

The research register for this journal is available at
<http://www.emeraldinsight.com/researchregisters>



The current issue and full text archive of this journal is available at
<http://www.emeraldinsight.com/0309-0566.htm>

European
Journal of
Marketing
36,5/6

524

Marketing, the consumer society and hedonism

John O'Shaughnessy
*The Judge Institute of Management Studies, University of Cambridge,
Cambridge, UK, and*
Nicholas Jackson O'Shaughnessy
Department of Management, Keele University, Keele, UK

Keywords *Marketing, Consumerism, Society, Materiality*

Abstract *Marketing is commonly assumed to be responsible for the consumer society with its hedonistic lifestyle and for undermining other cultures by its materialistic stance. This, for many critics, is the dark side of consumer marketing, undermining its ethical standing. This paper considers the connection between marketing, the consumer society, globalization and the hedonistic lifestyle, and whether marketing is guilty as charged. After all, anything that affects the image of marketing as a profession is important, as this influences both recruitment and social acceptance.*

The charge: a hedonistic society attributable to consumer marketing

This paper discusses the claim that today's consumer society is hedonistic, due largely to modern day marketing practices. To its critics, the implicit claims made by consumer marketing are that the meaning of life is discovered through acquisition; that the hedonistic experience of material accumulation is the core object of existence on earth. As hedonism in this context is meant to suggest a degenerate influence, it is important to assess whether the charge against marketing is true or the extent to which it is valid. This is the purpose of this paper. Consumer culture, and the ideology of consumerism, generally get a bad press today. The public visibility of goods is seen as becoming the core of social identity, achieved at the expense of other values such as family orientation and so on. This has now become a public issue. One piece in the *Sunday Telegraph* (McCartney, 2000) states:

Every night, on the television advertisements, you see smooth-jawed men driving £30,000 cars, attracting the envious, admiring glances of their peers and attractive women . . . Values, however, percolate through our culture (or our lack of it). Witty, moneyed advertisers have always sought to sell us more and more expensive possessions, but they now also choose to do so by relentlessly mocking any "value" which is not material: usually those found in either marriage or religion.

This process of acquiring, consuming and discarding is viewed as a novel and forbidding cultural form. Hedonism-consumerism has rapidly acquired the status of a modern bogey-man, and is seen as intimately associated with the parallel phenomenon of globalization. In fact, consumerism and globalization have become metaphors for human acquisitiveness in a revolt that is intellectual, moral and even physical. And such thinking is becoming



conventional orthodoxy. Nor are such reservations entirely new: anti-materialism has a tradition and a history. The thrust of most of the world's religions is anti-materialistic, where materialism is seen as being against spiritual values. Consumption and possession-driven hedonism find no support here, and much condemnation. Though Calvinism may at one time have associated material prosperity with a sign of being one of the "elect", this is not the same as endorsing hedonism.

A consumer society is defined as one directed largely by the accumulation and consumption of material goods. The term "consumer society" is used in a pejorative sense, coming from the perception that such a society will inevitably be hedonistic. It is the search for instant gratification that we traditionally associate with hedonism. Hedonism viewed in this way is the opposite to puritanism, associated with antipathy to all pleasures of the flesh. Yet hedonism is the more natural of these two positions. If there is one thing we have learned from behaviorism (Foxall, 1996), it is the strong desire for instant (egoistic) gratification. If explanations are sought, it is puritanism that requires explanation, not hedonism. Nonetheless hedonism is regarded as the least attractive feature of Western society: constructions such as "doing one's own thing" or "dumbing down" connect with the idea of an egoistic, individualistic culture distinguished – or degraded – by materialism, introversion and self-obsession. Phrases such as the "me-generation" and "the culture of narcissism" have entered the language of popular discourse with individuals viewed as standing apart from their community obligations, less aware of any connectedness to the larger whole, beguiled by the ceaseless medley of consumer offerings.

While many cultural forces – not least, Hollywood – have been indicted as having a role in this, the blame is frequently attributed to the supposed ingenuity and insistence of consumer marketing. When the term "marketing" is used by critics in this context, it is meant to cover all the ways used by marketing to tempt the consumer into buying, whether through product design, brand name, packaging or promotion. Yet this concept of marketing by critics rests on a purely outsider's view of marketing, not recognizing that the key decision areas of marketing embrace at least the following:

- identifying actual/potential wants within a market or markets; segmenting the market into want categories and selecting market segments suited to the firm's thrust and core competencies;
- determining the offering to match the want of each segment selected;
- making the offering available;
- informing and persuading those within the market segment or segments to buy or rebuy;
- deciding on a continuous basis what offerings to add, subtract, modify and upgrade; and
- cooperating with others to secure resources and support marketing plans.

These decisions have to be made by every company. They are not optional but need to be carefully considered, if a company is to be successful. A knowledge of marketing as a discipline provides useful approaches, concepts and findings that help in making these decisions. But there is no guarantee of success.

The criticisms of marketing overwhelmingly refer to consumer marketing with next to nothing to say on business-to-business marketing. Not-for-profit marketing is similarly ignored. Advertising in particular is singled out as acclaiming acquisition and celebrating consumption at the expense of other values, with advertising being described as the most value-destroying activity of Western civilization (Schudson, 1994). The genius of advertising, it is claimed, is to provide an alibi for self-indulgence. Advertising may, for example, seek to assuage guilt through reinterpretation, particularly of rules acquired from past authority figures such as parents, so what might initially be perceived as, say, an extravagance is reinterpreted as an investment. Kentucky Fried Chicken saw guilt as a problem to be overcome in selling fast food and sought to sell the notion of guilt-free fast food. This gave rise to the advertising slogan: "It's nice to feel so good about a meal".

The gospel of hedonism, it is claimed, is spread via globalization with marketing regarded as the engine used to propel acceptance. Marxist dogma regards marketing-directed hedonism as having been created by power structures to maintain dominance, with the mass media responsible for creating the "false consciousness" (beliefs out of line with true self-interests) of a consumption ideology (Adamson, 1980; Gramsci, 1971). Advertisements are seen as being produced by the dominant group for approval by the suppressed group, envisioning a process that is gratifying to the masses yet contributes to their enslavement. These claims are not irrelevant for marketing practitioners or marketing academics, since they relate intimately to the perceived ethical status of marketing.

Hedonism: definitions and meanings

If the major charge against consumer marketing lies in bringing about a hedonistic society, there is a need to define what is meant by hedonism.

As any etymological dictionary will tell us, the word hedonism is from the Greek *hedone*, which means pleasure, enjoyment or delight. Hedonism is the view that pleasure (which includes the avoidance of pain) is the only good in life. In philosophical discourse there are variations on this theme. Psychological hedonism claims that pleasure is the only possible object of desire, because all motivation is based on the prospect of pleasure. If pleasure is interpreted as selfish gratification, that this is consistent with a traditional view of man. Thus Descartes (1596-1650) argued that man is first and foremost regulated by selfish passion and Hobbes (1588-1679) viewed man as self-seeking, atomistic and not by nature (contrary to Aristotle) even social. Ethical hedonism claims pleasure (more broadly defined) is what we ought to pursue. Universal hedonism (which lies behind utilitarianism) has the moral edge in arguing that every man ought to act in whatever manner brings about the most pleasure to

the greatest number in the long run. Finally, rationalizing hedonism argues that it is the pursuit of pleasure that makes action rational by making it purposeful; that the criterion of rationality and intentional action demands a foundation in terms of pleasure. Systems of psychology such as behaviorism whose categories stress materialistic satisfactions are, by definition, hedonistic. Hedonism is pleasure-seeking, though, to leave it at that, makes hedonists of us all, since a preference for pleasure, in the very broadest sense, is what structures our lives.

