

## **HOW CCT COMMUNITY READ FOUCAULT? A SNAPSHOT OF THE CONTRIBUTION OF FOUCAULDIAN THOUGHT TO CONSUMPTION STUDIES**

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### **Resumo**

Consumption studies may be developed under different theoretical lenses. As any other applied social sciences, consumption theories are forged using theoretical frameworks borrowed from Sociology, Anthropology, History and Philosophy. In this way, it is important to situate the author whose theory is serving to build new concepts within a specific field.

When it comes to CCT, it is interesting to observe how the community embraces a new author as source for theory building. Thompson (2017) suggests that CCT community should adhere to Foucault's own warning not to canonize his writings as a regime of truth.

In order to describe the usage of Michel Foucault (Kendall 2003), this work explores his main citations within Journal of Consumer Research. Our aim is to investigate how the CCT community adopted different foucauldian concepts, which texts were selected and how they were used as a contribution to advance consumption studies literature.

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### **SUMMARY**

Consumption studies may be developed under different theoretical lenses. As any other applied social sciences, consumption theories are forged using theoretical frameworks borrowed from Sociology, Anthropology, History and Philosophy. In this way, it is important to situate the author whose theory is serving to build new concepts within a specific field.

When it comes to CCT, it is interesting to observe how the community embraces a new author as source for theory building. Thompson (2017) suggests that CCT community should adhere to Foucault's own warning not to canonize his writings as a regime of truth.

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**Keywords:** Foucault, JCR, discipline, power, literature review

In order to understand how Foucault's ideas have been used by researchers of culture and consumption we used the Journal of Consumer Research as the main source of our literature review. The reason for this choice is the fact that it is the first journal to study consumer behaviour from a cultural perspective, founded in 1974, therefore dedicating relevant space to consumer culture theory research. It is also ranked number 5 among Marketing journals and achieved 3,980 impact factor in 2016 therefore well known for its strong influence and academic prestige in consumer behaviour.

As to proceed with the literature review we used the advanced search of the online academic platform Google Scholar. We selected Foucault as keyword and JCR as the filter to display articles published in that specific and only journal with no limitation of time frame. As a result we found 49 articles ranging from 1995 until 2017. In Figure 1 we listed the main Foucault works referred in the articles to contribute either to empirical or theoretical CCT research. There are also other authors whose works referred to Foucault and were cited in the 49 articles selected. In order to identify the influence and contribution of Foucault's ideas to the findings in the articles we counted the number of times the name "Foucault" was cited in each one. We then attributed that equal or more than 5 (five) times citation of Foucault would be the criteria to select an article to be read and studied thoroughly. This exercise led us to 11 articles to be analysed by the two authors, randomly distributed five to the first author and six to the second author. The summary with the name and authorship of the eleven articles analysed as well as the number of Foucault citations and main contribution to the CCT can be found in Figure 2. Our literature review does not propose an ontology of Foucauldian thought and its influence in the consumer culture theory field. It is just an exercise of how an important philosopher of the 20th century has helped to advance empirical and theoretical researches in CCT for over 22 years.

### **CONTRIBUTION OF FOUCAULDIAN THOUGHT TO CCT**

In their conceptual article, Firat and Venkatesh (1995) are the first authors to cite Foucault extensively. They propose to demonstrate how postmodernism exposes the limitations of modernism for the study of consumption and offers alternative perspectives that have a *liberatory potential* for consumer research. Specifically, based upon postmodern thinking they argue that culture is the "very essence of human life", not economy.

As the authors are introducing an author to the audience, Foucault is situated by them as one of main philosophers of Postmodernism, side by side to Derrida, and Lacan. Firat and Venkatesh include an appendix, explaining some foucauldian's framework of regimes of

truth, including truth as negotiated by particular groups, normalization as a cultural process, the relationship between discourse and practice, knowledge as product of language, and the role of Science as a legitimization force of power groups.

The article proposes five postmodern conditions and their main themes: hyperreality, fragmentation, reversal of production and consumption, decentered subject and juxtaposition of opposites. Foucault is used to support the argument in favor of a fragmented subject, once “there can be no transcendental subject, but only an everyday subject, that is. a subject who is very much a product and part of the discourses and practices in which s/he is embedded.” Also, the Foucauldian concept of truth as a construction is used within the notion of hyperreal as intended to distinguish it from the modernist notion of reality as uncontested and singular.

