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Will Consumer Cosmopolitanism Save the World? Should It?

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This collection of explorations into consumption cosmopolitanism brought together by Woodward and Emontspool is timely. It opens up our thinking around the elusive concept of cosmopolitanism, and brings to the fore the centrality of its relation to consumption and marketing. This is timely for another reason. While consumer and marketing research have shown strong interest in the study of the global and the local in consumer culture, little has been done around cosmopolitanism. This is remarkable as cosmopolitanism research has witnessed a second wave of theorization since the early part of the millennium. My commentary will be organized around some themes that cut across the contributions in this book and which constitute fruitful domains for further conceptual and empirical exploration into consumer cosmopolitanism.

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A Personal and Academic Account

It is curious to witness the academic and political debates over the global and the local unfold over time. Growing up in social democratic Denmark in the 1970s and 1980s was quite dull: one TV channel, no access to cable TV or abundant travel, little access to consumption opportunities more generally. At the same time, this was an experience of growing up in a society that still bore resemblance to the contemporary ideal of a local self-sustaining community. However, in the 1980s this idea of the local was little valorized. Being young, all things global, particularly American, were strongly valorized. As the first of my friends obtained their driver's license, we would regularly drive 40 km to go to McDonald's or watch the latest Rambo movie. This was an era of decidedly positive valorization of global consumer culture. Theoretically, one might say that my life experience fitted perfectly with Ted Levitt's idea proposed in "The Globalization of Markets" (1983), in which he claimed that we were witnessing a global homogenization of demand in the form of a generalized preference for global goods.

The year 1989 marked the fall of the Iron Curtain and was also the onset of my early adulthood. For my generation, these historical circumstances ushered a decidedly optimistic look on the idea of the global and accordingly theorizations of a "post bi-polar world" order began to emerge. The late 1980s and early 1990s witnessed advanced theorizations of the contours of a globalized world. In sociology, Robertson (1986) began his theorization of globalization, Giddens (1990) produced his trilogy on (Western) modernity and its globalizing effects, to name a few. In social and cultural anthropology, things were no less productive: Appadurai introduced his notions of the scaping of the planet in 1990. Friedman and colleagues published a range of books in the *Theory, Culture and Society* book series in globalization, cosmopolitanism and consumption. Wilk (1995) reported from his fieldwork in Belize on globalization as structures of common difference. Taken together, these were sobering theorizations of the complex relations and mutual constitution of the global and the local.

In marketing and consumer research too the debate had been under way for some time. Arnould and Wilk introduced to some of these discussions

in an early piece on "Why do the natives wear Adidas" (1984) and Ger and Belk (1996) discussed the impact and opportunities of globalization and materialism in relation to development and emerging market contexts (1996). Thompson and Tambyah (1999) focused squarely on the notion of cosmopolitanism as a process and ideology perpetuated by late capitalism and partly structured by gendered social norms. In much of this, what we could call a first wave theorization, there was a reconstitution of the role of the global beyond naïve positive valorization or gut reaction critique: to a large extent most of these streams of literature would point to the potentially emancipatory dimension of the global (in e.g. repressive cultural contexts), the (re)construction of the local as an outcome of cultural reflexivity caused by globalization and the positive consequences of the cosmopolitan idea of "understanding the world as a whole" (Robertson, 1992) in, for example, sustainability and human rights terms. Marketing also took a strong interest in ideas of multiculturalism, for example manifested in the collected volume "Marketing in a Multicultural World" edited by Costa and Bamossy (1995). Likewise, this was reflected in the potentiality of generating local or regional economic and cultural sustainability through models of the market (e.g. Askegaard & Kjeldgaard, 2007; Ger, 1999).

For many years marketing and consumer researchers have had a conceptual and empirical focus on the process of particularization: the remarkable resilience and performed nature of the idea of the local in the midst of globalizing and homogenizing process. This leads to one of the first domains of clarification for future research in consumption cosmopolitanism: the role of the local and the global and the iterative categories of difference and sameness in understanding consumer cosmopolitanism.

Cosmopolitanism as Globalism and Localism

One of the key questions of consumer cosmopolitanism relates to the role of the local and the global. In much of consumer research's import of cosmopolitan theory (among others drawing on Hannerz, 1990, 1992), cosmopolitan consumption is characterized by an outward and open orientation towards the other, cosmopolitan consumption being the consumption of cultural differences. This is reflected in the opening chapter

by Woodward and Emontspool, as was also part of the early consumer and marketing research approaches to the relation between cosmopolitanism and consumption. Thompson and Tambyah (1999) for example explored the project of "trying to be cosmopolitan" in their orientation towards consuming the cultural and commodified other. Likewise, Firat suggested that in a global consumer culture, we are not so preoccupied with the consumption of homogenized global products as we are with consumption of globalized fragments of culture (Firat, 1995, 1997). This constitutes what we could term a localist perspective of cosmopolitanism.