These various philosophical positions are lost on the general public. Hedonism, in popular usage, is typically regarded as a form of egoism where pleasure and the avoidance of pain dominate as motives for action. Consumers are assumed to ask only: "Does it feel good?" without making any serious attempt to calculate the full consequences of action. This is narrow hedonism, which, it is argued, is the hallmark of today's consumer society. Bourdieu (1984) regards the ethic of hard work as being replaced by narrow hedonism as the fun ethic of modern day society, with sellers exploiting this trend by focusing on selling through emotive words and images instead of product substance (Bourdieu, 1984). There is even a resort company with the name Hedonism that offers precisely that! It claims the highest return rate of customers of any resort.

Yet, even in popular usage, hedonism connotes not just any pleasure. Few would describe, for example, listening to the orchestra as a hedonistic experience. Ideas of a self-gratificatory sensuality are linked to hedonism in the popular mind, with the implicit idea of excess, even of a kind of compulsion. Nor would popular usage refer to hedonistic behaviour as anything but selfish.

Hedonism, among critics of the consumer society is tied to popular usage since it is viewed as pleasure-seeking that is driven, and the notion of its compelling nature is contained in criticisms of consumerism. Hedonism is seen as something less than addiction, something more than ideology, something that victimizes consumers, even though they may understand its dysfunctional consequences at the detached intellectual level. As Rohatyn (1990, p. 78) comments:

Yet we continue to "buy" expensive products, cheap slogans, corrupt candidates and (above all) the ideology of ceaseless consumption of material goods as a way of life . . . Even when we know that it benefits corporations far more than ourselves, that every new acquisition generates disappointment, restlessness and another round of conspicuous (hence pointless) consumption . . . To live in North America today is to endure more propaganda in 24 hours than our ancestors faced in a lifetime.

Hedonism as popularly conceived is not a sustainable experience. If hedonism dominates the consumer society, its pleasures are fleeting and uncertain. Campbell (1987) distinguishes pleasure-seeking from satisfaction-seeking. Satisfaction-seeking is to fulfill biological needs to relieve discomfort arising from deprivation (e.g. hunger). In contrast, pleasure-seeking aims for a quality of experience arising from certain patterns of sensation. For Campbell the pleasures of consumption reside in imagination. Consumers imaginatively

anticipate the pleasure that a novel new product might bring, though the reality never lives up to what they anticipate. It is all a tragic saga of continuous hope and continuous disappointment, with true pleasure typically lying only in the imagination. According to Campbell, understanding today's hedonistic buyers means understanding how consumers use (and came to use) fantasizing to generate feelings. While no great pleasure can be derived from just imagined sensations, it is easy to imagine situations (e.g. love making) and events (e.g. meeting one's lost love) that have the capacity to stimulate emotional experience. For Campbell, when consumers feel something to be true (even when they know it to be false), that feeling may be all that is needed to determine a brand preference.

The Campbell view of modern day hedonism differs from the narrow hedonism used by critics of the consumer society. Campbell does not suggest that modern hedonism equates with self-indulgence. He acknowledges that the self-illusory pleasure-seeker may be led in the direction of idealistic commitment. Campbell thus moves from narrow hedonism to a broader view.

While we accept that humans, like all animals, seek pleasure and avoid pain, it is somewhat strained to argue that seeking pleasure/avoiding pain covers all motivations for buying. If every intentional action can be interpreted as driven by self-interest and self-interest is viewed as pleasure-seeking/pain-avoiding, it is extremely reductionist. Even sacrificing one's life to save others becomes acting for purely selfish reasons.

"Consumerism" and "hedonism" are part of a rhetoric of reproof and reprobation, suggesting that selfish, irresponsible pleasure-seeking has come to dominate life. These terms do not have a definitive and primordial meaning but are loose conceptual bundles covering multiple diverse phenomena. They are, or have become, rhetoric – and politicized rhetoric at that. They are not exact terms but emotional resonant rhetorical brands conscripted in an ideological war. But they affect attitudes to marketing as a social force in equating the simple desire for acquisition with greed. What is perhaps important is not so much the meaning of terms like "hedonism" and "consumerism" as the dominant public idea of what they mean. We have come to see them as anathematizing all those values that, at least at the level of public discourse, we hold dear. They have become a convenient shorthand for multiple and diverse threats.

Hedonism and consumerism

At the heart of the debate about hedonism and marketing responsibility lies the question of social consequences and the role of marketing in creating "new" products and the culture of consumption. Phrases such as "shop till you drop" reflect popular appreciation of this phenomenon. The stimulation of consumption is the most tangible expression of attempts at marketing-directed hedonism. In making this connection, marketing is blamed for social consequences; parents, for example, seen as too concerned with earning money to pay for the goods that marketing promotes, spending too little time with

their children but, instead, buying their affection. The consumer society embraces consumerism, not in the sense of protecting and advancing the interests of consumers, but in vigorously promoting a culture of consumption. The alleged characteristics of this consumer society approximate those associated with postmodernity (Lyon, 1994; Brown, 1995; Rosenau, 1992; Best and Kellner, 1997). These alleged characteristics constitute descriptive hypotheses, which (unlike scientific hypotheses, which can never be proved absolutely) can be shown to be true or false, provided that there is agreement on operational definitions and a sampling plan. No such research has been carried out. The claims made by critics are taken to be self-evident from observation. However, they are by no means self-evident and, in any case, cannot be taken necessarily as an indictment of modern society. The claims and our responses are as follows:

The accumulation and display of material possessions

Western societies are criticized for their materialistic orientation and focus on material possessions (Belk, 1985). Marxists like Marcuse (1964) view Western societies as characterized by conspicuous consumption with critical thought overthrown in a "one-dimensional" culture of mass conformity. There is the claim that the orientation of modern capitalist societies is toward the marketing and consumption of goods with societal members extraordinarily concerned with the accumulation and display of material possessions. Baritz (1989) sums up this fever to accumulate possessions with the bumper sticker slogan: "Whoever dies with the most toys wins". Consumer lifestyles together with mass consumption are said to control the lives of ordinary citizens.

We would argue that the accumulation of material possessions is simply a consequence of wealth and has been throughout the ages, since one purpose of possessions and "conspicuous consumption" is to serve as a live information system to signal to others the owner's self-image, rank and values (Douglas and Isherwood, 1979). Except that more people in society are able to indulge, there is nothing new about the display motive. While marketing facilitates the accumulation of goods and status emanating from their display, the basic motive is already there: people may not need many possessions but want them all the same. Without marketing, society would appear less materialistic but, without the opportunity to choose, there would be no merit in virtue.

John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) made the distinction between "self-regarding actions" and "other-regarding actions", arguing that individuals should be free to do what they want to do, provided that their actions are purely self-regarding and do no harm to others. In practice Mill's distinction has never been as operational as it appears (e.g. would you not feel that a person should be stopped from committing suicide, even if it brings no harm to others?). Mill never approved the various applications of his principle (see later on globalization). Nonetheless, as applied here, Mill's principle has applicability in relation to consumer choice: what people want to spend their money on is their own decision and critics have no right to impose their own "better" values. This

is not to suggest that there is no meaningful difference between high and low culture as postmodernists claim but simply that freedom to choose is a matter of individual liberty. Rawls (1972) in *A Theory of Justice* puts liberty as the foundation value for all else and sets out to establish a rational basis for the personal and civil liberties, which are held to be inviolable rights by twentieth century liberals.