For the authors, Postmodernism allied to Poststructuralism also brings implications for consumer research, such as the social construction of the consumer. They use a Foucauldian framework to demonstrate that the consumer was not discovered by market processes but rather was constructed by them. Similarly, consumption is constructed in contemporary society through normalization practices. Firat and Venkatesh also refer to Foucault suggestion to investigate micro practices of normalization as possible sources of insights. “In a Foucauldian sense, we also propose that the discourses of the consumption system be extended to include the producers of consumer research.”

Foucauldian concepts of discipline, normalization and self-control are used in the paper *Understanding the Socialized Body: A Poststructuralist Analysis of Consumers' Self-Conceptions, Body Images, and Self-Care Practices* (1995, THOMPSON & HIRSCHMAN) to examine consumption practices derived and motivated by one's body self-perception. The authors explain that Foucault (1980) considers self-awareness a pre-condition to a person exercise self-control. On the other hand, this self-awareness is forged by sociocultural influences that dictate what should be controlled. This autonomous subject is then also disciplined and constrained. The post-structuralist perspective adopted in the paper regards concepts of body, mind and self as social constructions modified through cultural discourses (Foucault, 1980). In this sense the external appearance of one's body will reflect how careful, disciplined and self-controlled someone is with its “within” (Foucault, 1978). Violations of good nourishing practices visibly appear on an overweight or sick body and can be redeemed through confessional practices and engagement in acts to erase the violation (Foucault, 1979). The authors refer to Foucault to explain to the CCT community this constant social and individual surveillance, introducing Foucauldian concept of the disciplinary gaze of the panoptic. Through the idea of constant vigilance they argue that the material condition of the body and one's self-perception of it will be controlled as “the individual becomes his/her own agent of surveillance conforming to normative conventions even when not being actually observed by another” (p. 149)

Through analyzing expatriate professionals and their consumption stories in the article *Trying to Be Cosmopolitan* (1999, THOMPSON & TAMBYAH) the authors propose to link the ideas of cultural discourses and power structures to ideology using the lenses of Foucault's 1980 and 1982 works. To propose this link, Thompson and Tambyah explain that Foucault criticized the Marxian theoretical view of ideology as a veil that masked the revolutionary capacity of the dominated classes. Foucault argued that the orthodox Marxian concept of ideology puts knowledge and power in opposition whereas he proposes a co-determining relationship between them. For Foucault (1980, p. 52), “knowledge and power are integrated with one another, and there is no point in dreaming of a time when knowledge will cease to depend on power.... It is not possible for power to be exercised without knowledge, it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power.” Therefore, productive power results in common knowledge accepted and legitimated through cultural practices and constituting the “grid of intelligibility” (Foucault, 1982). The article then proposes that the

contemporary CCT research should move away from the orthodox Marxian concept of ideology and embrace the Foucault's conception "that ideological meanings are inherent to any sociocultural perspective" therefore "cultural practices and identity positions are necessarily constructed within, ideological systems."

A phenomenological account of desire. The inspiring article *Fire of Desire: A Multisited Inquiry into Consumer Passion*, written by Belk, Ger & Askegaard (2003) enacts different and important Foucauldian notions. The very concept of desire is built around the strategies of modern governance, where desire is "deeply linked to the social world, both through the mimetic process and through the pool of available value systems and lifestyles that constrain the freedom to desire."

Foucault's argument about systematic efforts by Christianity to control and inhibit longing is used to represent a form of external control, as well as a premodern authoritarian exertion of power (Foucault, 1984, 1985, 1986). Yet, in modernity, "constraints on desire, no longer imposed by traditional institutions, are now embedded in the range of social lifestyles available for the choosing self." (Belk, Ger & Askegaard, 2003). So, this internalized social control is a process where "subjects choose to restrain themselves in order to pursue what they believe to be happiness, purity, and wisdom, practices varying in different societies and times and involving dieting, physical exercise, and other forms of self-control." (Foucault, 1984, 1986, 1988, 1988).

The debate whether consumer could emancipate from the capitalist marketplace ideologies is brought forward in the article *Marketplace Mythology and Discourses of Power* (2004) where Craig Thompson analyzes the mythologies and discourses of power of advertising in the natural health segment. The author argues that advertising messages intend to build an ideal typology of consumer identity submitted to dominant ideologies. Consumers incorporate these discourses of power without noticing because they circulate in their everyday lives. Drawing on Foucault 1984 "unromantic view of resistance" (p. 173) Thompson proposes that social acts can oppose to the power structures although he recognizes that new power relationships and discourses will be created and will remain dominant until they are challenged again.

