines had some territorial dispute in the South China Sea with us, during that period, I did not want to visit that country. Why should I visit that country to contribute to its economy?”* (Wu)

Informants also see traveling as a way for Chinese citizens to represent their country to the outside world. *“As a Chinese, traveling abroad means you are a representation of China. Whenever I travel, I would pay particular attention to my own speech and behavior, I would like to establish an impression that China is a powerful country.”* (Tang). This resonates with Yi, who asserted that *“as a Chinese citizen, traveling is good, as long as you don’t do anything embarrassing to the country. Otherwise, it is a good bonus and contributes to our country’s global influences, especially in poor countries. When you go to developed countries, you are essentially promoting China.”* Additionally, the outside world seems to have a rather negative impression of Chinese people, and they would like to correct that wrong impression when they are abroad.

*“Whenever I was treated unfairly or poorly, I would try to show them in some ways that I am a Chinese citizen, that even though you look down on Chinese people you still have to provide service for me... Many countries might not like China, but they are afraid of us because we are stronger than them, and that their economy depends on us... they know no matter how much they dislike China, they have to acknowledge that our country contributes to their economy, they cannot deny this.”*

*“When these countries or people are forced to accept our presence, I feel especially proud.”* (Wu)

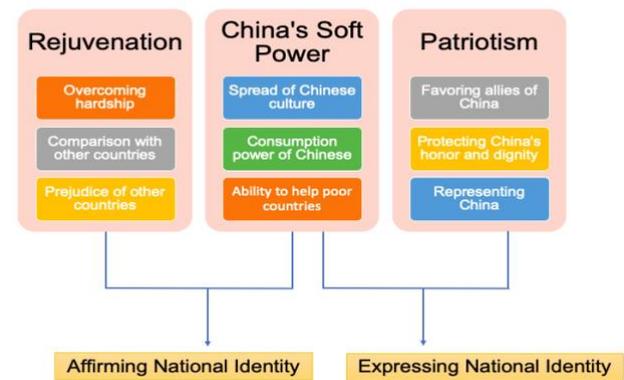


Figure 1. Thematic Map

## V. DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

International tourism is seen as a consumption practice used by Chinese citizens to **affirm** and to **express** their national identity. The themes “rejuvenation” and “China’s soft power” both echo the desire to see the world outside of China in order to understand China’s current international standing. International tourism provides an opportunity to compare China with other nations. Several informants have lived through hardship, such as the widespread famine and Cultural Revolution under Mao’s regime. Decades, or even centuries of hardship have created the general perception of China as the “Sick man of East Asia” (Gries, 2004, p. 71). The open-door policy in late 1980s, however, has greatly alleviated China’s protracted economic and social predicaments. For these informants, their experience and participation in the country’s growth, from past difficult times to the current economic status has given them a sense of attachment to the nation. The communist party has also devoted considerable efforts to instill patriotism by creating a Chinese national identity. National humiliation and victimhood have been used by the government as a discourse in Chinese identity politics (Wang, 2014, p. 2).

The theme “rejuvenation” shows, for instance, how the act of traveling abroad is a way to show that the country has overcome hardship, as people are now affluent and can afford travel (Hsu et al., 2007). Moreover, traveling abroad also gives Chinese citizens a chance to visit other countries to draw comparisons with China. These comparisons allow them to observe how China is “better” than other countries, such as Malaysia and the United States. As noted by Wang (2014), the concept of rejuvenation is ingrained in China’s national experience and collective memory, it represents the desire of be “strong, prosperous and free of foreign invasion”, and it is an integral constituent to a successful construction of China’s national identity (p. 11). This theme also resonates with the identity motive of “distinctiveness” proposed by Vignoles et al. (2006), which posits that individuals seek to establish and maintain a sense of differentiation from others, as distinctiveness provides a meaningful sense of identity. In comparing with other countries and to narrate how far the country has “rejuvenated”, Chinese tourists appear to use

traveling as a way to differentiate themselves from others, in so doing, affirm their national identity.

The concept of soft power was coined by Nye (1990) to describe how a country achieves international legitimacy by influencing other countries to obtain the outcomes it wants “through attraction rather than coercion or payment” (p. 94). Evident in the “China’s soft power” theme, China’s growing international influence and soft power has given them the upper hand to influence a country’s economic progress. Owing to the spending propensity of the Chinese and desire to consume luxury products, major tourism destinations, such as France and Germany receive a large number of Chinese tourists annually, and their expenditures also constitute a large component of these countries’ tourism receipts. The adoption of Chinese online payment system is a telling example of how Chinese tourists are sought after by countries. It is of particular importance to note here that these popular destinations previously belonged to the “Eight-Nation Alliance” coalition that colonized China. The economic dependence of these countries can therefore be seen as the Chinese’s way of affirming and expressing their national identity and to show the world that they have come out of the humiliation imposed by these countries. Accordingly, Chinese are inherently proud of their ancient civilization and achievements, the “humiliation experience” incurred on them by the West and the Japanese motivates the Chinese to revive its past glory and display their identities to the world (Wang, 2014, p. 4). Thus, as China achieves global prominence on the world stage, along with its growing soft power through tourism (Shambaugh, 2013), Chinese citizens are able to affirm their national identity, and in this process, also confirm that their country has indeed been rejuvenated and surpassed their former rivals. Concurring with the identity motive of “self-esteem”, which refers to the desire to “maintain and enhance a positive conception of oneself” (Gecas, 1982, p. 20), traveling allows the Chinese citizens to recognize and to confirm with their self-perception that China is a powerful country.

Furthermore, under the theme of “Patriotism”, traveling abroad appears to be an instrument for Chinese citizens to express their national identity. Notably, their economic affluence allows them to pledge their loyalty by not visiting countries that are in political wrangle with the Chinese government. According to Wang (2006), there is a noticeable rise of consumer nationalism in China, wherein Chinese consumers wield their consuming power to demonstrate their national identity and patriotism. In a similar vein, traveling to countries that are allies of China, such as Russia and North Korea is another way of exhibiting patriotism. Vignoles et al. (2006) contended that individuals may have a belonging motive, which refers to “the need to maintain or enhance feeling of closeness to, to acceptance by, other people” (p. 310). It is plausible that the constant display of patriotism and pride for the country could be due to a desire for these Chinese citizens to establish a sense of belonging to their motherland. Following the conclusion of the Second World War in 1945 and China’s economic development since 1979, Chinese people seemed more eager to engage in consumption as well as to demonstrate to the world about China’s present developments. As Oakes

(1998) explicated, China’s national identity is largely shaped by the collective aspirations to restore their pride and dignity as the decedents of the Yellow Emperor and Dragon and to obtain wealth and power. These aspirations are etched in the collective memories of Chinese citizens and embedded in national identity making. Chinese citizens are inherently proud of their nation’s civilization and past glory, along with its rapid economic developments, Chinese people are seemingly eager to demonstrate to the world their national identity in various ways.

In essence, this study has demonstrated the ways in which Chinese tourists use tourism as a consumption instrument to negotiate their identity, predominantly on affirming and expressing what it means to be a Chinese in the modern world. Evidently, the Chinese tourists in this study have shown conspicuous efforts to negotiate their national identities during their travels, exemplified in their proclivities to compare themselves with the quality of life in the destination country, or to believe that countries depend heavily on the Chinese tourists. More specifically, it allowed them to invalidate the “Sick Man of East Asia” narrative by exhibiting their international and economic influences through traveling. To the Chinese citizens, traveling abroad has allowed them to recognize their country as the “Strong Man of East Asia”. As the first scholarly attempt to examine how Chinese citizens negotiate their national identity in the tourism context, it has uncovered important findings that are unique of the Chinese consumer culture context. Given that Chinese people are known to be economically affluent and generous consumers, future research can be initiated to investigate identity negotiation with Chinese citizens in other consumption contexts.

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# Linked Legitimacy as a Driver for Sustainable Business Models

Melea Press and Isabelle Robert

*Abstract*— We suggest that legitimacy is key to unpacking how sustainable business models (SBMs) develop and grow, which is not well understood. We explore the cultural context for legitimacy development and introduce *linked legitimacy* as a key driver for developing SBMs within a firm's ecosystems and across boundaries into the overlapping ecosystems of firms' stakeholders. Using data from three business cases we explore how firms build and exploit linked legitimacy and how this leads to SBM development. Using data from three cases from the energy industry, we identify ways that firms develop and both firms and their stakeholders exploit linked legitimacy.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

How sustainable business models (SBMs) develop and grow is not well understood. In this paper we explore the cultural context for legitimacy development is not well understood. Further, the connection between legitimacy development and SBM development has been largely ignored. In this paper we use legitimacy as a lens to explore how sustainable business models (SBMs) develop within and across business ecosystems. Past research on SBMs assumes one of two scenarios. The first is that the SBM is created by and for individual firms; that the SBM is a type of business model (BM) for a focal firm. The second conceptualization is of SBMs as collaborative efforts toward sustainability, such as sustainability networks, eco-industrial parks, and sustainability syndicates; these present a view of SBMs that focus on a shared collective goal and shared governance. However, neither conceptualization of SBMs identify how SBMs are built or how they grow. Indeed, this is an area that has been identified as needing more research (Zollo, Cennamo, and Neumann, 2013).

In this paper we explore how legitimacy as a resource that is created through sustainable development projects. We use a cultural lens to explore how legitimacy is created in organizations and how legitimacy can be used and shared across ecosystem stakeholders once it exists. We introduce the idea of *linked legitimacy* as a key driver for developing SBMs both within the business ecosystem of the focal firm, and crossing boundaries into the overlapping ecosystems of their stakeholders. Using data from three business cases we explore different ways firms build and exploit linked legitimacy and how this leads to SBM development. In our cases, linked legitimacy is a resource built around sustainable development projects, and

thus is linked to principles of sustainable business strategies or action around sustainability. While it is recognized that SBMs must have porous firm boundaries and acknowledge a variety of stakeholders, the means of transportation past these boundaries has not been identified. We suggest that linked legitimacy is the driver transportation across firm boundaries that allows the resource to be exploited broadly by ecosystem stakeholders. Finally, we re-conceptualize the rules of engagement for developing SBMs. In our model of SBM development, each firm then takes advantage of the resource (*linked legitimacy*) available in the ecosystem and is free to use it opportunistically; this drives SBM development.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. Legitimacy

Legitimacy has long been a topic of interest in general management studies (Dowling and Pfeffer, 1975; Suchman, 1995) and, increasingly, in marketing research (e.g., Giesler, 2007; Humphreys, 2010; Press and Arnould, 2011, 2014). Legitimacy is the understandings about acceptable, desirable and appropriate actions (Suchman, 1995). Firm legitimacy is considered a resource necessary for getting other resources (Zimmerman and Zeitz, 2002). Thus, this resource contributes to firm success, especially with a fledgling endeavor. In an organizational context, legitimacy implies shared social worlds that coordinate stakeholder actions to reinforce the stability of a given social order (Press et al., 2014), and this order is reinforced by the expectation and effects of external order, including laws, social norms, and cultural habitus (Weber, 1978).

Legitimacy is a construct typically focused on one firm. Legitimacy for the focal firm comes from internal actions aimed

at external stakeholders who then endorse the validity of the focal firm (Drori and Honig 2013; Johnson et al. 2008; Zimmerman and Zeitz 2002). Research on new ventures presupposes that legitimacy comes from the activities an organization engages in to build its own legitimacy, which is then given by external stakeholders based on how well the focal firm has succeeded in impression management (Tomikoski and Newbert 2007; Uberbacher 2014). However, this conceptualization constrains legitimacy to outcomes including accumulation of additional resources, customers, clients, and investors, all for the focal firm (Bitektine and Haack 2015; Drori and Honig 2013). In this paper we propose that, rather than being a firm-focused resource, legitimacy is created through engagement with the market and thus is a resource that is available to actors in the focal business ecosystem for their own opportunistic purposes. The cases presented here illustrate how organizations in the focal ecosystem use legitimacy to develop their businesses.