Satisfying transitory appetites and created wants

It is argued that the primary motivation of those in a consumer society is satisfying the transitory appetites and wants created by advertising. Frank (1999), like Campbell, argues that the pleasures from consumption are both relative and fleeting. Moving to a relatively better house provides pleasure only for a short time, namely, until the new level of luxury seems routine or one's neighbor goes one better. The pleasure derived from owning any house or any other possession is tied to the status attached to owning such a house relative to those owned by neighbors. Frank uses the metaphor of the arms race to characterize conspicuous consumption, because it is motivated by a desire to keep up with the Joneses. He concludes that consumers in affluent societies would be more content, if less was spent on luxury goods, resulting in less of a need to work long hours and more time spent with families.

We agree. Pleasures, like all pleasurable emotions, tend to be short-lived. But whether satisfying transitory appetites is desirable or not depends on the context and a person's values. No one who claims to support a democratic society would deny people the right to make choices for themselves. But the real charge is against advertising with its assumed ability to create wants (see, for example, Galbraith, 1977). But wants cannot be created. There must be an underlying appetite for the product. Galbraith, like other economists before him, claimed that firms are less preoccupied with want-satisfying than with want-creating, which involves some element of manipulation. Galbraith sees corporations as a powerful force in shaping wants, arguing that the myth that holds that the great corporation is the puppet of the market, the powerless servant of the consumer, is one of the devices by which power is perpetuated.

The controversy over whether wants (market demand) can be created or molded at will is important (O'Shaughnessy, 1995). A firm that believes that wants can be created, or demand can be molded, is less concerned with discovering wants but will adopt something close to a promotion-cum-manipulation orientation. If the orientation is wrong, resources are misdirected. The assertion, however, assumes that consumers are motivationally empty until injected by marketers with wants created by advertising (Campbell, 1987). It seems truer to say that there are wants that are latent until activated by promotion. All persuasion, to be effective, taps into the target audience's motives. As Walter Reuther, the US automobile union leader, is once reputed to have said: "You can automate the production of cars but you cannot automate the production of customers".

Seeking positional goods for social status and social bonding

In a consumer society, consumers seek "positional" goods to demonstrate group membership, to identify themselves and mark their position. With positional goods, satisfaction arises in large part from a product's scarcity and social exclusiveness (Hirsch, 1977). It is argued that advertising stimulates this perversion of values by dramatizing the satisfactions of positional goods and status; with an implicit claim that the advertiser can soothe the consumers' floating discontent at the deepest of levels through the ownership of goods. This Baudrillard (1968) calls the ideology of consumption. As Holbrook and Hirschman (1993) remark, such an ideology holds that social meaning is attached to and communicated by commodities. In line with this, it is argued that accumulation, consumption and disposal become the core of existence to give life meaning; advertising in the aggregate is seen as a proselytisation for this ideology. The search, purchase, using and discarding of products become the great aim of life and an alternative self-articulation. As the close bonds of communities wither away, people survive the new order of weak communities by a continuous re-expression of self to transient audiences. They dress up, now as skiers who never ski, now as pilots who cannot fly, now as soldiers who never see army life, in a search for the expression of individualism bound up in a fantasy status. They discover community through the community of shared brands: brands link consumers via promotion to similar others. Branding pulls things together into one tangible attractive symbol, while advertisements differentiate the brands. On this reading, the hedonistic need satisfied by marketing is dramaturgical; a need to self-present in the theater of life, and to refine our act. The hedonistic pleasure satisfied is a need to be socially admired and envied, and to maintain a sense of connection.

The continual process of search, purchase, savoring, using and finally replacing goods is seen as masking what is ultimately a search for social bonds covering social integration, the display of power or status, and the attainment of friendship. For Gottdiener (1990) and others, social meaning is attached to and communicated by commodities. Schudson (1984) suggests that through consumption people seek social membership and social acceptance as much as anything else. Commodities become means for acquiring social ends such as love and friendship. Consumers seek, through symbolic material artifacts, what could be experienced in more satisfactory ways: all a consequence of the need for social communication in a rootless world. Marketing-driven hedonism is seen as a response to this need. As Fiske (1990) stresses, in line with Douglas and Isherwood (1979), in a world where appearances matter enormously, most cultural artifacts have a communication as well as a technological function, so possessions and acquisitions really count.

We argue that consumers do desire to be accepted by their social milieu, but also desire visibility and social status and positional goods help in this. If the search for status and power are base motives, they are also basic motives, which are pervasive throughout the animal kingdom. People in affluent democracies, whatever the education system, seek the symbols of status and

power in their purchases and there is no way of denying them this choice without abandoning democracy itself. Marketing does not create these motives but, in recognizing them, serves them.

Consumers take their identity from their possessions

A postmodernist claim is that self-identity is no longer a matter of social ascription but individual choice. It is a short step from this to arguing that people take their self-identity from their possessions or at least their social self (Belk, 1988). This is a position well defended by Dittmar (1992), drawing on extensive social science findings. The movement is from ascribed to personally achieved identity (Belk, 1984). Dittmar views possessions as material symbols of identity; as expressive symbols of identity and as reflections of identity in terms of gender, and social-material status. This view of possessions and self-identity connects to positional goods, as both are quoted to explain a move away from assembly-line mass production to niche marketing.

There would be something wrong with society, if the whole of a person's self-identity were defined by his or her possessions. But it is a parochial view to equate self-identity with possessions. Self includes a life history (Schiffer, 1998). Many other factors enter into self-identity such as personal history, socio-economic status, religion, ethnicity, roles in life, job and so on. In fact, as Flanagan (1996) argues, the whole narrative of our lives and what concerns us enters into our self-identity. Self-identity is something more than the sum of our appetites. As Erving Goffman (1971) says, no one's self-identity is limited to a singular "core image", as people have many different sides to their personalities, revealed on different occasions. This is not to deny that consumers use goods as a way to express some aspects of their social identity and to distinguish themselves from others "in a world in which traditional social bonds and class boundaries are weakening" (Gronow, 1997).

With regard to the claim that self-identity is now more a matter of individual choice than social ascription, this ignores the fact that self-identity is not developed in a vacuum but is very much influenced by how others view us in social interactions. Similarly with possessions, there is a limit to the extent that consumers can express a completely distinct self-identity. There is the matter of time and financial resources while consumers, non-conforming to societal norms, may be conformative to the norms of subcultural groups. Subcultural social pressures are likely to produce a strong family resemblance in possessions among the members of the subgroup.

Consumption cleavages being less based on social class

Another claim is that consumption cleavages (social divisions in consumption) are becoming less based on social class than on differences in patterns of consumption. Clothes, for example, are less apt to reflect social class than personal choices. This is consistent with the earlier claim that the construction of self-identity is more a matter of personal choice than social class ascription. It suggests the declining importance of social classes.

If the importance of social class is declining, it is of considerable importance to marketing, since social class is considered vital in defining target audiences in advertising and in segmentation. Whether social class has significantly declined in importance for these purposes must, in the final analysis, be a matter for empirical inquiry. But there are strong reasons for doubt. When economic status varies widely among the citizens of a society (and it is very wide in Western societies), sharp divisions in social class inevitably exist, as people seek status and visibility in possessions that reflect income level.