After 5 years of participant observation and interviewing clubbers Goulding, Shankar Elliott and Canniford (2009), aim to demonstrate a "biosocial conceptualization of pleasure" (p. 759) and how experiences of listening to music, dancing and consuming ecstasy within an organized space where rules and norms of everyday life are suspended have become a site of contained and legitimate illegality to replace the illicit practices of ravers. The authors cite Foucault (1980, 1995) to support their claim about the social pressure for a disciplined body contained and regulated by acceptable forms of pleasure and punished by unacceptable practices. In this sense they argue that clubbing popularity increased due to the illegality of rave parties. Although the authors acknowledge that both practices share illicit pleasurable foundations "raves may be considered temporary autonomous zones (TAZs; Bey 1991) [...] a microcosm of "free" culture, populated by similar-thinking, committed people who collectively share an intense peak experience before parting (see also St. John 2002)" (p. 768) It's their understanding that this type of ideological resistance contributed to making raving illegal and led to repression and other legal forms of power (Foucault, 1980). On the other hand, clubbing illicit pleasures were reframed to be contained and become commercially profitable "where the "ungoverned mob" of rave is transformed and distributed toward a safer, more sanitized, and domesticated state of ordered multiplicity and productive delinquency (Foucault 1995)" (p. 768) Before entering the club space, clubbers queue to be selected and once inside "the organization of space in combination with the music, lighting, contained drug use and the mass of bodies creates an obligatory rhythm (Foucault 1995) that unites clubbers as they move together as a coherent multitude". (p. 768) Although transcending their

“everyday selves” (p. 768) and managing to keep on practicing the illicit consumption of drugs Goulding et al (2009) suggest that the transformation of raving into clubbing does not offer a countercultural act of resistance or liberation from market place ideologies. On the contrary, it became an economically productive activity, contained and socially regulated. Drawing on Foucault’s (1995) *Convicts’ Sabbath* and other authors, Goulding et al highlight that the next day of a night of pleasure clubbers return to their mundane routines. This offers a new perspective to the traditional approach of CCT that considers it liberating and oppositional.

In “Early Modern Ottoman Coffeehouse Culture and the Formation of the Consumer”, Karababa e Ger (2011) explain how and under what conditions an active consumer subject was formed during an early modern period. They also want to know “how did early modern people, supposedly tied to prescriptions, move from such prescribed manners of consumption to negotiated and at least partially self-determined modes?” Once they detect a change in consumption patterns regarding rejecting authorities’ prescriptions, the authors uses power conflicts notions (Foucault 1980) to analyse consumer resistances at the discourse level.

Foucault’s discourse analysis (Foucault 1972/1998; Kendall and Wickham 2003) is intensively used to find discursive constructions of the use and meaning of the space, norms, and practices of consumers and institutions. In addition, they searched for discontinuities in discursive practices in order to discover the formation of a new consumer subject and institutional transformations.

Finally, they explicitly cite Foucault (1990, 28) to describe the resistant consumers elaborating on their own ethics as they “delimits that part of himself that will form the object of his moral practice, defines his position relative to the precept he will follow, and decides on a certain mode of being that will serve as his moral goal.”

Twenty-five years after its publication, Russel Belk (2013) updates the concept of Extended Self to incorporate the changes to consumer behavior and sense of self in the digital era. Belk acknowledges that the technological environment and the influences digitization brings to individual self-perception will continue to evolve as a never-ending work in progress. One of the major changes is what he calls the practice of “online” confession. He claims this is not so different from the Catholic confessional or psychoanalytic couch except from the aspect of talking to “an unseen and anonymous” (p. 485) crowd. The author borrows from Foucault 1978 and 1998 the concept of confession as a freeing experience that “along with contemplation, self-examination, learning, reading, and writing self-critical letters to friends are a part of the “technologies of the self” through which we seek to purge and cleanse ourselves”(p. 485). Confessions of before not publicly shared secrets seem to have become a new way to the revelation of the “true self”. Belk reminds us that online publishing is like voicing out loud for self-validation and celebrization allowing what Foucault (1978) once called “Exomologesis or publishing oneself”(p. 485). This therapeutical effect of a public confession is also experienced by the audience that reads the posts either empathically or voyeuristically. Nevertheless, the author reminds us that Abercrombie et al. (1986) pointed out that “the Foucauldian guilt-based motivation for online confessions has been characterized as applying primarily to Western, individual, guilt-based cultures”. (p. 485) as opposed to Eastern cultures of shame-based punishment. Before the internet, the threat of shame could suffice to induce compliance to the social norms. On the other hand, in the digital era confessions are no longer controlled or contained by the confessor and once spread online it might never be forgotten or erased by the community. Therefore, the on line posts and exchanges of messages and replies to one’s writings become a collaborative creation evoking “Foucault’s (1998) idea that we can cultivate the self partly “with the help of others.” (p. 488). Belk then argues that while “Belk (1988) spoke of aggregate levels of self from a purely individual perspective, it now appears that it is more properly considered to be a joint project



resulting in an aggregate self that belongs as much to the others who have helped to form it as it does to oneself”(p. 488)