Many studies of legitimacy in new ventures use an institutional approach, which supposes that legitimacy comes from shared beliefs about normal behavior (Meyer and Rowan 1977). New entrants with a sustainable development agenda can seek legitimacy in established markets by changing perspectives at a higher level or by changing the performance criteria of product options (Bergek, Jacobsson and Sandén 2008). This dovetails with suggestions to align with other entrepreneurs to build collective legitimacy for a general issue or product (Thompson, Purdy and Ventresca 2018) or to build legitimacy for a particular cause, such as sustainable forestry or fisheries, or general environmental or social issues (Crespin-Mazet and Dontenwill, 2012; Uberbacher 2014). All of this research identifies legitimacy as being enmeshed with a particular source. Thus, the focal firm does not receive a general “legitimacy” but a constrained legitimacy that is linked to a particular action or project. For example, one firm is bestowed with legitimacy linked to good business practice, another firm gains legitimacy linked to good financial reports, another has legitimacy linked to commitment to sustainable forestry (specific cause). We refer to this as *linked legitimacy*.

Legitimacy in the sustainability space has been defined as a “general assumption by the supplier’s stakeholders that the actions of the firm are authentically respecting the three components of sustainability i.e. environmental stewardship, social equity and economic performance” (Crespin-Mazet and Dontenwill, 2012, 2009). Strategies for new venture legitimacy creation are echoed in the sustainability space and here they are tied to specific sustainable development projects (Crespin-Mazet and Dontenwill, 2012). Thus, linked legitimacy is tied to its origin and cannot be separated from it. Linked legitimacy as a resource may be taken by firms and used to build other projects, but only if those projects are consistent with the linked content of the legitimacy. For example, if a firm gained legitimacy around a sustainable forestry project, it could use that legitimacy to innovate new products that promoted the values, norms, and shared understandings and actions stemming from alignment with the cause of sustainable forests (Suchmann, 1995). However, the firm could not use that legitimacy to innovate in ways that were oppositional to values, norms and understandings surrounding sustainable forestry. As linked legitimacy is developed as a resource, its uses are constrained by

its linked meaning. In this article, we introduce *linked legitimacy* as a key to spreading SBMs across different business ecosystems. We argue that dynamic capabilities around building legitimacy will benefit firms and stakeholders, and will lead to proliferation of SBMs.

### B. Sustainable Business Models

The SBM should have an explicit sustainability orientation that integrates triple bottom line concerns and be able to identify how the firm creates economic value without creating negative externalities (Schaltegger et al. 2016), have a broad notion of value creation and capture (Lüdeke-Freund, 2010; Rauteur et al., 2017;) that is communicated broadly to explicitly-recognized stakeholders, and be able to identify for whom value is created (Lüdeke-Freund and Dembek 2017; Schaltegger et al. 2016). The implication is that sustainability must exist in a supply chain or ecosystem for a focal firm to successfully develop and employ a SBM (Crespin-Mazet and Dontenwill 2012). Further, adopting an SBM is seen as a catalyst for the transition to sustainability across the ecosystem (Bolton et al, 2016). However, there is very little discussion about how this happens for focal firms, let alone for business ecosystems and there is hardly any discussion on how SBMs actually develop. We identify legitimacy linked to sustainable development projects as a resource that organizations use to develop SBMs across overlapping business ecosystems.

We wish to counter two points about sustainability. There are that “[1] sustainability strategies demand shared responsibilities...[and 2;] efforts are risky and involve significant financial commitments” (Seshadri, 2013, 765). These ideas promote the belief that sustainability strategies are both risky and costly for organizations (Connelly, Ketchen and Slater, 2011; Sancha, Gimenez, and Sierra, 2016) and limit a firm’s ability to see innovation opportunities in these constraints. We present a different conceptualization of SBM where groups of organizations interact in overlapping ecosystems, building and using linked legitimacy for innovation opportunities. Here, linked legitimacy is the key resource that is created, shared, exploited, and which enables each business to continue to expand the SBM.

## III.CONTEXT

Data were collected in the "Hauts de France" region (in the north of France), which has experienced several economic upheavals in the coal, iron and steel industry (19th century) and in the textile industry (20th century). In 2013, “Hauts de France” decided to promote sustainability as a regional development model. Over the course of nine months, multiple stakeholders worked to develop a long range plan called “Rev’3.” This plan focuses on the use of renewable energies, new ways to produce and consume responsibly, sustainable mobility, improvement in quality of life, well-being, and job creation.

## IV.METHODOLOGY

Following Eisenhardt (1989), we use a comparative analysis within and across three case studies to identify processes of legitimacy development and SBM expansion. We selected three companies from the energy sector (Gecco, ArcelorMittal and

Dumont), which illustrates a diversity of approaches to integrating sustainability into business models. In addition, highlighting three cases from the same sector allows us to explore similarities and tensions in the SBM ecosystems (Eisenhardt et Grabner, 2007). The innovations of the SBM in the three cases are diverse both in terms of the nature of innovation and the development of the ecosystem.

Data were primarily qualitative and collected through interviews, documents, and observations (Ridder 2017). In 2016 and 2017, we conducted semi-structured interviews with managers and/or owners in each company, with key stakeholder, and with managers and owners at each company (Eisenhardt, 1989). In total, we conducted 28 interviews, which lasted between 20 minutes and three hours and 20 minutes (90 minutes on average). Each interview was recorded and transcribed. In addition, we engaged in participant observation at company meetings and forums on energy transition for entrepreneurs. Finally, we collected secondary data from 2014-2018 examining sources including as company websites, corporate, NGO and administration reports, local newspapers, information in social media and other artefacts.

## V. FINDINGS

We present cases from three companies that engage in sustainable development projects that touch on the energy sector. Gecco has developed a BM based on the transforming waste into fuel, Dumont has a vision of integrated value in building projects, increasing energy efficiency, and ArcelorMittal engages in projects that directly address local environmental and social issues, including transforming waste heat into residential heat and electricity. We discuss each case from the point of view of the focal firm, and also offer insight into how others in the ecosystem were affected by actions, choices, and alliances.

### A. *Gecco*

The first case illustrates how the focal firm used linked legitimacy created through relationships to obtain financial funds, develop a scientific research program and diversify its products and activities. At its start in 2007, Gecco collected used oil from restaurants and chip shops and sold it to a Belgian intermediary that re-sold it to biodiesel plants in Europe. Since then Gecco has worked on several projects, including waste collection, biodiesel production, and consulting. Gecco benefitted from national recognition from the Ministry of Economy and Ministry of Agriculture that gave it an early boost as a business engaged in important work. Gecco used this early recognition plus its social networks to build the strategic partnerships it needed to grow. A regional business network helped Gecco emerge as a “real business” that was engaged in issues around waste, alternative fuels, and circular economy.

Part of Gecco’s plan was developing a new procedure to transform oil into biodiesel, which remains a novelty for biodiesel production. In 2010, Gecco received support from the University as well as significant support from many small individual donations to develop its biodiesel process. Over the next five years, Gecco successfully developed the biodiesel

process, which was overseen by a PhD candidate in biochemical engineering who was funded by Gecco. This process added research and technology as elements of Gecco’s linked legitimacy.

The relationship with McCain, the largest frozen French fry producer in the world, gave Gecco formal access to the used oil in their factories, opened a network of restaurants to collect used oil, and significantly increased the amount of oil Gecco was collecting, creating stability in terms of accessing its main material input. In 2014, McCain contributed funding to Gecco’s lab to help promote the development of their biodiesel technology, solidifying McCain’s role as a key player in Gecco’s network. In 2016, Gecco received an EU grant to further develop its lab.

While it was perfecting its biodiesel production, Gecco built a relationship with the City that leveraged Gecco’s linked legitimacy as an answer to the City’s political pressures. In 2017, Gecco began a pilot program selling its biodiesel to the City of Lille to power a bus, a street washer and street sweeper. Gecco’s BM transformed from passing fry oil through its supply chain to a BM focused on transforming local waste into locally-used product.

In 2016, Gecco’s founder recognized a market opportunity to spearhead a “total solution for all organic waste” from restaurants. In addition, Gecco recently started a consulting and training program, helping project leaders in other regions of France navigate regulations, certifications, collection logistics, and build an efficient and circular waste collection program.

Gecco’s partners benefit from the linked legitimacy created in their projects and relationships. McCain’s partnership with Gecco represents a way to bolster existing CSR activity. The partnership supports McCain’s policy to develop social businesses in the region, it expands McCain’s CSR story by addressing downstream waste in their supply chain and highlighting engagement with circular economy project, and thus, it helps McCain build legitimacy with local potato farmers and customers. Supporting Gecco’s biodiesel production process further solidified McCain as an innovative leader in CSR in their industry.

The City of Lille partnered with Gecco in a politicized move to buy local biodiesel to promote energy autonomy in the region. The City of Lille benefits from its relationship with Gecco in several ways; it fits into a city policy to end the use of diesel in municipal vehicles (more vehicles will be powered by biodiesel in the future), promotes energy autonomy, improves air quality, adds jobs through collaboration with startups, and generally provides political and reputational support for the City. Linked legitimacy developed through this partnership improved Lille’s reputation as an innovative city because it supports local business innovations and works toward a circular economy.

While the structure and governance of individual projects remain with Gecco, benefits from linked legitimacy are shared, allowing stakeholders to develop new projects. Further, stakeholders beyond those directly engaged in projects with Gecco also benefit from access to Gecco’s linked legitimacy and use this resource to address their own goals. For example, the social business network promotes Gecco as a great example of how social business can be relevant and innovative, which helps the network gain additional support from funders. In these ways, linked legitimacy emerges as a key resource in developing and

expanding SBMs across the overlapping business ecosystems of Gecco and its stakeholders.

### B. ArcelorMittal Dunkirk

The second case illustrates a model in which the focal firm reluctantly adopts sustainable development projects as a result of external pressures. ArcelorMittal is one of the largest steel producers in the world. It employs over 230,000 people in 60 countries worldwide. ArcelorMittal is the dominant firm in a large industrial park on the northern coast of France in the Dunkirk-Grande Synthe zone. On its website it states it is one of the leading industrial sites in France in terms of energy recovery. It describes the efforts it makes toward sustainable development along the coastline, promoting biodiversity, for example. However, while ArcelorMittal became the dominant company in the region in terms of employment and economic generation starting in the 1960s, it also disfigured the coastal landscape and generated an enormous amount of pollution. For many years, local residents have pressured ArcelorMittal to improve air quality by reducing industrial discharge. At the same time, Dunkirk is plagued by high unemployment due to the decline of industry and this steel mill has been a stable source of employment for people in the region. Since the 1990s, sustainable development projects taken on by ArcelorMittal stemmed from an urgency to respond to social and regulatory pressure.