More commodification of social life

It is claimed that the market is extending its reach with more and more aspects of social life becoming commodified, that is, offered for sale. Everything from religion to government services is presented and segmented as various offerings from which the public is to choose; a distinct move away from the "one size fits all" view. This is said to bring with it a move away from the welfare state and all public ownership that offers "freebies".

While there is truth in this, it is not clear how extensive it is. The evidence in support is mainly anecdotal, which gives no order of magnitude. In any case, many would welcome a move away from any welfare system that has come to be perceived as encouraging dependency and feckless behavior.

The impact of fantasy and imagery in influencing buying

According to Campbell (1987), modern hedonism is characterized by day-dreams (fantasy), giving rise to illusions known to be false but felt to be true. Featherstone (1991) in a similar vein identifies three facets of consumption in the consumer society:

- (1) that consumption is continuously encouraged as an inducement to work;
- (2) that consumption patterns are a significant source of status differentiation; and
- (3) that consumption is a source of fantasy and pleasure.

We agree that advertising attaches to brands culturally symbolic images in the hope that a fusion of the two enhances a brand's desirability. All consumer marketers emphasize the importance of symbolic meaning. As Eliade (1991, p. 168) says:

We may even wonder whether the accessibility of Christianity may not be attributable in great measure to symbolism, whether the universal images it takes up in its turn have not considerably facilitated the diffusion of its message.

Baudrillard (1975, 1981) argues that, through the manipulation of the symbolic code, any object can take on any symbolic meaning regardless of its physical attributes. For Baudrillard the new electronic media introduce a world of pure simulacra, where the distinction between the "real" world and images is eroded and where people are regarded as non-rational with an orientation toward instant gratification, feelings, emotions and the deviant.

The claim that consumers may be so immersed in the imagery that this becomes the reality for consumers is not backed by evidence. The fact that people often buy purely on the basis of brand image is no proof, since brand image acts as a summary evaluation, which can on occasions determine choice simply because it saves time. In any case, whatever symbolic code exists, it needs to be known (codified), that is, the relevant bits need to be identified in some way if a code is to be used by advertisers. Until then advertisers must rely on their own intuitions as to what is likely to symbolize what. Not all associations (however pleasant) are compelling and advertisers can seldom ensure in advance those that will be.

Privileging ephemeral and superficial values

Critics see marketing as privileging the material surfaces of life . . . the ideology of consumption as a way of life, supported by a set of value perspectives . . . over the deeper things that dignify humanity. Self-identity, as we have seen, becomes the assemblage of possessions; signals to define status, social involvement and stylistic intelligence. An individual's intellect, wisdom, decency, erudition and personal accomplishment, it is claimed, do not figure in the advertising universe. Advertising concentrates on what we have, not what we are, in any profound sense.

More important, according to the critics, advertising speaks to current ephemeral values and the very latest in household knick-knacks that enunciate style over substance. In effect, advertising exhibits a cult of what is contemporary, the passing insubstantial style, the chic and the trendy, often clothed in a sort of pseudo-sophistication, a worldly know-knowingness. Certain personality characteristics are highlighted for approval such as being sexy, powerful, to be in control and, above all, "cool". Much advertising is about the loss and restoration of control (e.g. in love) via the agency of the product. Selfless deeds, dedication to community, sensitivity to the elderly and so on are conspicuous by their absence. Those human values which, it is claimed, advertising leaves out are as important as those which it leaves in. There are, for example, no references to religion, except humorously or satirically in the form of the genial sky pilot vicar, or to erudition, intellect, creativity – none of the corpus of human traits considered traditionally to ennoble mankind; nothing which reaches the higher octaves of spiritual and intellectual striving. On the other hand, bad habits are advocated with eloquence.

To critics, the values thus promoted by advertising celebrate narrow hedonism, because, while much differentiates us as individuals, lower order passions such as greed, lust and power are all we have in common. For Pollay (1986), advertising is a "distorted mirror" in that it provides only reinforcement of shallow hedonistic values and thereby strengthens them and expands their domains of salience. This projection of hedonistic values, it is argued, is not something incidental to advertising, but central to advertising's ability to persuade. Schudson (1984) sees advertising as based on a kind of Utopianism

characteristic of Soviet art or "socialist realism", what he calls in contrast "capitalist realism", an edited version of life based on the upbeat and stereotypical, which claims to picture reality not as it is, but as it should be, showing people only as incarnations of larger social categories. He quotes one study of 500 magazine advertisements in which couples were pictured. There are no old, poor, sick or unattractive couples in the advertisements. Along the lines of Campbell, it is thus claimed that advertising reflects how people are acting, but their dreaming: advertising wraps up these dreams and sells them back to its target audience. For otherwise undifferentiated products, copywriters tend to converge, in various ways, on the idea of constructing illusions, images and fantasies round the product, and such projections are never value-free. When, as in many mature markets, technical and other performance factors such as service are all equal, image becomes the basis of differentiation, with the projection of these images tied to hedonistic values.

We agree that advertising seeks to persuade. All ways of promoting a brand are meant to persuade. This is because advertising is advocacy of the brand designed to influence buying behavior. If the provision of lots of accurate information helps in this advocacy role or is needed to ensure successful use of the product, such information will be provided. Sometimes in fact all that needs to be done in advertising is to provide a compelling logic as to why the brand is best for the function being served. More commonly, however, in persuading the consumer, there is a need to get the consumer on to the "right wavelength", to have the right perspective. This changing of perspectives is never simply a matter of logic but of appeals to the imagination (e.g. to savor an experience with the product) and emotive words that resonate with the target audience. All persuaders need to put "their best foot forward" and advertising is simply doing this. What there should be, however, is a way of reinforcing the "will to be good" by ensuring that there are penalties for lying and misrepresentation.

Image-saturated environment pressing consumers to buy

Another focus by critics has been the sheer insistence and multiplication of marketing messages. To live in the West today, and increasingly in other parts of the world, is to inhabit a message-saturated environment. The claim is made that the aggregate effects of mass consumer messaging on this scale press consumers in a hedonistic direction. Some see advanced capitalist society as self-subverting, in effect needing to continually stimulate self-indulgence to expand market share and, in the process, undermining notions of self-discipline and self-denial that made advanced capitalism possible in the first place. What might appear threatening in a radical newspaper, left-wing poster or pornographic text is neutered by advertising, which has the ability to stylize and domesticate the perverse, bringing it into the cultural mainstream.

Marketing communications thus stand accused of creating strong social pressure to consume; that the icons of our age are manufactured by marketing's processes; that seductive images, designer labels, slick packaging, the product's self-proclamation as the gateway to a sophisticated lifestyle and so on constitute

a live information system about what the élite have now become. By this argument, the social pressure to acquire is immense and, conversely, a marketing-arbitered social ecology, arousing envy among those who cannot purchase these things, and leading ultimately to increased criminality.

We agree that we live in a message-saturated environment concerned with exhortations to consume. But consumers are selective in what they perceive and tune out the vast majority of messages coming their way. Consumers attend to what concerns them. Advertising provides information and creates the initial awareness of innovative new products and services. If advertising were to disappear tomorrow, there would be a perception of loss, because, as with newspapers, advertising provides a sense of what is happening in the world, while many ads have intrinsic appeal, all of their own.

Globalization as transmitting the consumer society

Hedonistic marketing, according to critics, bleaches out the indigenous cultures of traditional societies, emptying them of content and filling the vacuum with sensually glazed materialism. The advertising promise is of a costless cornucopia, a sensual nirvana, and it is marketing's disguise of the true cost of earning the delights it proffers that encourages the association made between marketing and hedonism. Marketing on this view, in its global expansion, is concerned with hedonistic appetite and its stimulation: hidden from view is the amount of work and skill necessary to pay for what is offered, or the social and emotional costs of indulging some of the desires that advertising summons forth.