The article *Branding Disaster: Reestablishing Trust through the Ideological Containment of Systemic Risk Anxieties* (Humphrey and Thompson, 2014) analyzes the role of media coverage in reestablishing consumers’ trust in experts after a brand disaster event. The context of study are the public discourses created around two major oil spills, Exxon Valdez’s of 1989 and BP Gulf’s of 2010. The authors argue that media coverage helps contain public anxiety enacted by the initial news and that narratives about a previous incident help set the tone that experts will know better how to deal with the new one. “This form of ideological containment is constituted through tales of restoration. Whereas reprobation focuses on punishment for wrongdoing, restoration focuses on compensation, on righting wrongs, and thus on restoring justice” (p. 897). On the other hand some media news challenge the fact that environmental damage can be somehow restored functioning as what Foucault (1977) defined as counter-memories: “subjugated or marginalized viewpoints that diverge from official histories and other culturally dominant narratives” (p. 897). It appears, somehow that these counter-memories are contained by mainstream restoration narratives that evoke the restorative power of nature. Therefore, drawing from Foucault’s (1977, 1979) concepts of power and discourse the authors argue that “the legitimating power of disaster myths is grounded in a diffuse network of discursively aligned practices and norms (...) defined as the disciplinary apparatus or dispositive (Foucault 1980, 194-95): “What I’m trying to pick out with this term is, firstly, a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions—in short, the said as much as the unsaid. Such are the elements of the apparatus. The apparatus itself is the system of relations that can be established between these elements. . . . Thus, a particular discourse can figure at one time as a means of justifying or masking a practice which itself remains silent, or as a secondary reinterpretation of this practice.” In this sense, a disaster myth is socially, culturally, historically forged and institutionalized through ideological and mythological discourses and narratives that circulate in the marketplace. The authors then propose an analytics of ideological containment to move parallel to Foucauldian distinction between an analytics of power and theory of power (1979): try to broaden the understanding of practices, discourses, systems and institutional imperatives that might influence consumer’s risk perceptions, preferences and decision making from an individual level to an heterogeneous assemblage of actors.

Giesler & Verisiu (2014) argues that responsible consumption requires the active creation and management of consumers as moral subjects. In their article, “Creating the Responsible Consumer: Moralistic Governance Regimes and Consumer Subjectivity” they theorize the formation of the responsible consumer subject, using Foucault’s concept “technologies of the self”—practices by which agents represent to themselves their own ethical self-understanding. Using theories of responsabilization, authors argued for the impact of moralistic governance regimes on the formation of the responsible consumer subject. For them, “the neoliberal mythology of shared responsibility provides a resilient narrative structure for the *management of populations and things* (Foucault 1978–79/1991) that accommodates a broad range of ideological views and imbues the socialization of consumers into an ethos of responsible consumption with heightened moral significance.”

How developing technologies can inspire and honor cocreative participation in prevention, diagnosis, treatment, and counseling related to chronic disease? Authors Tial et al (2014) use Foucault’s (1963/1994) analysis to anchor the rational behind the objectivation of consumer, as it exposes the irrelevance of the human suffering experience for the health care industry. Their article “Transforming Health Care: Empowering Therapeutic Communities

through Technology-Enhanced Narratives” investigates in what ways can Information Communication Technologies empower individuals regarding health care treatments.

The dehumanization in western health care contexts was described by Michel Foucault in *The Birth of a Clinic* (1963/1994). The authors intensively use Foucault’s concept “medical gaze” to situate how “the practice of examining the body replaced former holistic medical processes that considered the person and their life.”

More than a doctor’s optical abilities, the gaze in Foucault’s (1963/1994) analysis is a metaphor that illuminates victims’ pain or suffering at many levels. At a broad level it refers to control over individuals claimed by the new clinical medical system that emerged to protect the public and state from epidemics that threatened the economic system.