Starting in the 1960s, ArcelorMittal had relationships with private actors that revalorized its industrial waste; these were motivated by economic gains. As in other industrial ecology examples (Chertow 2007), it was not until an outsider provided an environmental lens that ArcelorMittal began identifying such projects as anything beyond economically beneficial. In 1983, as part of an effort to reduce regional dependency on fossil fuels, the city of Dunkirk selected ArcelorMittal to build a district heating scheme with Dalkia, another firm. This heating system recovers steam from ArcelorMittal's blast furnaces and provides heat to over 6,000 private and municipal buildings, apartments and houses. In the partnership, ArcelorMittal gives the steam to Dalkia, but charges a "right to use" fee for the land to build the pipes to transmit heat to the dwellings. ArcelorMittal gained economic benefit from the partnership and decreased risk management costs by removing the need to cool steam in its industrial system, which is a potential serious health risk (like *legionellosis*). This was one of the first examples of industrial ecology in France and was, and still is, widely praised, generating legitimacy linked to industrial ecology for ArcelorMittal.

In the early 2000s, ArcelorMittal partnered with Gaz de France (GDF) to build DK6, a power plant that recovers waste from steel plant gas emissions and converts it into electricity. These two capture and transformation projects monetized waste, decreased negative externalities, and created legitimacy linked to industrial ecology, waste management, and sustainable development. In addition, following ECOPAL's inventory of material flows in the Dunkirk area, ECOPAL was able to connect ArcelorMittal with Sea Bulk, a firm that had technology to recover iron from fleet waste, which ArcelorMittal was then able to reuse.

ArcelorMittal is now attracting other manufactures that recognize potential for the waste and by-products generated by

its blast furnaces including a project to recover the steel slag to produce low carbon cement and a project to recover hydrogen produced during the coal combustion to use as fuel for new generation vehicles. The multiplication of projects enables ArcelorMittal France to position itself as a key innovator in industrial ecology and to participate in EU-Sponsored research projects. These projects build linked legitimacy for industrial ecology and pave the way for ArcelorMittal to replicate them at its other plants. The ongoing tension with local residents and environmental groups remains, as does pressure to continue work on environmental projects.

These projects were also useful for other members of ArcelorMittal's ecosystem (Crespin-Mazet and Döntenwill, 2012). GDF and Dalkia each gained economic value from the linked legitimacy they created with ArcelorMittal, improving the image and acceptance of a polluting industry in the region. Access to legitimacy linked to industrial ecology enabled Dalkia to focus on developing innovative energy recovery solutions and industrial ecology. Likewise, ECOPAL has been able to demonstrate the technical, economic and environmental reliability of industrial ecology and initiated cooperative projects. Finally, linked legitimacy developed in this ecosystem is used by the Urban Community of Dunkerque, a regional project focused on constructing regional energy excellence, promoting circular economy and reinforcing of the regional attractiveness.

### C. Dumont

The case of Dumont illustrates specific challenges in creating linked legitimacy through social networks. Dumont is a family company created in 1949. For most its existence it has focused on installing electrical, heating and plumbing systems for companies and residences. Today it employs 35 people.

Didier Dumont, the son of the founder, has a personal passion for sustainable development. In 2003, he took over the family business and he decided to focus on sustainable development by advocating for renewable energy installations among its clients (geothermal energy, heating and solar water, Canadian wells). In 2014, Dumont decided to extend this strategic change into a more challenging ideological change (Press et al. 2014) and wanted to transform the business from a product logic to a service logic. In B2C work, Dumont develops holistic energy solutions with each client, making suggestions for improvements and highlighting the quality of the service (e.g. responsiveness, respect of commitments, deadlines). This is the core of his business, however he wants to work on larger B2B projects. In B2B work, Dumont developed a value proposition to design and build sustainable housing projects that meets triple bottom line needs. He uses the concept of sustainable housing, which includes health (materials, electromagnetic waves), environmental (reduction of energy consumption and use of local products), and social (e.g. mixing generations, low-income housing) issues. So far, he has not been successful in B2B work.

Dumont has dedicated himself to creating a vision of an ideal housing development. Over the past four years, with the help of various experts he has articulated this vision in terms of the environmental impact of building and taking into account environmental efficiencies, done costing from a long-term perspective and chosen materials based on lifecycle analysis and

environmental and health implications, designed social spaces, and incorporated solutions for disabled residents and low income residents. His vision is compelling on economic, environmental and social dimensions. In addition, Dumont responds to large bids through a collaborative working group called Habiter. As a result of this cooperation, he has been a finalist for large housing development bids, but has not won any contracts. Thus, he has been unable to work on large residential development projects.

We will now highlight some of the constraints to Dumont's success. First, Dumont offers holistic bids, which are difficult for developers to understand because they are used to receiving separate bids for each functional area (e.g. building, plumbing, heating, glazing). Plus, Dumont includes things that developers do not know how to judge such as social mediation in case of conflict, modularity of housing over time, and participation of the client in the different steps of construction. Second, there is not currently external political or regulatory pressure on developers to build more sustainable housing from any perspective (e.g. long-term costing, environmental, social, health), so they have little incentive to partner with Dumont. Third, Dumont has not found a developer-partner who understands his vision, sees the economic potential, and is willing to be his advocate in the marketplace. Thus, Dumont is in a position of trying to gain legitimacy for his vision while remaining stuck outside the marketplace. Without working on an actual project that enacts the ideals of his vision, Dumont's efforts as a spokesperson for his vision build reputation, which marks him as a visionary in his circles, but do not build linked legitimacy to enter the marketplace. A final constraint is that Dumont's employees believe he is wasting his time and making their lives more difficult and employees are not engaged. While Dumont has not had success with his holistic housing vision, he has only been trying for four years and it may just take longer for him to influence how the building industry functions in France. He could be laying the groundwork for future change by infiltrating many small organizations and other grassroots efforts in social networks.

Benefits for ecosystem partners are minor because legitimacy linked to Dumont's holistic vision has not been created. However, legitimacy linked to a holistic service offer has developed within the group Habiter. As this group has gained the support of the region and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, more businesses have joined and specific businesses in Habiter have found new work based on holistic sustainable solutions. For example, Delacroix found new customers by offering a more substantial value proposition and additional services, and Sylvagreg altered its focus to maintenance of homes owned by an aging population and exploration of shared housing projects. However, members of Habiter face the same obstacles mentioned above concerning their interaction with real estate developers, and fail to win substantial tenders. It is possible that linked legitimacy built among the actors in Habiter could become a resource that allows them to access ecosystems open to partnering.

#### *D. Linked legitimacy across cases*

Our cases illustrate how linked legitimacy is developed as a resource available for ecosystem stakeholders to use for future projects. As legitimacy linked to sustainable development

projects grows, organizations recognize more opportunities to leverage it and SBMs grow, spread (even into other ecosystems) and are solidified through ongoing activity. Further, as linked legitimacy grows in scope, reputation and popularity, it becomes known and understood as a valuable and rare resource. Other ecosystem partners recognize the value of the resource and opportunistically seek to exploit it for their own projects, which may be only marginally linked to the firm that created the linked legitimacy.

Linked legitimacy illustrates one way that businesses identify opportunities for innovation and open their boundaries. Our cases show different examples of how firms do this. Gecco collaborates opportunistically and expands cautiously, retaining a clear value proposition and governance over its projects. Gecco uses linked legitimacy directly to build and expand the activities and content of its business model to open the door for bigger projects. Further, Gecco linked to larger cultural and political pressures in the region and found support from a large partner. Linked legitimacy is used by partners for their own projects.

ArcelorMittal is diligent in keeping control of the structure of its sustainable development projects. It controls the main economic activities of the firm while collaborating with social networks, governmental bodies, and NGOs to leverage legitimacy and good will gained from new projects. ArcelorMittal creates legitimacy linked to its expertise around industrial ecology. Over many years, it has learned how to interact with local residents/government/NGOs, even when it is contentious. ArcelorMittal illustrates how a firm can change over time as it engages in sustainable development projects; shifting from reluctant to publicizing their efforts. Linked legitimacy created by ArcelorMittal is used by ecosystem stakeholders to promote their own projects, including by the City of Dunkirk to promote itself as a green industrial city.

Dumont collaborates with a limited number of businesses and builds its value proposition through social networks. He is interested in creating linked legitimacy around an ideology, but the idea remains caught at the level of social networks and has not spread into the market. This case illustrates the necessity of concrete actions in the marketplace to build linked legitimacy. Perhaps his activity in networking circles will eventually lead to entrepreneurs who have been touched by his grand vision emerging with new businesses that enact these values. It could even be that he will gain traction in the B2B arena, but so far there has been no indication of this.

## VI. DISCUSSION

Some past work has framed SBMs in a cautionary tone, pointing out transaction costs, sustainability costs, opportunism, and a lack of a shared goal (Connelly et al., 2011; Sancha et al., 2016); our cases illustrate that firms can work on joint projects while having different specific goals that are fulfilled by the same project. We show how SBMs can develop in an overlapping ecosystem mode, through creation of linked legitimacy that can be used by several stakeholders, without the need for a trans-organizational BM governing the projects (Seshradi, 2013; Kramer and Pfitzer, 2016; Nidumolu et al., 2014; Norheim-Hansen, 2018). Thus, for example, Gecco transforms used fry oil into biodiesel and the City of Lille wants

to reduce diesel consumption and support local entrepreneurs. A common desire to engage with sustainable development projects, a common need for legitimacy, and a recognition that joint work and association with each other makes the linked legitimacy available to both parties incentivizes each organization to engage, increases likelihood that they achieve their goals. Further, we suggest that as linked legitimacy is created and spreads through stakeholder ecosystems, the structure, content and governance (BM elements) of sustainability projects are solidified. As legitimacy bolsters sustainable development projects, shapes BMs, and spreads across the focal firm's ecosystem and beyond, SBMs are also solidified. Thus, linked legitimacy that increases positive externalities and decreases negative externalities also builds SBMs. Without the antagonistic, constraining viewpoint of a risk-laden approach to adopting sustainability (Seshadri, 2013), organizations can create this resource, use it to operate as self-interested entities (Williamson, 1975), and at the same time be motivated to preserve and capitalize on linked legitimacy, thus innovating more sustainable development projects and expanding their SBMs.

We find factors that affect both the creation of and ability to use linked legitimacy in our cases. Internal factors include whether the firm is able to understand market needs in terms of the resource provided in the linked legitimacy. That is, does the firm have the capabilities to identify market needs in terms of content and communication? In addition, we find that whether a firm has internal buy-in for its strategic development direction affects its course of action (Drori and Honig 2013; Press et al. 2014) and ability to develop and exploit linked legitimacy. Further, having a marketplace partner who acts as an advocate for the focal firm helps develop projects in the market. Another factor is the presence of external political or regulatory pressure, which can accelerate the pace at which sustainable development projects are found, created and enacted. Finally, our data indicate that heterogeneity in ecosystems lends itself to increased and more creative sharing of ideas and seems to lead to more opportunities for innovation and success. These factors identify rich areas for future research as well.

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# Running fever: the role of social media in shaping extraordinary experience

**Fernanda Scussel, Maribel Suarez & Martin Petroll**

*Abstract*— This article explores the role of social media in shaping extraordinary experiences. We have investigated the extraordinary experience of runners participating in a 140km relay marathon in an island in the south of Brazil. Resorting to participant observation, interviews and netnography, we have found that social media is both a facilitator of extraordinary experience and a part of the experience itself. By bringing together virtual and physical worlds, social media extends the notion of extraordinary experience, adding to the individual pursuit and the social interaction a new component, vital to the production of the extraordinary in a technological society: connections.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Internet, e-mail, social media, digital archives, blogs, self-track apps and instant message programs have transformed the way we desire, consume, understand ourselves and interact with people (Belk, 2013; Kozinets, 2007; Kozinets, Patterson, & Ashman, 2016). These changes have the power of reshape the nature of possessions and consumers' relationships with things, with a significant impact in people's consumption decisions and lifestyles (Belk, 2013).