A good deal has recently been written about global capitalism and the accompanying spread of the consumer society with its dysfunctional consequences, a by-product of a materialistic, throw-away transient society promoted by marketing. LaFeber (1999) quotes the case of Nike and the way it used Michael Jordan's celebrity status and the seductiveness of US culture to influence everything from eating habits, clothes, TV viewing and even language to push its products around the world. According to LaFeber, this globalization of the consumer society has had the unintended consequence, not only of undermining other cultures, but of strengthening anti-US feeling around the globe. Even if freely seduced, the seduced still feels hatred with the recognition that something has been lost, in this case, a dilution of culture. In a book, edited by Jameson and Miyochi (1999), contributors suggest that the global dominance of Western societies, with their ideology of consumerism, not only has been the undermining of foreign cultures but has led to a weakening of national governments in controlling both capital and the transnational corporations themselves. Thus the radical dynamism of global free markets is seen as sanitizing the authenticity of cultures and demolishing traditional authority structures, killing indigenous industries; the organizational form of this radical dynamism, the global corporation, is seen as an unchallenged extra-territorial force of immense power, switching manufacturing apparently at whim from country to country. And this is seen as being intimately connected

with questions of equity, particularly the unfairness of the deal for poor countries. The paradigm case is the problem of treating AIDS in South Africa, given the monopolistic prices Western countries charge for their drugs. John le Carré's novel, *The Constant Gardener*, thus expounds the theme of pharmaceutical imperialism.

Pankaj Mishra (1999), while paying tribute to the deceased writer Nirad Chaudhuri, acknowledges that Hindu xenophobia flourishes in India but argues that the most dominant culture in India is made up of borrowings from the West. He claims that the main emblems of these borrowings are not Pascal or Mozart but MTV and Coca-Cola! Even countries that shout the loudest anti-US slogans still exhibit the iconography of consumer hedonism, McDonald's and all the designer labels. On the global scene the charge, too, against marketing is that it has fostered the wrong (i.e. hedonistic) values.

If a nation's culture is its total way of life: its institutions, values, ideas, art, music, literature and all the other socially constructed aspects of society (Kammen, 1999), then trade and all other interactions with foreign nations have always had an impact on culture. Without the export of technology, books and medicines from the industrialized West, countries around the world would be far more impoverished than they are today. Every nation benefits from the inventions and innovations of other nations. What is really at issue is a value judgment as to what is good for a nation and what is bad. This is a cultural issue, as culture reflects societal values. To the French, US computers are worthy of import but not US movies or fast food, as these undermine French culture, while the Anglicizing of the French language strikes at the most cherished value of all, French "Frenchness"!

Many countries look at the USA as a mirror of their own future and worry that it will not be the dynamism of the USA that will be adopted but rampant individualism. It is easy to whip up feeling on this issue, given the speed with which ethnicity and chauvinism can be mobilized (Mayhew, 1997). In the shadow of globalization, as Crossette (1999) says, there is a revival of intense provincialism in unlikely places. However, Lal (1999) claims that non-Western countries such as those in Asia can import the best of US practices without undermining cultural values. Lal argues that the individualism and instrumental rationality that are the fountain of science in Western societies, have undermined the social values that held these societies together. The breakdown of family life and the general hedonism of consumerist culture are simply illustrative. Lal claims that such dysfunctional consequences need not arise in non-Western countries intent on scientific and technological progress. This is because, elsewhere in the world, cultures such as Hinduism, Islam and Confucianism are "shame" cultures, where cultural mores are enforced by social pressure.

This is not a new claim. The difference between Western culture and that of Japan has often been seen in terms of the difference between a guilt and shame culture. In Japan the sense of shame has traditionally been strong and the radical act of hara-kiri or suicide is associated with it. The same goes for many

other Asian cultures. In Urdu there are few words so heavily loaded as *sharam* (shame), except perhaps *izzat* (honor), which is reflective of cultural value priorities. Western cultures, Lal argues, are in contrast “guilt” cultures. Guilt cultures work fine, while a belief in God and Christian teaching prevails but the move towards secular societies in the West has meant that feelings of guilt have begun to dissolve. In contrast, non-Western cultures can adopt the technology and science of modernity without diluting their own value systems, as conformity is brought about by shame not guilt.

While shame is a powerful emotion in Japan and in other Asian countries, it is also a strong emotion in the West. Elster (1999) is particularly persuasive on this. Elster gives the key role to shame in bringing about compliance with all social norms. For him social norms always operate through the emotions of shame and contempt. As he says, if shame is a negative emotion triggered by a belief about one’s own character, the emotion of shame is not only *a* support of social norms but *the* support.

Similarly, in spite of all the efforts of psychological self-help books and the decline in religious observance, guilt has not gone away. These emotions simply get attached to new concerns brought about by cultural drift. It is far-fetched to explain the failings of Western societies purely on the decline of religious belief, as this assumes that religion rather than social conditioning is the major force in social behavior. Gellner (1994) reminds us of the comment made by Hume (1711-1776) that classical antiquity inculcated civil duty and social virtues conducive to communal wellbeing in the real world, while Christianity replaced this with an egotistical concern for personal salvation in another world. We can disagree with the Christianity part, while recognizing that the role of cultural indoctrination is ethical conditioning. Education in particular is important in increasing the likelihood that people will adhere to socially desirable goals and feel shame if they do not. Thus Hyman and Wright (1979) show the enduring effects of education on values that can be far removed from narrow hedonism. In any case, we cannot ignore causal social factors such as the pill, the social mobility of labor, and the social emancipation of women in making for a less culturally restrained society.

Micklethwait and Wooldrige (2000) look at globalization as the current economic reality and tabulate its flaws like the consumer society, while at the same time claiming that its superiority lies in its promise of increasing individual liberty. The authors draw on John Stuart Mill in arguing that globalization brings with it the liberal ideal of personal freedom by ultimately bringing about a world-wide open society. Theirs is a defensible position, though it is illicit to quote Mill in support, as Mill rejects any implication that his principles on personal liberty can be used to justify a universal free market. In his *On Liberty* (1859), Mill argued that all forms of trade are social acts which can harm the interests of others and so are other-regarding actions, with the consequence that his principle of liberty cannot be used in defense. On the other hand, we do find that global flows of information, made possible by the Internet, are enhancing personal liberty around the world. Global flows of

capital, however, are more problematic. George Soros is reputed as saying that deregulated financial markets can behave more like wrecking-balls than pendulums. In other words, the picture is mixed. Certainly, it cannot be claimed that a democratic society equates with a market economy and that free markets (as is commonly claimed) are the engine for democracy, though many of us feel that it helps. There are winners and losers in the wake of globalization. Some of those winners are the wretched of the earth. Globalization has also meant more freedom of information and its development could contribute to the sum of human freedom. Moreover, the displacement of cultures is not necessarily true: new artefacts, new product forms do not necessarily banish old cultures and their forms, but are merely absorbed by them, interpreted within the parameters of the particular culture.

