

Russell Belk, Nikhilesh Dholakia, and Alladi Venkatesh, eds.
Cincinnati, OH: South-Western College Publishing, 1996; 360 pp.

This provocatively wide-ranging collection—it is not so much an edited volume as it is a bricolage of essays linked loosely by the leitmotif of consumption—poses a curious challenge for a reviewer, since the core contributions of its authors are accompanied by the thoughtful commentaries of analysts invited by the editors to add such value as I might ordinarily attempt in these paragraphs. This dialogic format of position statement and enlightened response encourages the reader to examine key issues more thoroughly and fosters an engagement with ideas that will reverberate beyond any particular reading. I further imagine the writing agendas of these authors will be shaped in part by the commentators' public reactions; quite cleverly, the editors have sown the seeds of

disciplinary advance into the structure of the volume itself.

The book is composed of two major sections, one treating macro dimensions of consumption and the other exploring macro dimensions of marketing. The editors begin with a usefully programmatic overview of the field but opt not to offer interpretive syntheses between chapters or an integrative conclusion at the collection's end. Thus, the volume has more the feel of a conference proceedings than of a monograph. The decision not to provide ongoing synthesis or offer closure is unfortunate, but it does not detract appreciably from the ideas presented as much as it confounds the dialogic promise of an otherwise novel presentation strategy. At any rate, the volume is an abso-

lute treasure trove of citations that will send motivated readers scurrying to the library stacks to round out their education.

The section on macro aspects of consumption deals with issues both substantial and methodological. Holbrook's meditation on experiential consumption, a celebration of introspection and a reformation of romanticism couched in a critique of Campbell's work, becomes a passionate advocacy of scholarship beyond the merely scientific and presentational styles beyond the conventional article. Given the controversial nature of introspection (and its perilous proximity to self-indulgence) in our field, this essay is especially timely, as commentaries by O'Guinn and Uusitalo make apparent. Campbell's systematic rejoinder to Holbrook's position will amplify readers' appreciation of the former's pathbreaking monograph.

The discussion by Joy and Wallendorf of the emergence of consumer culture in the Third World includes both a useful summary of theories of development and an identification of key gaps in our theorizing. Using six concise extended case studies of consumer behavior in developing economies, these authors advance a powerful argument for the use of ethnography in consumer research.

Costa's examination of the interplay of global and local forces and Miller's locally situated critique of theorizing are wonderful examples of the utility of the editors' value-adding commentary strategy. Rudmin and Kilbourne delve deeply into moral economy to produce an account of the voluntary simplicity movement, providing both a historical overview and a normative probing of the phenomenon. In their commentaries, Shama and Wachtel help further unpack the notions of *voluntariness* and *simplicity* in ways that will inspire additional research.

The section on macro aspects of marketing introduces issues of managerial relevance and practice into a discourse heretofore concerned principally with disciplinary advance. Perhaps the strongest chapter in the volume, and seemingly misplaced in this section, is the treatment by Firat and Venkatesh of postmodern perspectives on consumption. This chapter reads as a companion piece to their comprehensive *JCR* article (Firat and Venkatesh 1995) on the same topic. Here the authors guide the reader on a tour of consumer behavior from modernity through postmodernity and

explore, in particular, issues of hyperreality, fragmentation, reversals of consumption and production, decentering of the subject, and juxtaposition of opposites that make contemporary marketplace behavior so fascinating. Commentaries by Suerdem and Bouchet explore some of the continuities and paradoxes encountered by marketers in transition from modernity and postmodernity.

Jones and Venkatesh examine the roles played by transnational corporations in the processes of cultural convergence and individuation unfolding on a global scale. They speculate on the evolution of organizational structure and advocate a radical rethinking of economic development strategies as we move into the next century. Again, commentaries by Smith and McIntyre suggest that models grounded only in political economy or world systems result in center-periphery distinctions that fail to capture the speed and complexity of global realities. They also remind us that the hegemony of transnational capitalism may be overstated.

Dholakia, Bakke, and Dholakia trace the diffusion of information technology and urge us to consider its social effect. In particular, the differential acceptance of home computers, debit cards, and information services is explored by these authors, who seek to push past the technological utopianism of the marketing vision to achieve a realistic perspective of technology diffusion. The interplay between technology and culture is probed effectively in this chapter. Kling builds on the authors' ideas in his summary, using two-way television as an extended vehicle to propose a thorough investigation of emerging technologies as integrated into consumers' lives.

This volume will likely prove useful as recommended reading in graduate courses in both consumer behavior and macromarketing, given its eclectic coverage. It may also find a home in seminars on marketing theory. Its availability in paperback should speed its adoption.

Reference

- Firat, A. Fuat, and Alladi Venkatesh (1995). "Liberatory Postmodernism and the Reenchantment of Consumption." *Journal of Consumer Research*, 22 (December): 239-67.

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