Smartphones play a significant role in this context since it enable individuals to access social media anywhere and anytime, a computer-mediated technology used to share information, photos, videos, ideas and interests through networks or virtual communities (Nedra, Hadhri, & Mezrani, 2019). Via social media, people connect to friends, family and strangers, drawing a line between the memorable and the ordinary in their lives and highlighting those things and moments worth to be shared (Munar, 2010).

These statements lead us to extraordinary experiences, a particular class of consumption experience characterized by high levels of emotional intensity that creates meaningful, unique and transformative experiences, motivated by interpersonal interaction (Arnould & Price, 1993; Carù & Cova, 2003; Celsi, Rose, & Leigh., 1993). Extraordinary experience promotes personal growth and renewal (Arnould & Price, 1993); individual and share transcendence (Celsi et al., 1993); and a desirable and valued temporary experience, in which fantasy and

reality are combined (Schouten, McAlexander, & Koenig, 2007).

Nevertheless, not only positive features create an extraordinary experience: there are boundaries, competitions, conflicts and opportunistic behaviors in such situations, putting light into aspects beyond the romantic and communal notion of extraordinary experience (Tumbat & Belk, 2010). From this, it is plausible to say that extraordinary contexts can instigate extraordinary behaviors, opening a range of opportunities for research in this topic.

Schouten et al. (2007) reported that different combinations of products, services, companies, other individuals and contexts might lead to extraordinary experiences. This comment expands the scope of possibilities and, so far, extraordinary experiences in the digital and technological context remains unexplored. Since social media is a key category in our society and it has become an important cultural and consumption domain in which individuals interact and create their own narratives (Kozinets, 2007), the main purpose of this article is to understand the role of social media in shaping these experiences.

We unfold this argument in a research with runners participating in a relay marathon, since extreme sport activities are recognized as extraordinary experiences, engendering ways people find to bring meaning and perspective to their lives (Arnould & Price, 1993; Celsi et al., 1993; Tumbat & Belk, 2010). In the following sections, we review theory regarding extraordinary experiences and the role of technology in consumer research. We then present the methodological design,

followed by our findings and a discussion. Conclusion and references closes our article.

## II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### *A. Extraordinary Experiences*

The “obsession with the extraordinary experience” have its roots in a search for intensity, risk-taking and extreme entertainments, and it has fulfilled literature with works that not only describe consumer engagement in extraordinary experiences, but how these experiences describe several aspects of life in a consumption society (Carù & Cova, 2003: 279). These positive, intense and enjoyable experiences are outcomes of unusual events that have the power to mobilize focus, personal control, sense of power and interpersonal interaction (Arnould & Price, 1993).

The delivery of extraordinary experiences became a matter of great interest in consumer behavior literature (Arnould & Price, 1993; Celsi et al., 1993; Tumbat & Belk, 2011). Arnould and Price (1993) uncovered the aspects forming a complex relationship between consumer expectations and satisfaction in river rafting, a commercial activity that carries the extraordinariness factor, given the adventure and the mystery involved in such expeditions. These expectations relate to the integration with nature, the level of service and the social interaction with other participants. According to the authors, the context, the process and the relationship between consumer and service provider along with affect narrative and ritual understanding create the river magic, an extraordinary experience that transcend commercial relationships creating temporary bonds with other consumers and with guides in a meaningful way.

Tumbat and Belk (2011) uncovered negotiation of marketplace tensions in Everest commercial climbing expeditions. In contrast to previous works reporting the bonds created between strangers in a sense of community, they reveal the rise of competition, conflicting goals, selfish motivations and individualism that challenge the romantic and communitarian view of extraordinary experiences (Tumbat & Belk, 2011). Similarly, Schouten et al. (2007) have disclosure a dark side of extraordinary experiences, regarding the fine line between an enjoyable and adventurous experience and an addiction to escapism. Recently, Lindberg and Østergaard (2015) demonstrated that extraordinary experiences encompass paradoxes, ambiguities and conflicts that affect consumer experience in a significant way.

These arguments expand the knowledge on extraordinary experience, reinforcing the power of an unprecedented, positive and temporary experience, but point out there is more to know that its romantic and classic view.

### *B. The role of social media in consumer experience*

Social media has become a daily ritual for many individuals as it provides opportunities to interact, build relationships and share experiences (Krishen, Berezan, Ararwal, & Kachroo, 2016). Traditional social media such as Facebook and Instagram share a common characteristic, regarding users’ interest in connecting to old friends and meeting new people, social browsing to get information about events and social connections and to increase self-esteem by developing an ideal image on

social media profiles (Karapanos, Teixeira, & Gouveia, 2016). Not to mention WhatsApp, a digital application that enables people to communicate in a multimodal way via written conversations, emoticons, images, photos, videos, voice notes and web links that has been changing people’s communication and sharing activities dramatically (Sánchez-Moya & Cruz-Moya, 2015).

For Belk (2013), it is likely that social media users share more with their virtual friends than with their family: private information is being shared so anyone can read and self-photography has replaced the family photo album of before. This social media mediated life has fomented what Munar (2010) calls the Age of Exposure, concept in which sharing personal content is central for consumers’ relationships.

Furthermore, social media increases consumers’ passion to consume (Kozinets et al., 2016). These scholars use the expression networks of desire to indicate an open system in which technologies, consumers, passion and virtual and physical objects interact producing consumption interests in a broader social system. In a network of desire, private and public participation meet in a digital context. Private network participation mode regards sharing content with people who know each other, reinforcing existing connection. On the other side, public participation concerns sharing content that may reach unknown people. As content shifts from intimate to public and the audience becomes more specific, public sharing contributes to network development, cultural capital building and exhibiting status.

In summary, previous studies on extraordinary experience report different features of this kind of experience, but they lack a discussion about the interaction between extraordinary experiences and elements from a macro context, external to the experience itself. In face of this, we propose to investigate extraordinary experiences in the context of digital and technological changes.

## III. METHOD

### *A. Research context and setting*

We explore the context of Volta à Ilha, which means Around the Island in Portuguese, a relay marathon of 140 kilometers in Florianópolis, an island in the south of Brazil that reunites 42 beaches. The Volta à Ilha relay marathon is a running event in its 23rd edition in 2018, with over 500 running teams that run the distance in asphalt roads, beaches, steep dunes and extreme trails. During event day, the city of Florianópolis embraces the relay marathon as traffic changes and hydration and athlete exchange stations are set in several places around the island.

The Volta à Ilha relay marathon occurs every April, but teams must be formed in October of the year before, going on a lottery of vacancies to participate. Teams must pay the whole participation in the year before, together with a medical exam that attest athletes’ health conditions. Teams from 2 to 15 runners can be formed to run the 18 stretches that, together, form the distance of 140 kilometers. Every team has a coordinator that participates of a mandatory technical congress before the event, receive and distribute the identification kit for teams’ runners. Teams also must register a van and a support car that will be

identified as official event cars, to take the athletes to the start of the race, exchange stations and finish line.

*B.Data collection and analysis*

We engaged in a qualitative research comprised of three data collection methods. At first, we draw on participant observation, as the first author of the article participated in the relay marathon with the purpose of gathering real time insights and to deeply access the experience.

Participant observation involved interaction with other members of the team, individual and collective training sessions and Whatsapp group participation. We have tracked conversations from October 2017 to June 2018, when the group was ended. The content from this Whatsapp group covers document sharing, written communication, audio conversations, photos and videos. In this participant observation, notes were written and we had the opportunity to take pictures and record videos during the experience. Besides, participation was essential to interact with other participants outside first runners' team.

The first author also conducted short interviews (10 minutes average) with 31 participants of the event. Besides the intensive interaction through this process, the first author collected testimonials about the experience of the 10 participants of the running team in an attempt to capture runners' emotions and perceptions in the moment of the competition.

To select the other 21 participants, we approached runners who were interacting with their smartphones, and after the contact, we asked if they could indicate a friend for our project. Some interviews (11) were carried out at the competition setting, while the last 10 interviews took place after the event. As respondents were familiar with technologies, the conversations used WhatsApp features, such as video and audio resources. We asked all participants about their favorite social media; only five of them did not use any social media; all others provided their Instagram profile.

Additionally, we interviewed a trainer from São Paulo, in the city for his 21st participation, bringing to the 2018 edition 12 running teams from different cities of the country, which he coaches virtually through Whatsapp groups and training apps. This face-to-face interview happened the day before the event. Table 1 summarizes informant's profile. To provide confidentiality, we changed the names of interviewees.

Lastly, we performed a netnography on Instagram, from the moment the first author accepted to run the Volta à Ilha. Netnography data collection began with the first author inclusion in a Whatsapp group of the running team. Social media data tracking started in October 2017 with the first author's Instagram profile, nine profiles from her running team members and the hashtags used by the event athletes #voltaailha2018 and #voltaailhafloripa. These hashtags enabled us to follow several open Instagram's profiles and, together, they covered 2.699 photos of the event until May 2018, one month after Volta à Ilha, when we finished data collection.

<i>Name</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Running time</i>	<i>Competitions</i>
Mary	53	Government Employee	2 years	11
Anna	36	Administrative Analyst	10 years	80
John	50	Manager	2 years	17
David	36	Government Employee	15 years	56
Carol	32	Teacher	2 years	15
Hellen	37	Coach	2 years	5
Liz	34	Government Employee	7 months	6
Abby	40	Sales Person	5 years	Over 30
Huck	40	Manager	10 years	98
Charles	44	Teacher	2 years	Over 20
Louis	59	Military Servant	40 years	Over 200
Barbara	40	Secretary	4 years	7
Lisa	25	Student	8 months	10
Aaron	41	Government Employee	9 years	Over 50
Jennifer	47	Government Employee	14 years	180
Kate	36	Teacher	3 years	No idea
Sandra	33	Entrepreneur	5 years	Over 30
Oliver	38	Government Employee	16 years	Over 200
Margie	34	Architect	5 years	Over 20
Andrew	42	Real State Agent	5 years	Over 50
Dave	42	Government Employee	5 years	No idea
Patricia	48	Lawyer	2 years	6
Gabrielle	41	Lawyer	2 years	30
Lucas	32	Entrepreneur	5 years	27
Mike	37	Freelancer	7 years	Over 50
Donna	42	Engineer	2 years	28
Alex	34	Engineer	3 years	20
Harry	37	Medical Doctor	8 years	Over 50
Paul	36	Sales Person	4 years	Over 30
Michael	29	Government Employee	1 year	8
Rick	37	Engineer	13 years	Over 40
Marcus	50	Trainer	32 years	Over 100

Analysis was based on the hermeneutic part-whole process of Thompson (1997), throughout multiple readings and comparisons of the interview transcripts, field notes and Instagram data. Additionally, through a coding process (Saldaña, 2012) categories and concepts were developed, comparing and contrasting interviews. Rather than being linear,

TABLE I. INFORMANTS PROFILE

this process evolved in several rounds of coding and frequent references to the literature as specific themes emerged.

#### IV.FINDINGS

We have organized our findings not in sequence or type of data, but around the story that emerges from the data and disclosures the extraordinary experience of running the Volta à Ilha. The story is composed by three stages: pre-competition experience, when runners decide to engage in the competition and report their preparation; the experience itself, regarding competition day; and the after experience. As proposed by Lindberg and Østergaard (2015), extraordinary experiences are dynamic, multi-phased and emergent, characterized by an entry phase, an immersion and an exit phase, corroborating the sequence of events that engender the Volta à Ilha extraordinary experience.