Hedonism and the pleasure motive revisited

Narrow hedonism is but one among many motives for human action: it would be strange therefore if it were the only motive for marketing to tap. Hedonism is one of those simple-sounding concepts that tends to remain unanalyzed in debates. Upon analysis, the concept is rather elusive. What, for example, is the role of altruism? What if human beings receive pleasure largely through indirect ways, say, through fantasy? Those seeking to nuance and qualify the notion of hedonism in effect considerably qualify the responsibility of marketing for much of that hedonism: hedonism becomes less negatively charged as a moral concept and marketing is seen as less blameworthy.

Csikszentmihalyi (2000) argues that humans have a need to keep consciousness in an ordered state and this experiential need to keep consciousness tuned is what influences a good deal of consumer behavior. Sometimes it does not matter what we are shopping for – the point is to shop for anything regardless, as consuming is one way to respond to the void in consciousness, when there is nothing else to do. This is something different from narrow hedonistic shopping.

Campbell (1987) argues that human motivation involves not only self-interest but perceptions of moral obligations, since embarking on any action has to be justified to the consumer's moral self. We have a sense of ourselves as moral agents. Morally idealized self-images can be sources of pleasure. Similarly, there is aesthetic pleasure. It is by no means demonstrated that the pleasures associated with narrow hedonism are what life is about or what people really want most of all. This in fact is known as the hedonistic paradox, which is the paradox that the deepest pleasures in life, such as maternal love, come about from undertaking actions for reasons other than pleasure. "Happiness" encompasses something broader than pleasure and it is happiness which is the more natural end of human activities. Seeking pleasure directly is commonly not the best way to achieve happiness.

Csikszentmihalyi (1990), in his discussion of the attainment of what he calls "flow" (a state of contentment or happiness), finds it necessary to distinguish "pleasure" from "enjoyment". Csikszentmihalyi views enjoyment as optimal

experience and distinguishes this enjoyment from mere pleasure, which he sees as resulting from a reflex response built into the genes for the preservation of the species. Just as the pleasure obtained from eating when hungry ensures that the body will get the nourishment it needs, the pleasure that arises from meeting social expectations is related to the continuance of the "tribe" for collective security. Though pleasurable experiences can on occasions be optimal experiences (enjoyment), pleasure is generally evanescent. Here we have an echo of Campbell. Only if the pleasurable experience involves intensity of attention, sense of achievement and psychological growth, does pleasure become enjoyment.

Rationalizing (non-narrow) hedonism has most relevance for marketing. Gosling (1969) points out that a hedonist, contrary to popular interpretations, does not claim that all actions are simply undertaken for pleasure but that, if an action is voluntary, the final reason for it will have some reference to pleasure. For Gosling, this gets round the paradox of hedonism, since he denies that the hedonist necessarily seeks pleasure directly in all his or her actions. He makes the nice distinction between hedonism, defined as the claim that people ought to pursue the achievements they contemplate with pleasure and the achievements they think will give them pleasure. Pleasure is a way of attending, not a sort of feeling, as most views on hedonism seem to assume. This is very much tied to Campbell's (1987) thesis that the modern hedonist obtains his or her pleasure from anticipating novel products as offering the hope of realizing some of the idealized pleasures imagined in day-dreams (fantasies). However, since reality falls short of the dream, disappointment results. It is the contemplation of anticipated buys that is so pleasurable.

For Gosling, doing things for pleasure means doing things into which you can put your heart and soul without reservations. This implies that, for long-term success, marketing must aim at getting target audiences:

- to contemplate buying with pleasure; and
- to buy without reservations.

Anticipation, attending to and contemplation are conceptually related. Anticipating implies or extends into attending to and contemplation. From a marketing point of view, what both Campbell and Gosling are saying is that marketing should arouse or intensify the anticipation, attending to, contemplation in fantasizing about the product (including services/experiences), as this feeds the urge to buy.

On Gosling's view (and Campbell's) the consumer can contemplate with pleasure upholding social norms or some system of uplifting values in buying and still be acting in a hedonistic way. This claim is in direct opposition to what most of the critics of the consumer society say with their focus on narrow hedonism.

To Gosling rational action is chosen action, and if chosen then free, and if free then done because it is wanted and, if really wanted, then pleasure is involved in contemplating the action. He sees no reason why people cannot take

pleasure from seeing themselves as heroic performers of duties, as people vary regarding in what they take pleasure. Gosling, unlike the utilitarians of the nineteenth century, does not regard pleasure as a sort of feeling, since, on this feeling view, the hedonist would be committed to advocating the pursuit of a certain kind of feeling. This is not so. The notion of feeling is attached to pleasure only in special circumstances: a feeling of pleasure is always "at the thought of . . ." It does not follow that a consumer chooses what she thinks will give her most pleasure.

The consumer does not necessarily act on the strongest motive as to what is likely to give most pleasure, since the consumer's beliefs about the wisdom of the action may rule against it. The strongest motive is that which is stronger than any other single motive, but it need not be stronger than any other two or more motives in alliance. The relative strength of the reasons to do *X* rather than *Y* depends substantially on what other desires people have and beliefs about how satisfactions will be changed by choosing to satisfy *X* rather than *Y*. Typically, the consumer contrasts what she wants most to do with what she believes she should do, whether for reasons of duty or practical necessity. Beliefs plus desires/wants constitute reasons for action and make a coordinated contribution to determining what action to take. The earlier critics mentioned in this paper implicitly suggest that desire and desire alone determines buyer action, as marketing operates by intensifying desire. Desire is a synonym for a species of motive but reasons for action involve more than motive. Thus:

If we have a motive (or desire) to do *X* (buy brand *X*)

And

we have the ability (e.g. financial) and the opportunity (e.g. brand availability) to do *X*

And

the belief that doing *X* makes most sense in the circumstances, then we come to have an expectation of doing *X*, which in turn:

Leads to

an intention to do *X*, which, other things remaining equal, leads to the will to do *X* and the actual doing of *X*.

Motive + ability + opportunity + beliefs about means lie behind whatever is bought, though the role of motive versus belief can vary widely. Yet without a motive (desire) there is no action. Although, as a shorthand, we speak of a motive for doing something, in practice there may be several motives at work. Thus a mother may take her children to church, not only to affirm a belief in God and to acknowledge a faith, but also as an attempt to bring up her children as good citizens and to show unity with others in the community. Similarly, people can take the same action for very different motives, just as consumers may buy identical makes of car for different reasons.

Although a reason for action involves both belief and desire, either belief or desire may on occasions be the more determining. In fact the phrase "impulse

buy” suggests that affect-driven choice (desire) has been dominant. Traditionally there is this controversy over which is generally dominant, with Kant (1724-1804) arguing that a person can act against his present desires but with Hume (1711-1776) claiming that action occurs at one time, instead of another, because a particular desire has the force at the time. What we now accept is that beliefs alone do not motivate any specific action without a corresponding desire, while desire itself does not lead to a specific action without a corresponding belief, even if it is some default belief. Certainly, if desire is interpreted as sensory pleasure, desire is not the only motive at work.

Kagan (1999) rejects the notion of human action being mostly motivated by the (narrow hedonistic) desire for sensory pleasure and argues that a universal motive is a wish to regard the self as possessing good qualities. Human beings tend to act to avoid experiencing regret which follows from loss, rather than to obtain the immediate pleasure or gratification from attaining a desired immediate goal. People are inhibited from actions that are likely to bring about guilt, embarrassment or shame, contributing to what Kagan calls a motive for virtue. Adherence to ethics or moral norms is tied to feelings of self-respect, while the violation of these norms gives rise to the emotion of guilt. A growing number of consumers take account of the environment in their buying and choose manufacturers who exhibit social responsibility, such as those not exploiting child labor, polluting the environment and so on. It also violates a person's sense of integrity to accept an unfair transaction, so consumers ask what something is worth in some objective sense rather than just what it is worth to them. A consumer may forgo buying, not because the utility of the product to her is less than the price to be paid, but because the price is considered a “rip-off” (Frank, 1988). Consumers are emotional animals and emotions are turned on not just by the narrow hedonistic desire for possessions but by just about anything that concerns us.