On the other hand, the root of the idea of cosmopolitanism in, for example, Kant, as is also pointed out by Woodward and Emontspool in this volume, is an emphasis on humanity and hence an emphasis on a common human condition. This we might term a globalist perspective on cosmopolitanism. In this volume, the local versus global approach is im- or explicitly present. Kipnis in her review of marketing studies of cosmopolitanism points out that consumer preference for global *and* foreign products has been studied as cosmopolitan. In the chapter by Riegel, the consumption of global brands is explored as a site for potential cosmopolitan commitments and Rojas explores the conditions under which the moral commitments of a cosmopolitan "citizen of the world" can come about. Interestingly, she concludes that consumers' emotional narrowness and self-orientation forms a strong basis for an increased capacity to "collectively imagine a common world", something which parallels the conclusions in the study by Kjeldgaard and Askegaard (2006), which found that consumers at the periphery of global consumer culture showed a more cosmopolitan imagination of their future self-biography compared to those at the centre. This also relativizes recent research on global mobility that typically focuses on global elites and their liquid relations to consumption (e.g. Bardhi, Eckhardt, & Arnould, 2012). Going back to Holt (1998), there is an implicit assumption that high levels of cultural capital are a prerequisite for consumer cosmopolitanism. This calls for exploration of cosmopolitanism in social contexts where resources are scarce, or amongst marginalized consumer cultures. Furthermore, the role of the local and the global in consumer cosmopolitanism could benefit from additional conceptual and empirical clarification, as well as a clarification of the nature of their mutual constitution.

"Make Love Not Walls" (Diesel 2017): Producing Cosmopolitanism

As Woodward and Emontspool point out in their opening chapter, studies in the domain of marketing have tended to approach cosmopolitanism from the perspective of consumption and less from the perspective of marketing (understood as production of the material and aesthetic commercial signs and objects that circulate in the contemporary marketplace). This is one avenue of research that seems fruitful and the time is ripe as marketing is increasingly preoccupied with globalized and cosmopolitan issues. This is reflected in the Diesel slogan used in the heading above, which I recently observed in a shop window in Northern France. Diesel and other global brands such as Starbucks are mobilizing politically as a reaction to contemporary politics evoking and implying a planetary or transnational imagination on the behalf of consumers. Most recently, at the time of writing this chapter, global companies such as Facebook, Apple and Goldman Sachs joined public discourse to counter the US government's choice of exiting the Paris climate accord.

In the collection, these issues are addressed from different perspectives. Figueiredo, Bean and Larsen tackle this question most directly by exploring the material semiotics of cosmopolitanism in servicescapes. The chapter's commitment to analyzing the minute empirical detail of a specific ethnographic context elucidates the amalgamation and assembling of diverse signs and food practices into a cosmopolitan aesthetic which in turn serves as a branding platform. The study of the mobilization of cosmopolitan aesthetic also demonstrates the oftentimes mundane, pervasive presence of cosmopolitanism in everyday marketplaces as frames for exchange and consumer sociality more widely. Likewise, the chapter by de la Fuente, which looks at materials and surfaces through the lens of cosmopolitan values, addresses the often concrete and material manifestations of cosmopolitanism in our everyday built environments. The question here is whether this kind of material-aesthetic expression is wilful, or speaks to the fact that the cosmopolitan aesthetic has become a standard part of the aesthetic and stylistic repertoire of marketers? We might think further about this through the contribution by Verderame.

In this chapter, another material—or at least spatial—framing of cosmopolitanism is explored through an empirical study of a ritual: the Festival of Europe. Not only does the chapter point to the sometimes elusive nature of the spaces in which cosmopolitanism can be performed, but in this case also to the ritualization and celebration of cultural diversity by way of the theme of the festival. Here cosmopolitanism is exactly not mundane, nor mobilized in a non-reflexive manner, to the contrary.

Is Cosmopolitanism to Localism, What Globalism Is to Nationalism?

These days it seems we have never been more oriented towards the planet—or demonstrating a "consciousness of the world as a whole", to quote Robertson (1992), and at the same time political and cultural localism is rising. We might argue that we are seeing not just a hyperglobalization but also a hyperglocalization. We are at once experiencing an intensification of a process of universalization of our living conditions—as a species but also as societies. And, we are experiencing an intensification of the retraction into (new) localisms in the form of nationalism as witnessed by current political events: Brexit and potential independence sought by Scotland; the rise of nationalist political sentiments in Europe and the United States. It would seem that the fault lines between the national and the cosmopolitan are growing ever more intense and that consumer cosmopolitanism holds the promise of a post-national imagination much needed in contemporary politics.

At the same time we are seeing an increase in regional and local forms of social and economic organization that defies established politically and economically organized institutional frames. The heralding of the local as possibly the ultimate value in contemporary consumer culture needs unfolding. A recent piece in *The Economist* discussed the potential demise of the idea of the global corporation as smaller and craft-based economic actors are gaining market share in a number of product categories (see also Kjeldgaard, Askegaard, Rasmussen, & Østergaard, 2017). The preference for locally grown and sourced products is increasing in a number

of affluent market contexts presumably due to consumer perceptions of authenticity. The preoccupation with local forms of consumption culture in the face of globalism and cosmopolitanism is often understood to be a natural outcome of the idea of glocalization: that we are seeing a global valorization of the local. We might argue therefore that the increased production and marketing of signs and symbols of the local is the engine that keeps cosmopolitanism running and that cosmopolitanism therefore holds the promise of both perpetuating a universal humanity and culturally sustainable local consumer cultures. Perhaps consumer cosmopolitanism *can* save the world.

However, we may also ask ourselves if the co-occurrence of the preoccupation with the local in the form of sustainability, food cultures, regional identities and so on and the emergent nationalism that many Western societies are experiencing politically are mutually implied. The common currency of the local certainly is readily available for mobilization as symbolic resonance for cultural and political nationalism. If this is the case, then perhaps consumer cosmopolitanism is not part of the answer but part of the problem, at least for some groups of consumers.

Such are the complex questions one becomes preoccupied with after exposure to this refreshing and innovative collection of papers. One can only encourage researchers to further begin to map out and explore the relations between the vast conceptual domains of cosmopolitanism, globalism, localism and nationalism and the role of the consumer culture in relation to the contemporary glocalized political landscape.

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