##### *#pre-competitionexperience*

Pre-competition experience starts six months before competition day, when running teams must be set. Participant observation notes reveal an excitement around team formation, itinerary study, logistics and training schedule. In part, trainers, service providers who train consumers with the objective of improving their running abilities, guide this pre-experience. These trainers call athletes to join Volta à Ilha running teams by their Instagram profiles, e-mail list and Whatsapp groups. Most of the participants are engaged in groups of training. Although athlete and trainer may meet in person for a first conversation, this service is delivered through an app. Consumer receives a weekly training schedule on the app, giving the trainer a feedback about the performance, which will affect next week's plan. Payment is made by digital apps and communication happens, the majority of the time, by Whatsapp.

Since these trainers know runners interests, skills and performance level, they form teams that may or may not know each other, and they chose a coordinator for each team. Field notes indicate that from the moment runners accept to join a team, Whatsapp groups are created so participants can know each other and make all the arrangements. The objective of these groups is to share important information about submission, training and logistics.

However, Whatsapp groups quickly become a space where participants interact, bond and start living the experience, as Sandra, a 33 years old entrepreneur explains: *"Our trainer opened a WhatsApp group so we could arrange training sessions, decide on the distance each one would run and make the necessary arrangements for the big day. We met physically once, the whole team, to decide a few points and it was great. The team had a great energy. From that day, every day we interacted on the WhatsApp group, and it felt like we were already living that experience"*.

This quotation shows that although participants had different abilities and experience levels with Volta à Ilha, the use of Whatsapp allowed participants' physical preparation, approaching individual performance to the standards of a

competitive team. In this sense, Whatsapp social media not only eliminates the problem of geographical distances, making it feasible performance record and competitiveness creation.

The preparation stage gives rise to another important finding: running a relay marathon is different from competing solo. There is a sense of purpose in running in a team: if there is no team effort and commitment, there is no experience. Hence, participants share a clear objective that guides their training season such as responsibility, sense of collectivity and team spirit – expressions told in almost every interview and netnography data.

Our field notes trace an evolution on the content shared in Whatsapp groups. In the beginning, conversations are formal and restricted to objective information. As time goes by, participants share training schedules, performance improvements and exchange information about products and services. They also use the WhatsApp group to report their worries about performance and frequently post on Instagram about unsuccessful trainings and how being part of a group is a motivation to overcome bad days. In this sense, Volta à Ilha comprises a network of heterogeneous actors as a heterogeneous consumption community (Thomas, Epp, & Price, 2013), since participants have very different experiences, especially regarding expectations about the event.

This anxiety is particularly intense for beginners, as Carol, a 32 years old teacher expresses: *"first time brings a lot of expectations due to all we hear people talking about the Volta à Ilha. Everyone in my running group talks about it. People get desperate to be on it. People that don't even run a lot want to be part of it. My husband was invited several times by his coworkers to be part of a team. People talk so much about it on Facebook, Instagram that makes you want to do it too. They are proud to do that, and they want everybody to know. I judged a lot people in the year before, but I did the same and felt the same when it was my turn"*.

The evolution of participants' interaction on social media moves from the online to the physical environment. Some participants start running together so they can bond, others start training the routes they will run in event day, so they know what to expect when competition starts. Field notes show that training sessions are set by Whatsapp when one or two participants invite other to a specific run and, after that, a photo is shared in the Whatsapp group. This first running is followed by other sessions, with more participants, as they feel motivated to train with more people. This shows that social media sharing creates a sense of collectivism that is brought to physical ambiance through training sessions, mediated by social media in this pre-competition stage.

Netnography data reinforces this, as several photos of training sessions in parts of the city where the Volta à Ilha will happen are shared on Instagram, followed by subtitles that reveals runners' commitment to the experience. As competition day gets closer, several photos of running teams are posted on Instagram reporting the collective expectation and anxiety about the event.

In this perspective, presence in social media turns conspicuous the participation in the event, serving as a

celebration way and as a mechanism of parameter establishment for future performances. Hence, technologies work as a tool of community inclusion, but also as an instrument that enables members of these communities to have fun and anticipate the real experience in the day of competition.

The technological context in which pre-competition stage takes place favors interaction, as participants know each other strengths and weaknesses and work to build a solid team in this phase. Nonetheless, another dimension brought by social media needs to be addressed. According to Moon et al. (2016), users' motivation to use Instagram go beyond self-expression and social interactions: there is a strong association between narcissism and users' self-promoting behaviors. Besides, among the consequences of this new behavior, social media holds the power of influence individuals' sense of self-worth and anxiety levels (Krishen et al., 2016).

With reference to this, our participant observation notes point out that runners in a team end up having an idealized perception about other teams' abilities and level of performance. If these teams have trained together, they would acknowledge the efforts and difficulties of others, but the restricted contact to social media photos implies a distancing from the body and the process realities, conducting participants to an illusion around a successful result. In the age of exposure (Munar, 2010), comparison is facilitated by the volume of photos, videos and texts runners share about their training sessions and accomplishments. Consequently, external appreciation and validation, in the form of likes or comments become an important feature of the extraordinary experience.

### **#thevoltaàilhaexperience**

The second stage of the Volta à Ilha concerns the event day, the immersion during extraordinary, a main concept to understand extraordinary experiences consumption. By escaping their mundane lives and engaging with other people in wilderness settings, consumers go through a temporary identity transformation, which enable handling with this kind of situations and living the full experience in these contexts (Lindberg & Østergaard, 2015). As told by Carù and Cova (2006: 5), immersion goes beyond being physically present in the experience setting, since it implies the "elimination of the distance between consumers and the situation, the former being plunged in a thematised and secure spatial enclave where they can let themselves go".

In the Volta à Ilha context, this immersion starts before teams arrive at the starting line. Whatsapp messages start when they wake up, around 3am, with messages saying that the big day has come and they are in their way. The first participant starts running at 5am, and most of the teams are present at this time. People post about everything on Instagram: photos of the teams, of them expecting the start, of the clock indicating how early it is. Subtitles explain what they are doing, and there is a pride feeling of being there. Instagram stories and lives, features of this social network that allow people to share moments while they are happening, were used all day long.

From the moment the first runner crosses the starting line, the team as a whole engage in a logistic operation in order

to take athletes to the exchange stations. About this, Paul (36) says: *"In the running group I am part of, one of the main expressions is 'you run more when you run together' and I hardly ever run alone, we always have this team spirit very strong. Even though, a relay competition is very different because besides athletes, we act like staff, support others in hydration, we plan the cars' routes, we have to manage poor bathroom facilities and other needs, like a lot of sweaty people in the van. But the most important from all of it is to be together for those 15 hours"*.

Whatsapp, participants' main instrument of communication, used to track runners' arrival to the stations, to check if participants exchange worked and to monitor their performance and control the team available time to finish, mediates the operation created to live this extraordinary experience. Several photos showing these moments are shared in Whatsapp group. Information from digital gadgets such as Waze and Google Maps are shared in the group to provide traffic information and calculate the best routes.

Our findings also reveal the Volta à Ilha extraordinary experience as an integration of two particular experiences happening simultaneously, the individual and the collective experiences. The individual experience regards athletes running by themselves their routes, moment in which several feelings and perceptions about the experience emerge. Participants relate the opportunity of running in a paradisiac island, among nature and in routes they wouldn't be able to run if there was no service staff to assure their safety.

This experience is connected to a greater experience, the collective one. Participants reveal that along all the joy of running in a team, they feel the pressure of delivering a great performance in name of the team, creating a strange feeling that mixes motivation, pressure and responsibility, and most participants say they have better times running in relay marathons than in individual competitions. These statements find resonance in the work of Celsi et al. (1993), when the authors report that experience in extraordinary settings emerge as a thrilling experience via individual achievement that will be posteriorly shared with others during experience consumption.

The expression "someone is waiting for you" was frequent in the interviews, showing individual and collective experience were combined all times. Netnography data comprise Instagram's posts with photos and videos of exchange moments, reporting the responsibility participants feel when their goal is part of a greater good. Interviews reinforce these feelings, as Jennifer (47) illustrates: *"A relay competition reinforces complicity and partnership among team members, and individual competition is a dispute with yourself. In a relay, I know someone is anxious waiting for my arrival so they can start running. We run thinking about seeing that person. When I am running individual competitions, I don't have this feeling, I only think of getting a podium"*.

Besides, the possibilities promoted by digital technology enhance feelings of protection to each other such as loyalty and union, avoiding conflicts, as Paul (36) points out: "Team interaction was excellent. Given the extension of the

competition, 140 kilometers, and the quantity of athletes exchange stations, that were 18, the logistics of taking athletes and picking them up at these stations was very complex, and at the beginning I thought it could be a point of conflict for the team. But everyone was engaged and united and we knew how to handle it in a smoothly way”.

Instagram data, including photos, subtitles, stories and live recording create a diary of this collective experience in which the efforts, the bad parts, the fun moments and the accomplishments were shared to any connection in the social media. In our interpretation, social media amplifies synergy, team energy, integration, team interaction and partnership, words frequently used by participants to describe the cooperation and commitment of the teams to provide their members an extraordinary experience. In this perspective, social media has proved to be a facilitator of the extraordinary experience, allowing runners to be on time and enjoy their participation, help others and keep track of team performance.

### **#theafterexperience**

Participant observation notes show that teams cross this line together with a mix of exhaustion and euphoria, as they scream, hug and cry when passing the finish line – when the after experience phase starts. Feelings of physical fatigue, relief and accomplishment are combined with sensations of gratitude and team spirit, as netnography data reports. We observed the effect of the extraordinary experience in the amount of photos, videos, live recordings and stories on Instagram, describing the experience, the positive aspects and the connection between the groups, reinforcing the extraordinariness of this experience.

This feeling lasts longer than competition day, creating a nostalgic feeling, when people relate missing the sensations experienced in the Volta à Ilha. Instagram users retort to the hashtags #tbt and #fbf, representatives of the expressions “throwback Thursday” and “flashback Friday”, to post old pictures of moments worthy to share. The hashtags work as a digital memory album. As proposed by Belk (2013), in the technological context, digital files, blog archives and social media allow consumers to access memories.

Furthermore, our findings lead us to conclude that extraordinary experience needs to be shared: it seems that living the experience is not enough, as Marcus, a trainer, explained in his interview: *“People want to share, right? And they want to share something big, something extraordinary, because running a 5k competition doesn’t generate as much likes as a 10k, or a half marathon, or a marathon. And a lot of people are running marathons and they ask themselves: what is the next big step? And they go in this crazy adventures, some of them really like it, some of them enjoy the feelings and all, but most people go in this great adventures like Volta à Ilha only to share and to show they did. You can see, tonight they will all talk about their anxiety, tomorrow morning your timeline will be full of pictures of what they are doing, they will make stories and lives on Instagram and they will talk about how great it was in #tbt. They will always go for something huge and Volta à Ilha is a fertile ground for it”.*

As indicated in Kozinets et al. (2016), consumers are craving for the next big thing. Furthermore, the trainer’s testimonial is an evidence of the age of exposure, as discussed by Munar (2010). In the context of internet and the dematerialization of things, consumers can share their enthusiasm with a broader community, people they do not even know, but whose applause and feedback are important. In this sense, sharing serves a social function as it helps individuals to bond with others and gain their empathy (Belk, 2013).