Is marketing really responsible for the hedonist life style?

There are many rival explanations for the Western hedonistic life style, made possible by increasing affluence. Bauman (1999) claims that pervasive insecurity, uncertainty and danger, plus the decline of the family, mean that people lose their traditional informational anchors and, as a consequence, turn to a hedonistic lifestyle. After all, the fact that society is more and more organized to offer more variety and individual choice for self-expression should, on the surface, incur no criticism, unless the aim (one that can be defended) is a more world-wide redistribution of wealth. However, what is being typically argued is that marketing encourages hedonism by creating wants. The claim that wants can be created, we have argued earlier, assumes that consumers are motivationally empty until injected by marketers with wants created by advertising. This is nonsense. We simply come to see what some product might do to enrich our lives. In other words, consumers have latent wants which can be activated.

In reversal theory, pioneered by Apter (1989), people, at any one time, can be in either a telic or a paratelic mode. In a paratelic mode people are in a mood to seek excitement to avoid boredom, while in a telic mode people focus on goals to avoid anxiety. Although people move from a telic to a paratelic mode and vice versa, it is possible to get locked into one state or the other. To be locked into a paratelic mode means to focus on pleasurable (exciting) experiences, not on any set of goals. Although, in a telic mode, people seek to avoid anxiety as being painful, it is not a mode associated with hedonism. In other words, reversal theory claims that narrow hedonistic pleasure-seeking is reserved for the paratelic mode. Reversal theory demonstrates that our lives are by no means concerned with just narrow hedonistic pleasure-seeking. Narrow hedonistic pursuits do not dominate our lives.

Many of the criticisms of marketing-induced hedonism are exaggerated. The hedonism that permeates society, the "culture of narcissism", is viewed low on a scale of values, but it is often not a question of worse but only of different values. This is not to underwrite the relativism of postmodernism but simply to acknowledge that hedonism will characterize any affluent society where there is freedom of choice. As Posner (1999, p. 14) says:

Unless we want to go the way of Iran, we shall not be able to return to the era of premarital chastity, low divorce, stay-at-home moms, pornography-free media and the closeting of homosexuals and adulterers . . . But it would be more accurate to speak not of a cultural revolution but of a transformation in morals and manners resulting from diverse material factors that include changes in the nature of work, growing prosperity, advances in reproductive technology, increasing ethnic diversity and a communications revolution that has created a far better informed population.

The whole attack on marketing promotions rests on a passive/reactive view of the consumer: a more precise image of marketing's impact would be that of negotiated meaning or co-production, rather than a hypodermic or stimulus-response model. Consumers are hard to persuade. They have a great ability to filter out the siren voices that beckon. Materialism and sex were not invented by consumer marketing: societies were highly materialistic before its advent. Moreover, marketing, as a set of techniques, is open to everybody. Religious leaders who complain about shopping-malls on an epic scale and the "shop till you drop" culture have seized on the same techniques themselves to promote the gospel and have been equally accused of manipulation (Moore, 1994).

Marketers often chose hedonistic appeals, but marketing in itself is simply an orientation and a set of tools that are value-neutral and can be used to proselytize any perspective. Critics of marketing-hedonism, such as media critics generally, are apt to take marketing imagery and messages literally, and techniques such as content analysis reinforce this literalness of interpretation. There is so much in marketing promotions – product-irony, self-parody, subversion – which eludes these techniques of analysis, especially since it is contained in the surface decoration of texts or in the kind of paralanguage discussed by Cook (1992). What marketing often gives us is less a celebration of hedonism or an arousal of sensual and material passions that can be

conscripted into the process of consumer stimulation, than something more complex, namely, the tongue-in-cheek invitation, the spoof, the bizarre and the anarchic. In fact the attitude to hedonism contained in most advertisements is at least ambivalent: not a rejection, but by no means an explicit, roaring endorsement either.

It is not clear what the alternative to the consumer society is when people become relatively affluent and seek freedom of choice. Bauman (1990) argues that a communist planned economy can only understand and cater to the logic of needs, not that of desires, and argues that the main reason for the collapse of the East European socialist states was the incompatibility of socialism with a modern society. Communist states could satisfy people's basic needs but could not contend with the more segmented and refined demands of consumers, as their discretionary incomes increased.

There are costs as well as benefits attached to every type of society and the consumer society is no exception. In the USA, the organization called "Buy Nothing Day" (BND) argues that over-consumption is wrecking the environment and dragging down the quality of life (*The Economist*, 2000a). *The Economist* points out that personal borrowings in the USA went up from 26 per cent of personal income in 1985 to 34 per cent in 2000 and the number of bankruptcies have quadrupled over the same period. Marketing communications are not entirely blameless for this. However, marketing can in fact be used to reduce and not just increase consumption (Kotler, 1972). There is much waste. Susan Strasser (1999) talks of the "disposable society", how affluent societies dispose of perfectly serviceable products, simply because newer models have come along. Strasser documents the cost of this waste. Marketing promotes psychological obsolescence, where the new models become, through promotion, a celebration of the modern way. Finally, Csikszentmihalyi (2000) quotes a number of studies showing that, beyond a low threshold, material does not correlate with subjective wellbeing. He goes on to say that research indicates that excessive concern with financial success and material values is associated with less satisfaction with life. In fact excessive concern for material goals is a sign of dissatisfaction with life: people report being happier in life when they are actively involved with a challenging task and less happy when they are passively consuming goods or entertainment. However, it is the consumer society which offers choices, convenience, the reduction in chores – and the excitement of contemplating buying of the new. Even the promotion of psychological obsolescence is the spur behind the innovation that, in particular, characterizes the US social scene.

Conclusion

Whatever influence marketing has had on the creation of a consumerism tied to the narrowest form of hedonism, it has been in the role more of facilitator than of manufacturer. If someone were to insist that we name a single culprit, it would be the development of a strong value orientation that puts unrestrained freedom to the forefront. Consumers, like people generally in Western societies,

really do want to feel unrestrained by the social norms of the past and demand freedom to "do their own thing". As Kass and Kass (2000) argue, the more people grow to love their freedom, so as to regard it as the defining feature of the life style, the more they come to view themselves as having no obligation to do other than self-indulge, as long as it is a self-regarding action. But consumer values can change, as can the weighting of values. It may be that society's current values will change but the change must come from people themselves, as coercion only achieves minimum compliance and is incompatible with the value of liberty and freedom of choice. Marketing seldom tries to change values altogether, though it may seek to change value judgements through changing perspectives as to what is in line with values. Marketing can be enlisted to oppose the habits and addictions it is accused of sustaining. *The Economist* (2000b) records the enormous success of a shock advertising campaign in reducing smoking among the young in California; the point is significant, since one of the gravest charges laid at marketing's door is its world-proselytization of nicotine addiction. As a medium it is quite a mercenary to anyone who can hire it.

The arguments denouncing hedonism-consumerism represent a gross simplification of complex issues. Marketing does not create or invent wants but merely surfaces them: materialism became part of the human condition long before the first advertising executive. Man has always been, in all societies, materialistic but, in former days, poverty meant the absence of ability and opportunity to indulge in a hedonistic lifestyle. The global economy underpinning material advance has existed in prototype form for centuries. Thousands of Roman artifacts have been discovered in India: the Phoenicians traded everywhere, and Japanese junks first visited South America in the early seventeenth century.

We said earlier that many of the assertions made by critics are matters of empirical inquiry. It follows that a limitation of this paper is the absence of relevant data. This would seemingly point to future research areas. But such research pre-supposes that many of the concepts used in the debate, like hedonism itself, are uncontroversial and easy to operationalize and measure. This is unlikely to be so. Similarly, there would be problems in obtaining relevant samples of consumers and seeking to gauge motivations and beliefs. On the other hand, as this paper shows, critics need not be answered by empty rhetoric but argument that draws on social science and our collective experience.

References

- Adamson, W. (1980), *Hegemony and Revolution: Antonio Gramsci's Political and Cultural Theory*, University of California Press, Berkeley, CA.
- Apter, M.J. (1989), *Reversal Theory*, Routledge, London.
- Baritz, L. (1989), *The Good Life: The Meaning of Success for the American Middle Class*, Knopf, New York, NY.
- Baudrillard, J. (1968), *Les Systèmes des Objets*, Gallimard, Paris.

- Baudrillard, J. (1975), *The Mirror of Production*, tr. Poster, M., Telos Press, St Louis, MO.
- Baudrillard, J. (1981), *The Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, tr. Levin, C., Telos Press, St Louis, MO.
- Bauman, Z. (1990), "Communism: a postmortem", *Praxis International*, Vol. 10 No. 3-4, pp. 185-92.
- Bauman, Z. (1999), *In Search of Politics*, Polity Press, Oxford.
- Belk, R.W. (1984), "Cultural and historical differences in concept of self and their effects on attitudes towards having and giving", in Kinnear, T.C. (Ed.) *Advances in Consumer Research*, Vol. 11, Association for Consumer Research, Provo, UT, pp. 753-60.
- Belk, R.W. (1985), "Materialism: trait aspects of living in the material world", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 12 No. 3, pp. 265-80.
- Belk, R.W. (1988), "Possession and the extended self", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 15 No. 2, pp. 139-68.
- Best, S. and Kellner, D. (1997), *The Postmodern Turn*, Guilford Press, New York, NY.
- Bourdieu, P. (1984), *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London.
- Brown, S. (1995), *Postmodern Marketing*, Routledge, London.
- Campbell, C. (1987), *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford.
- Cook, G. (1992), *The Discourse of Advertising*, Routledge, London.
- Crossette, B. (1999), "Who needs anyone?", *The New York Times*, Sunday October 17.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990), *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, Harper & Row, New York, NY.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2000), "The cost and benefits of consuming", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 27, September, pp. 267-72.
- Dittmar, H. (1992), *The Social Psychology of Material Possessions*, St Martin's Press, New York, NY.
- Douglas, M. and Isherwood, B. (1979), *The World of Goods*, Basic Books, New York, NY.
- The Economist* (2000a), "Baa or buy", November 18, p. 82.
- The Economist* (2000b), "Smoking: just say no", December 9, p. 72.
- Eliade, M. (1991), *Images and Symbols: Studies in Religious Symbolism*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, p. 168.
- Elster, J. (1999), *Alchemistries of the Mind: Rationality and the Emotions*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Featherstone, M. (1991), *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*, Sage, Beverly Hills, CA.
- Fiske, J. (1990), *Introduction to Communication Studies*, Routledge, London.
- Flanagan, O. (1996), *Self-Expressions*, Oxford University Press, New York, NY.
- Foxall, G. (1996), *Consumers in Context*, Routledge, London.
- Frank, R.H. (1988), *Passions within Reasons*, W.W. Norton, New York, NY.
- Frank, R.H. (1999), *Luxury Fever*, Free Press, New York, NY.
- Galbraith, J.K. (1977), "UGE: the inside story", *Horizon*, March.
- Gellner, E. (1994), *Conditions of Liberty*, Penguin Books, London, p. 44.
- Goffman, E. (1971), *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Penguin, Harmondsworth.
- Gosling, J.C.B. (1969), *Pleasure and Desire*, Clarendon Press, Oxford.
- Gottdiener, M. (1990), "Hegemony and mass culture: a semiotic approach", *American Journal of Sociology*, Fall, pp. 979-1001.

- Gramsci, A. (1971), *Selections from Prison Notebooks*, International Publishers, New York, NY.
- Gronow, J. (1997), *The Sociology of Taste*, Routledge, London, p. 5.
- Hirsch, F. (1977), *Social Limits to Growth*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London.
- Holbrook, M.B. and Hirschman, E.C. (1993), *The Semiotics of Consumption*, Mouton de Gruyter, New York, NY.
- Hyman, H. and Wright, C.R. (1979), *Education's Lasting Influence on Values*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL.
- Jameson, F. and Miyochi, M. (1999) (Eds), *The Cultures of Globalization*. Duke University Press, Durham, NC.
- Kagan, J. (1999), *Three Seductive Ideas*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.
- Kammen, M. (1999), *American Culture, American Tastes: Social Change and the 20th Century*, Knopf, New York, NY.
- Kass, A. and Kass, L.R. (2000), *Wing to Wing, Oar to Oar*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, IN.
- Kotler, P. (1972), "A generic concept of marketing", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 36, April, pp. 46-54.
- LaFeber, W. (1999), *Michael Jordan and the New Global Capitalism*, Norton & Company, New York, NY.
- Lal, D. (1999), *Unintended Consequences: The Impact of Factor Endowments, Culture, and Politics on Long-run Economic Performance*, MIT Press, Boston, MA.
- Lyon, D. (1994), *Postmodernity*, Open University Press, Buckingham, UK.
- McCartney, J. (2000), "Taylor's lament", *Sunday Telegraph*, December 10.
- Marcuse, H. (1964), *One-Dimensional Man*, Beacon Press, Boston, MA.
- Mayhew, L.H. (1997), *The New Public*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Micklethwait, J. and Wooldrige, A. (2000), *A Future Perfect: The Challenge and Hidden Promise of Globalization*, Heinemann, London and New York, NY.
- Mishra, P. (1999), "Nirad Chaudhuri", *New York Review*, September 23.
- Moore, R.L. (1994), *Selling God*, Oxford University Press, New York, NY and Oxford.
- O'Shaughnessy, J. (1995), *Competitive Marketing*, Routledge, London and New York, NY.
- Pollay, R.W. (1986), "The distorted mirror: reflections on the unintended consequences of advertising", *Journal of Marketing*, April, pp. 18-36.
- Posner, R.A. (1999), "The moral minority", *The New York Times Book Review*, December 19, p. 14.
- Rawls, J. (1972), *A Theory of Justice*, Oxford University Press, New York, NY.
- Rohatyn, D. (1990), "The (mis)information society: an analysis of the role of propaganda in shaping consciousness", *Bulletin of Science, Technology and Society*, Vol. 10 No. 2, pp. 77-85.
- Rosenau, P.M. (1992), *Postmodernism and the Social Sciences*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ.
- Schiffer, F. (1998), *Of Two Minds: The Revolutionary Science of Dual-Brain Psychology*, The Free Press, New York, NY.
- Schudson, M. (1984), *Advertising, the Uneasy Persuasion*, Basic Books, New York, NY.
- Strasser, S. (1999), *Waste and Want: A Social History of Trash*, Henry Holt, New York, NY.