## V.DISCUSSION

We have identified two roles played by social media in the context of extraordinary experiences. First, our data shows these digital technologies as an essential instrument facilitating extraordinary experience to happen. Second, social media configure a facet of the extraordinary experience, regarding the intense and positive feelings that surround sharing. In such a way, these digital technologies act as the environment where the same extraordinary experience happens. Therefore, experience mediated by social media is both a product of our technological society and a context that generates new social and cultural patterns of behaviors.

Belk (2013) was the one to question if sharing nonmaterial possessions in a technological context could be object of consumer attachment and if they could gain status and increase sense of self with their virtual possessions. Based on our findings, we believe that extraordinary experience sharing works as a self-extension instrument, given the personal feelings it provides for the consumer and the need people have in sharing moments with others.

When this self-extension possibility provided by social media meets the transformational power of extraordinary experiences, we understand that an important feature of the extraordinariness in experiences lies on social media sharing. Because of the possibilities of sharing provided by social media, consumers absorb the extraordinariness of the experience as a part of themselves, as a part of who they are. In other words, experience becomes extraordinary when I show how extraordinary it was. As consumers share their extraordinary experiences in social media, other consumers respond with applauds in form of likes, comments and emojis. In the eyes of those who do not run or who did not experienced the same, consumers end up feeling extraordinary.

Beyond the individual transformation and the sense of community, the extraordinary experience shared in social media transforms regular people in remarkable individuals, extraordinary individuals. Therefore, sharing an extraordinary experience not only validates consumer status in the running community; it transform their status towards other social groups, a broader audience via social media, as important as closer social groups.

From this, we understand that the role of social media is to add another social interaction layer to the extraordinary experience: there is the individual, the community and the connections. What we demonstrate in this research is that

although both individual and collective interests need to be present to create an extraordinary experience, in the context of social media, the social interaction within the heterogeneous running community is not sufficient. It is the extended interaction in social media and the recognition of the extraordinary it provides that engender the extraordinary experience.

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# Figuring the Child as Digital Native: Digital Class in the Net Generation

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*The first generation of children growing up immersed in digital social media (SM) in Westernised societies, have been conceptualised, somewhat one-dimensionally, as 'Digital Natives' (Prensky, 2001) and 'the Net Generation' (Tapscott, 1999). However, with some notable exceptions (Turkle, 1995, 2011) research has tended to neglect the qualitative study of SM activities of children. Within this early stage project, child-centred group interviews from ages 11-12 came together to help uncover the topic under investigation (n:15), data was collected to gain a preliminary understanding of cohort engagement and non-engagement with SM platforms.*

*There is a particularly marked research hiatus concerning the SM activities of younger children. The majority of SM platforms have a lower age limit of 13 despite many children between the ages of 10-12 being SM account holders (Jamieson, 2016). Despite age-related barriers, in 2017 46% of 11 year olds, 51% of 12 year olds and 28% of 10 year olds were reported to have their own SM profiles (Ofcom, 2017). It is suggested that it is unattractive for SM companies to target those under 13 because of increased compliance requirements from COPPA and GDPR (Balkam, 2018), as a result SM companies set access limits to age 13 in order to avoid the cost implications of holding data of those under this age. Despite the best interests of policy makers, it seems that restrictions and costly fines has contributed to a limited availability of online content that is both suitable and preferred by 10-12-year olds.*

*Smartphone and tablet ownership and access is increasing among even younger children (Holloway, et al., 2013) suggesting that SM impacts the contemporary cultural experience of childhood, even among those with little or no*

*access. While this is understood by the industry, due to the situation described above children are accessing digital space in such a way as they do not present as their own age group. Therefore research surrounding SM use focuses on legitimate child users, predominantly those aged 14+ ( Lim , et al., 2017), (Hargittai & Hinnant, 2008), (Sarwar & Soomro, 2013), (Wilkins, et al., 2018), (Nielsen, Haun, Kärtnner, & Legare, 2017).*

*Research on legitimate child users largely focuses on digital literacy due to public concern surrounding young children with internet access (Livingstone, et al., 2018), with current research centring on child protection. However, the recent pan-EU Net Children Go Mobile survey (3500 respondents/9–16 years) (Ólafsson & Mascheroni, 2015) suggests that emergent digital inequalities among children with and without access to SM intersect with social inequalities, and can result in disparities in online activities, with children who benefit from a greater autonomy of use and a longer online experience having enhanced socio-economic opportunities. Ball, et al. (2017) describes a social divide between those who can proficiently use new technologies, and those who cannot, indicating unskilled users of technology may not be informed or knowledgeable enough to reach the full benefits available through technology use. This suggests that among even young children, what might be called digital class is emerging.*

*Digital class does not always neatly map onto traditional socio-economic class categories but is complex and ill-understood and as SM use envelops even younger cohorts of*

children, these somewhat hidden inequalities of use and opportunity become more resilient and embedded. While prior CCT research has explored the phenomenon of increasingly technology-infused childhood somewhat (Bettany et al, 2014; Bettany and Kerrane, 2016) there remains a dearth of research that seeks to address the technologisation of childhood in the terms of the CCT paradigm. Hence, this early stage research seeks to examine the classed identity projects of tweenager (or sub-tween/preteen) children, the merchandising segmentation category age delineated at 10-13 years old (Cook & Kaiser, 2004) in terms of their access to SM.

Themes of SM functions and preferences, enabling devices and their affordances, awareness of digital marketing strategies, as well as parental and cohort group interaction and exclusion emerged. Modes of SM relationship affordances such as 'shoutouts', parental negotiations around access, cohort negotiations with the concepts of 'real' and 'fake', and collective group filtering of spam and authentic communications, was shown to contribute to how digitally classed tween identity develops within the relevant networks of parents, peers, brands and influencers. This identity differs between the participants' sophisticated literacy and knowledge toward cohort cultural SM activities as well as their knowledge toward a collective etiquette and understanding of SM. This work ultimately seeks to contribute to qualitative understanding of how children are becoming differentially socialised consumers through SM engagement, through the lens of the concept of digital class.

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# Whither Poetic Inquiry? CCT & Beyond

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## To Cite:

Poetry has played an increasingly prominent role over our past thirteen conferences, from its inaugural posting on hallway walls to the current SRO performance session captured in an annual chapbook. Poets have placed their work in the field's journals and in edited volumes of interdisciplinary research. As one of the more vibrant genres of arts based research rippling across contiguous social science disciplines, poetic inquiry has enabled scholars to explore aspects of marketing and consumption less accessible and perhaps inscrutable to prevailing approaches. Having thrust their collective toe in the door of commerce, the *Mousai* are poised to put their joint shoulder to the structure and force it from the jamb. To cross this threshold irrevocably, some mid-campaign strategy adjustment will be required.

Consonant with the conference theme of "The Future," we propose to convene a parliament of poets, aesthetes and hermenauts for the purpose of divining trajectories and considering strategems that might catalyze the efflorescence of poetic inquiry. Participants will assess the current state of the field by examining the threats and opportunities facing the enterprise in the domains of ontology, epistemology, axiology and praxis. Among the topics to be addressed include the cultivation of new outlets for performance and text (*CCT Proceedings? CMC? Independent publisher? JCR? JACR? JCC?*), the challenge of on-going craft development and refinement (annual conference workshop? Collaborative workshop with host university poets?), the expansion of institutional frameworks of support (Inclusion of poetry in "regular" CCT conference sessions? ACR? AMA? SCP?), the compilation and elaboration of a didactic canon (CCT articles/poems? Other disciplines' articles/poems? Poets' articles/poems?), the extension of the paradigm to areas such as teaching, service and consulting,

A reading list will be circulated in advance of the conference to ground participants in a host of issues and set the stage for informed deliberation.<sup>1</sup> Conveners will be charged with brainstorming in advance of the round table on the topics identified above as well as on other emergent issues, so that all participants will be drawn into a semi-structured interaction. Conveners will

<sup>1</sup> E.g., Bochner and Ellis (2016), *Evocative Ethnography*, NY: Routledge; Cahnmann-Taylor (2016) *Imperfect Tense*, San Pedro, CA: Whitepoint Press; Faulkner (2009); *Poetry as Method*, Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press; Goodall (2008), *Writing Qualitative Inquiry*, Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press; Prendergast et al (2009), *Poetic Inquiry*, Rotterdam: Sense; Sameshima et al (2018), *Poetic Inquiry*, Delaware: Vernon Press; Speedy (2015), *Staring at the Park*, Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press.

also elicit additional directions from all participants to capture insights generated in the interaction. The goal beyond this immediate communal discussion of diagnosis and prescription is the development of a set of practical recommendations that poet activists can begin refining and implementing in the coming year to advance the agenda of poetic inquiry.

Suggestions for Moving Forward: Summary of Poetic Inquiry RT Discussion

Turn your research paper into a poem

Recruit CCT scholars to workshop ideas (research, teaching, service, & consulting spheres) as prompts

Frame poetry as *useful* (promotes better writing, more creative thinking)

Build an archive of poems illustrating research, teaching, service, & consulting spheres

Conduct re-inquiries of seminal CCT articles via poetry

Add supplementary material to existing publications (e.g. on ResearchGate)

Curation of poems from existing CB/MKTG journals & books

Create anthologies of poetry based on research themes for submission to CB/MKTG journals

Propose Special Issue on poetry for CB/MKTG journals

Add *Poetry as Discourse* (Anthony Easthope) to reading list

Check Organizational Studies literature for poetry

Create volume on the [theoretical & practical] contribution of poetry to CB/MKTG

Illustrate how ambivalent thoughts/feelings can be clarified through poetry

Set up poetry archive on the CCT website

Check Geography literature for poetry (national/regional poetry caches and maps)

Emphasize poetry as a *frame*, not merely as data (“Here is how X poems illustrate topic Y.”)

Park poems on-line as demonstration of what poetry can do, and elicit commentary

Establish poetry as a QDA workshop track on methods

Video/audio record the CCT poetry session for those unable to attend (also, live stream/podcast)

Appoint a permanent/rotating poet in residence for our CCT poetry group

Propose an ABR workshop (multiple genres) for upcoming conferences

Promote community outreach through local library presentations

# A Path To A Better World Through Arts-Based Research

**Ai Ming Chow, Esi Elliot, Meryl Gardner, Lynnette Overby, Ann-Thomas Moffett, Carmina Cavazos, Hilary Downey, Molly Jensen & Catharina von Koskull**

*Abstract*— Various art forms are central to expression of cultures, identities and lifestyles among consumers. This paper provides a discussion of Arts-Based Research (ABR), as a method of data collection and dissemination which can complement traditional research methods used in consumer research. Importantly, ABR presents a strategy to address consumers-related issues such as materialism, stigma, sustainability and vulnerability in an engaging and creative manner. The aim is to demonstrate that ABR can provide a unique approach to obtaining new knowledge and finding solutions to a wide range of consumer related issues, in ways that are transformative.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

“[A]rt arms silence with voices that, even when the bodies that carry them are crushed and ground to powder, will rise again, and multiply, and sing out their presence... art in this sense is silence that screams” (Ngugi, 1998, p. 28).

The Kenyan writers Ngugi alludes us the importance and significance of art practices for the people who have been silenced through various circumstances such as colonization. For example, within the communities of Indigenous People, art becomes both a site for articulating Indigenous resistance and resurgence. Art breaks the vow of silence and invisibility

demanding of Indigenous Peoples by the colonizers while it contributes to the revitalization of Indigenous culture and nationhood (Martineau & Ritskes, 2014). As Indigenous scholars Martineau and Ritskes (2014, p. V) restate, “[a]rt creates experiences of potentiality that inspire and sustain our collective struggles for freedom; Indigenous art reminds, remembers, and calls out to us to account for colonial injustice, and to realize the potential freedom found in our creative transformation of the world”. Just like how art is transformative for the Indigenous People in their decolonial struggle, art methods are powerful tools widely used in fields such as education as a source of learning and in health for its healing

capabilities. They are also starting to gain attention within the consumer research communities. This is especially significant among transformative consumer researchers (TCR) who are working with communities who are politically marginalized, vulnerable or illiterate.

Consumer researchers have started incorporating alternative forms of artistic expression in the research process. These alternative artistic forms include poetry (Madison, 2008; Smith, 2012), photography (Ozanne, Moscato & Kunkel 2013), participatory video and theatre (Cornwall, 1997). These researchers recognized that the traditional top-down methods of inquiry led by researchers could be insensitive to issues of power and often deny agency (Denzin, Lincoln & Smith, 2008; Smith, 2012; Swadener & Mutua, 2008). Particularly, with the documented usage of poetry in consumer research, it is often used as a researcher-reflexive tool (Sherry & Schouten, 2002). Poetry is also a valuable instrument to access consumers' emotional and embodied experiences (Canniford, 2012). Therefore, alternative artistic methods were used with the aim to share with the research participants the power to define their problems and take action for their well-being. Alternative arts forms can become important political tools for critiquing power structures at the individual, market and societal level (Seregina 2019). There are also consumer studies that had documented the creativity demonstrated by consumers, whether through various artistic performances among the Burning Man participants (Kozinets, 2002) or street art marking (Visconti et al., 2010).

These various studies in the current consumer research literature suggest that, the use of art by consumer researchers and by consumers as research participants is valuable. However, there is still much to be explore, in terms of how could arts be incorporated into the research process? How do consumer researchers collaborate with the consumers as artists in the research process? How do we analyze and communicate the findings to our audience and readers? It is the aim of this paper to unpack these questions so that in the future, consumer researchers can continue to explore and tap into the potential of arts to generate novel consumer insights and knowledge. In the next section, this paper provides a discussion of arts-based research (ABR) and explain how incorporating arts in the research process can enhance our understanding of consumer-related insights.

## II. ARTS-BASED RESEARCH

Arts-based research (ABR) is a rapidly growing methodological genre that adapts the tenets of the creative arts to social science research and makes research more publicly accessible, evocative, and engaged (Piantanida, McMahan, & Garman, 2003). Particularly, it is grounded in the tradition of qualitative social science and refers to the use of any art form(s) at any point in the research process, whether for generating, interpreting, and/or communicating knowledge (Knowles & Cole, 2008). According to Leavy (2015), arts-based research practices are a set of methodological tools used by researchers across the discipline during all phases of social research, including data generation, analysis, interpretation and representation.

In general, ABR is defined as the systematic use of the artistic process, the actual making of artistic expressions in all the different forms of the arts, as a primary way of understanding

and examining experience by both researchers and the people they involve in their studies (McNiff, 2008). More importantly, Leavy (2015, p. 3) highlighted that, “[a]rts-based researchers are not “discovering” new research tools, they are carving them.” In the following paragraphs, this paper aims to provides a more detailed discussion of arts-based research, in attempt to encourage the use of various art forms in the consumer research.

ABR inquiry is very similar to traditional interviews in qualitative research and goes a step further in its use of narrative inquiry in artistic processes (e.g. storytelling) and practices that engage individuals in artistic activities with pronounced aesthetic and design qualities. Epistemologically, it assumes that art can create and convey meaning (Barone & Eisner, 2012). In arts-based research, art is used ... “to disrupt the ordinary, which in turn stimulates change, transformation and even transcendence” (Leavy, 2015, p. 20). In addition, it fosters reflexivity and empathy in the researcher which allows more open dialogue and opportunity for collaboration with research participants.

The specific goal of ABR is gaining consumer insights through diverse research methodologies and narratives, which rely heavily on core elements that resonate with the participants and languages to convey an array of emotions such as sympathy and empathy, tailored and responsive to the participants' context. Arts-based techniques include handcrafts (drawing), digital (photography, videography), hybrid (cartooning), performance dimensions (improvised installations, 2D and 3D objects, dance, theater), narrative construction (storytelling) and music (metaphor and structure), and each technique has its specific reflexivity impacts. According to Greenwood (2012), there are two dominant overall approaches within the broad paradigm of ABR. In the first, one or more of the arts are used as tools to study an issue, perhaps a social or an educational one. In the second approach, the research is an investigation into the arts themselves, a search for a way to understand and describe the complex layers of meaning within an artwork or an art form. Overall, ABR provides one more way to try to understand consumers and their well-being (Fraser, Diane & Sayah, 2011).

ABR can improve well-being by providing insights into critical issues and problems which are not able to be obtained with more traditional methods and by communicating insights on a level which can result in attitude and behavior change (Barone & Eisner, 2012). Cole and Knowles (2008) use the term arts-informed research, which they describe in broad terms as the mode and form of qualitative research influenced by the arts, where arts comprise of a range of literary, performative and visual modes of artistry. Art-based research is one such practice that facilitates a unique view of the world and when complemented with other qualitative methods (e.g. ethnography) contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon being investigated. For the qualitative researcher, ABR enables rich engagement with the aesthetics of the phenomenon, which gives a deeper meaning to the notion of the researcher as bricoleur. This is considered to be “an aesthetic of representation that goes beyond the practical or pragmatic” (Denzin, Lincoln & Smith, 2008, p. 6).

ABR researchers distinguish themselves from other qualitative researchers on the basis that they use artistic processes and practices in their investigations and in the communication of their research outcomes (O'Donoghue, 2009).

O'Donoghue (2009) therefore argues that ABR researchers cannot ignore the processes and practices of the artists as they continue to develop and theorize a research discourse and practice contrary to the logical rational scientific one so embedded in the research inquiry. For example, in education research, arts-based research is founded on the belief that the arts have the ability to contribute particular insights into and enhance understandings of phenomena that are of interest to educational researchers. One example of such ABR is an educational study conducted by Rodriguez Vaga (2014), looking into the lives of Mexican-American children ages 5 - 18 growing up in hostile anti-immigrant environments of Phoenix, Arizona using artistic mediums. 115 drawings, poems and letters were collected while these young research participants revealed that the experience of expressing themselves through these artistic mediums was therapeutic and these art mediums become platforms for them to call for actions and changes in the political and educational arenas (Rodriguez Vega, 2014). Such insights and knowledge created are communicated to teachers, policy makers and community organizations to better respond to the needs of immigrant children are experiencing the threat of family separation and discriminations. Therefore, the use of art in the research process can recommend changes in behavior and bring about transformations among the research participants involved. Additionally, the examination of experience and expression of a voice aiming for social change provides insight into social issues such as illiteracy, conflict resolution, self-control, positive body image, and healthy lifestyles.

Essentially, art s is used ... “to disrupt the ordinary, which in turn stimulates change, transformation and even transcendence” Leavy (2015, p. 20). In addition, it fosters reflexivity and empathy in the researcher which allows more open dialogues and opportunities for collaboration with the research participants. Therefore, it is argued that incorporating art in the research process is potentially transformative. To further highlight the potential of art, this paper builds on the key elements and steps in the research process proposed by Crockett, Downey, Firat, Ozanne and Pettigrew (2013).

### III.ARTS IN CONSUMER RESEARCH

Crockett et al. (2013) highlighted the need for a diverse set of research tools to address the key aspects of the consumer research process: (1) problem identification, and sampling, (2) data gathering techniques, analytical process, and (3) translating and disseminating research results. Crockett et al. (2013) noted that data gathering techniques in consumer research that are predominantly positivist, and seek to understand, predict or explain behavior. Instead, for consumer research that strives for transformations and changes in behaviors, there is a greater need to collaborate with consumers to enhance well-being so the research process tends to be more participatory (i.e. Ozanne & Anderson, 2010; Ozanne & Saatcioglu, 2008).

However, it is not the intention of this paper to suggest that only studies seeking for transformative outcomes can use arts in the research process. Instead, the goal is to highlight that consumer research that incorporates arts contains the potential to bring about wider society changes or changes in the behaviors of consumers. More important, instead of relying on a narrower set of established methods to gather data, the aim of

this paper is to encourage the consumers researchers to “get creative, up close and personal” (Crockett et al. 2013, p. 1174). Arts-based research provides tools to address some of the limitations of research using exclusively traditional methods. In the following subsections, we illuminate the steps in the consumer research process through the lens of ABR (See Table I).

TABLE II.

Research Process (Crockett et al. 2013)		The Potential of Arts-Based Research (Leavy 2015)
Problem Identification	Examines and explores complex social problems	Cultivates new insights and frames problems in new light for fresh perspectives
Sampling	Requires flexible and creative sampling of research participants	Promotes access to those who are marginalized because of their race, ethnic, gender, sexual orientation, disability, poverty and illiteracy
Data Gathering Techniques	Requires innovative and wider set of data gathering techniques	Draws on literary writing, music, dance, performance, visual art, film, and other mediums as data
Analytical Process	Collaborative analysis by researchers and participants; work to build community capacities	Promotes dialogue and the research process if participatory; participants and researchers are equal collaborators
Research Translation and Dissemination	Disseminates research findings using various accessible platforms and media	Include representational forms such as short stories, collages, paintings, drawings, sculpture, 3-D art, theatrical performances, dances, songs and musical scores that can be shared by the audiences of the research

#### a. Problem identification and sampling

Many consumer culture studies are embedded in the tradition of qualitative exploratory research whose purpose is the discovery and identification of new ideas, thoughts, and feelings. It provides a preliminary understanding of the relationships between entities, enhancing the psychological and social processes. One important way to enhance the research process is to employ approaches that diminish power disparities between researchers and researched, and allow informants to exude power in the shaping of the research process (Downey, Hamilton, & Catterall, 2007). This in effect involves informants from start to finish in the site of the research, giving them the capability to enact agency and autonomy for their own interests (Ozanne & Saatcioglu, 2008). Skills often associated with qualitative studies are observation and interpretation of text and visual data. Arts-based research is a form of qualitative research that employs the premises, procedures, and principles of the arts (Given, 2008).

Before beginning a project, consumer researchers should consider the broader societal and consumer related issues involved, and more specifically, the goal of improving consumer wellbeing (Mick et al., 2012). In keeping with such thoughts, the

researcher should give due attention to the explorative nature and associated dissemination means necessary to realize the research goals. This requires a subjectivist and possible intersubjective ontology (Cunliffe & Scaratti, 2017) and a critical perspective to confront issues of injustice for the purpose of making social change (see for example, Cooper & Yarbrough, 2010; Yi & Zebrack, 2010). The researcher may begin with a broad notion of the problem-laden empirical domain and the topic selection may not be narrowed down until well into the data gathering process. In fact, the questions to be researched may be produced in collaboration with the research participants or informants. This means that research flexibility is key, and restructuring the initial research questions is often necessary, as the focus of interest often lies in areas that are not directly visible or are concealed within multiple data sources. In essence, problem identification starts with issues that resonate with participants. It follows by individuals engaging through a compelling and relatable narrative. And ends with a generalizability of ideas and concepts where participants see parallels with and relevance to their own context.

In Foster's research project on the effectiveness of the Sure Start program, she sought to highlight and understand why targeted families tended to view the program with suspicion, and what drove the lack of engagement in the services offered as well as the experiences of those families involved in Sure Start. Her key motivation was to demystify stereotypical assumptions (Reinharz, 1992) of poor working-class mothers, regularly subjected to derision from the tabloid press, "being depicted as irresponsible, lazy and physically unattractive" (Foster, 2012, p. 42). During her two-year research project, she collaborated with six women (all mothers of children attending the program) to create research questions, collect, analyze and finally perform the data through a pantomime; "The Wizard of Us". Pantomime, considered part of British popular culture, was the type of theatre the participants wanted to use as they were most familiar with this artistic form and thought it would be fun.

Similarly, when it comes to sampling, it requires flexible and creative sampling of research participants. According to Given (2008), sampling is dependent on the art form selected, and the meanings and implications derived by the world at hand. The expressive sector offers a variety of arts styles to reflect the differing populations and cultures. To simplify, the arts have tended to collapse into three focal categories, namely, visual arts (e.g., art exhibitions, photo-voice, collages); performance arts (e.g., theatre, plays, dance, song), and literary arts (e.g., poetry, prose). This diversity of art modes exemplifies some of the principal performance categories in the literature. To date, the modes in the visual arts category have been generally applied followed by performance arts (e.g., theatre, plays, dance, song), and finally, literary arts (e.g., poetry, prose) (Fraser & al Sayah, 2011). One critical question for researchers is, "What artistic mode would be most appropriate, in terms of producing and disseminating knowledge about the issues arising from research project in an engaging and meaningful way?". Essentially, we are urging the researchers to keep the end-outcome in mind, even when one is at the first step of the research process.

The artistic form utilized is highly related to the understanding the researcher secures and different art forms have the potential to convey different understandings (Bagley, 2008). For example, the importance of visual culture to create

awareness and inform understanding has been instrumental in creating new forms of data collection and dissemination techniques. The photograph, a traditional form of stimulation has been incorporated into new and innovative modus operandi that gives informants the power to assert control over the data collection process and to highlight particular images, critical moments, which best exemplify daily life. The concept of photo-voice, has been adopted to highlight issues of concern for those laboring under consumption constraints, and or, issues of physicality (Ozanne, Moscato, & Kunkel, 2013; Wang, 2003). Alternatively, the method of ethno-theatre/ participatory drama (Taylor, Namey, Johnson & Guest, 2017) has emerged to assist researchers, where the audience through active reflection and dialogue with the actors, arrive at a place from which to secure change.

*b. Data gathering techniques and analytical process*

Researchers working within the theoretical boundaries of consumer culture theory embraces a wide range of methodological approaches and benefits from methods that facilitate information sharing, trust and collaboration among the consumers and the institutions that are working with them (Blocker et al., 2013). Using arts in the consumer research process allows collaborating with research participants. According to Barone and Eisner (2012), art-based research holds the promise of "transgressing against the prevailing metanarrative, which can lead the readers to become more 'wide-awake' to unfortunate conditions within institutions and cultures and ultimately into informed conversations about bringing about more responsive, just and democratic social arrangements".

Given that consumer researchers often seek to study phenomena in context, it is important that the data gathering techniques allow collected data to remain embedded in the daily experiences of people thereby facilitating transformations or even interventions. With the use of arts, consumers are placed and remain at the centre of the research process, enabling them to express their voices through various techniques. In contrast to the traditional research process whereby analyses and interpretations are predominantly performed by researchers, the use of art encourages engagement among community members in generating information as well as in performing analyses (Crockett et al., 2013). This is a forward-thinking approach to conducting research in collaboration with consumers and is central to consumer researchers who seek to bring about positive transformation for participants.

Arts-based research contends that projects should be judged based on their contribution and/or potential to further inquiry (Leavy, 2015). Means of communication that align with informants' everyday habits offer the potential for additional understandings to arise and for deeper insights to emerge. Such means of data collection give informants the power of disclosure, where the researcher no longer drives the process, rather the informant is free to shape the trajectory of his/her own lived experiences. Crucial to the data gathering techniques and analytical process, researchers might also consider what participants will gain from being involved in the research. This could be new skills, connections leading to future projects, platforms for disseminating their work/goods, or needed resources.

Often researchers' ties to educational institutions and other privileges that go along with having advanced degrees offer tangible resources to research participants that make projects more attractive to them, and lay the foundation for ongoing, meaningful partnerships. For example, in another project in Australia, photovoice has been adopted by researchers to promote health with homeless youth (Dixon & Hadjialexiou, 2005) and to engage Aboriginal youth in health awareness programs (Larson, Mitchell, & Gilles, 2001). One of the incentives for the young people to participate was that the photographs would be displayed in a public exhibition held in a community hall and visited by more than 100 people. More importantly, the exhibition created a window of opportunity for the wider community to be open to listening and learning from the affected young people instead of deciding what is best for them without hearing from the young people's perspectives. Hence, choosing and deciding on the artistic mode as data gathering techniques, as well as specific details surrounding its expression needs to be decided upon in dialogue with research participants.

Lastly, Crockett et al. (2013) also placed emphasis on the importance of translating these research findings to enhance well-being and then disseminating the findings to different audiences through multiple community tools. As participants are encouraged to express themselves through various art forms, e.g. generating photographs or writing poetry, these art forms hold the potential to be communicated and disseminated to create awareness around relevant social problems or consumer-related issues.

#### *c. Research translation and dissemination*

It is acknowledged that to improve the lives of those marginalized in society, the researcher must engage with wider stakeholders to raise awareness of vulnerable populations and their lived experiences (Ozanne & Fischer, 2012). Beyond traditional dissemination modes aimed at mostly academic audiences; arts-based research has introduced new forms of dissemination expression that speak to wider stakeholders and to marginalized groups themselves (Seregina & Christensson, 2017). As such, arts-based research is perceived as a key part of social change research, playing heavily to the often emotion-loaded data that is reflective of experiences of those laboring under the weight of marketplace exclusion, in whatever guise this may present. To enable the researcher to elicit rich insights of lived vulnerability requires the use of alternative modes of data collection, beyond traditional fare, which for the most part is served on the qualitative plate (i.e. in-depth/semi-structured interviews). This move away from traditional forms of data collection/dissemination to encourage and favor alternate forms offers researchers novel opportunities for informants to furnish genuine voices to their life stories, in familiar language and culture, reflective of everyday life (Ozanne & Anderson, 2011). The importance of visual culture to create awareness and inform understanding has been instrumental in creating new forms of data collection and dissemination technique.

For example, photography has the ability to capture the hidden, often obscured dimensions of vulnerability to provide researchers with a rich tapestry of personal and cultural

meaning, in which to instigate social and policy changes. Equally, visual techniques can be used in consumer research (i.e. videography, collages) to evoke fertile and impassioned data. By definition, marginalized people suffer from the disparities of the marketplace. In order to help alleviate this inequality, researchers must raise awareness, not only to marginalized groups, but by altering wider stakeholder perceptions (i.e. processes, practices, and institutions) that speak to such disparities. Understood in the process is the familiarity fashioned between researchers and researched; borne of researchers' empathy and understanding of the context of marginalization in which to effect change (Bishop, 2008).

For those, working with communities of relevant consumers, the support of key stakeholders, including community groups, is essential to gaining intimate consumer insights and effecting sustainable change. Given the nature of the problems that are off interests among consumer cultural researchers, it is to be expected that these are usually complex and embedded in socio-historical contexts. As such, studies of this nature may require a long-term approach. Arts-based research methods can act as the catalyst to initiate change and enable wider stakeholder engagement. Wider stakeholders include team members who are able to speak to social problems from multiple perspectives; these are considered conducive to effecting change.

This approach allows for corresponding assets to be implemented and the sharing out of tasks (engaging local community groups, doing the research, disseminating the research findings) in the development of educational and intervention programs. There is a need for consumer researchers to disseminate findings to relevant stakeholders in the immediate research community and beyond. Effective dissemination will come to rely on creative, arts-based methods that attend the local, in terms of cultural communication, to offer appropriate communication styles to effect social change (Mick et al., 2012). Most often the researcher collaborates with the artists for the production and dissemination of the research (Barone & Eisner, 2012). It should be kept in mind that the resulting artistic piece is always tied to the process of making it (Leavy, 2015).

#### IV. DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

For the purpose of this paper, we have presented the steps as a linear research process but in practice, incorporating arts in consumer research requires multiple iterations; it demands a certain amount of flexibility and creativity from the consumer researchers. Essentially, it is an iterative process that deeply engages the consumers as participants in the process, opening up dialogues around issues that might have been overlooked by the researchers. The intention is to project the arts in an expressive way that makes them a source of insight and inspiration as we gain understanding into those aspects of consumer lives. According to Gerber et al. (2012), art has always been able to convey truths, self-knowledge and other multiple ways of knowing.

A key aspect of incorporating art in the research process is the leverage of artistic expression for social change. Since the

research is going to involve artistic expressions, it also has the potential to promote transformational leadership through the following attributes (Grisham, 2006): Wisdom, competence, sensitivity, adaptability (empathy, culture, circumstances), creativity, patience and conflict management. By incorporating art in the process enables consumers and researchers to see and recognize form in both its physical and expressive (connotative) aspects for the purposes of understanding and acting on life, beyond the form itself. Through arts-based research, consumers are given tools and the depth of sensibility to make informed decisions about their choices in life and their choices in society and careers. For example, photographs are used to raise awareness and even inspire social action (Banks, 2001). As such art-based research and inspired changes and transformation to through consumer education and development. Education of the audience occurs through the consumer personally experiencing the presence and power of art and through participation in ABR attaining cognitive achievements with the aesthetic experience which often instructs, as pointed out by Smith (2005). The pleasure taken in aesthetic experience is a conceptual freedom, that is, a freedom from logical necessity that binds the audience to specific decisions, actions, or conclusions (Visconti, Sherry, Borghini & Anderson, 2010). This aesthetic pleasure sets the faculties of imagination and understanding into a harmonious and free play (Guyer, 1996).

ABR has the potential to be used in problem-centered contexts by creating new and inter-disciplinary approaches to research to serve communities in which they are enmeshed (Leavy, 2015). Since ABR facilitates the making of connections and inter-connections that otherwise would be out of reach, it reaches broad audiences and non-academic stakeholders. It facilitates entirely new audiences to be involved in ABR outcomes and thus researchers, bring themselves into their research – who they are, their sense of justice, to inspire the audience to see, think and feel differently. These new audiences are reached through diverse artistic expressions. Additional transformative outcomes and results also include the cultivation of empathy and the provocation of dialogue, both critical to understanding social justice work. Such understandings are situated within a network of culturally shared knowledge, beliefs, ideals, and taken-for-granted assumptions about the nature of social life (Benhabib, 1992; Faulconer & Williams, 1985). This is particularly relevant to consumer culture researchers who are working with consumers of different national-cultural conditions (e.g., Mexico North America, Denmark, or Turkey) (Luedicke, 2011).

Honing on the untapped potential of arts within consumer research, we have attempted to provide a discussion and explanation of the arts-based research and unpacked the key steps in the research process. This starts with identifying problems through shared interests with the consumers and establishing a mutually beneficial plan through consultation with the community partner. Additionally, ABR fosters reciprocity, mural recognition and rewards with formative and summative assessments to guide decisions about the progress and outcomes of the project and reflection and dissemination at

the conclusion of the project which can include platforms and outlets beyond the traditional academic publications, presentations, policy documents and corporate newsletters.

More broadly, ABR has research implications for consumer researchers who aim to facilitate consumers participation in the research process while striving to bring about transformative outcomes. With successful intervention for transformative social change in mind, such changes and transformations can be applied at multiple levels through the arts. Future research could make ABR methods more dynamic and stimulate more interdisciplinary conversations amongst consumers from various disciplines. Essentially, researchers who conduct arts-based research are not “discovering” new research tools, they are carving them Leavy (2015).

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