Effectively with their calls for visualization capabilities, participants seek access to that which was formerly accorded only to medical professionals (Foucault 1963/1994). Visualization capabilities could enable patients to engage in discussions with members of broader therapeutic communities (e.g., patients, caregivers, family members, and medical professionals) about bodily effects of their disease and consumption practices, in contrast to the more isolated patients promoted by traditional health care models (Foucault 1963/1994).

### **DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

As the title of this essay suggest, we intend to offer a snapshot of the CCT research inspired by Foucault’s thought. Considering the limitations of the size of our sample we suggest that Foucauldian ideas in the articles we analysed contributed to develop reflexive proposals to the four structures of common theoretical interest to the CCT community: (1) Ideological Shaping of Consumer Identity Goals and Desires opens a historical dialogue about ideology and consumer agency; (2) Structure–Agency Tensions account for social reproduction and identity transformation; (3) Glocalization and the “Scapes” of Global Flows refer to how global structures penetrate local cultures and economies creating heterogeneity; (4) Market-Mediated Networks and Embedded Consumption analyses how “exchange networks mediate social relationships, performative identities, social practices, and consumer experiences” (Arnould and Thompson, 2007, p. 12).

The main contributions of Foucault’s thoughts in the articles we analysed go around the debate of consumer agency and social acts opposing power structure in a tentative of emancipation of institutionalized norms, rules and ideologies. Discontinuities in discursive practices suggest the formation of a new consumer subject and institutional formation of the responsible consumer subject, using technologies of the self, narrative structure for the management of populations and things. Foucault brings a new perspective to former CCT understanding of liberation and opposition, exiting from Marxian ideological opposition of knowledge and power to foucauldian co-determining relationship of power and knowledge. It is also through his lenses that the idea of extended self is updated from individual to collectively created and that self-perception is forged and controlled by social forces. Foucault concepts about discipline are used to describe the social borders that embrace and limit individual choice and desire realization. This approach creates the condition for an epistemology of postmodern consumption where ideological and institutional dominant narratives create marketplace myths that influence consumer’s risk perceptions, preferences and decision making.

As we were concluding this essay a new paper was released: *Producing Foucauldians: Consumer Culture Theory and the Analytics of Power* (Thompson, 2017), suggesting that Foucault’s thoughts may inspire CCT researchers and shed light to the never ending debate agency/structure of the consumer studies field. Nevertheless, Arnould and Thompson (2007) remind us that Foucault (1983) argues that “solutions to specific institutional dilemmas are never resolutions but rather reconfigurations that pose new problems and dangers” (p.4).

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**FIGURE 1: Main Foucault works referred in the articles**

The History of Sexuality Vol 1, 2 and 3 (1978, 1990)	Discipline and Punish (1979)	Power/Knowledge (1980)	Technologies of the Self (1998)	The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language	The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979	The Birth of a Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception	The Ethics of the Concern of the Self as a Practice of Freedom, in Ethics: Subjectivity	What is Enlightenment? (1984)	On the Genealogy of Ethics (1984)
1993, Bristor & Fischer	1993, Bristor & Fischer	1995 Firat & Venkatesh	2013 Belk	2011 Karababa & Ger	2014 Griesler & Veresiu	2014 Tian et al	2011 Karababa & Ger	1994, Thompson, Pollio & Locander	2003 Belk, Ger & Askegaard
1994, Thompson, Pollio & Locander	1994, Hetrick & Lozada	1995 Thompson & Hirschman	2003 Belk, Ger & Askegaard	2007 Fischer, Otnes & Tuncay				1995 Firat & Venkatesh	
1995, Thompson & Hirschman	1995, Firat & Venkatesh	1999 Thompson & Tambyah	1997, Thompson & Haytko	2008 Luna, Ringberg &				2003 Belk, Ger & Askegaard	
1999, Thompson & Tambyah	1995, Thompson & Hirschman	2004 Thompson	2004 Thompson						
	2003, Joy & Sherry	2009 Goulding et al	2014, Giesler & Veresiu						
2002, Holt D									
2003, Belk, Ger & Askegaard	2004, Kozinets, Sherry et al	2011 Karababa & Ger	2017, Bardhi & Eckhardt						
2011, Karababa & Ger	2005, Bernthal, Crockett & Rose	2014 Humphrey & Thompson							
2011, St James, Handelman & Taylor	2007, Thompson & Tian								
	2009, Goulding, Shankar et al								
2013, Belk R									
2014, Sandikci & Ger	2010, Humphreys								
2015, Thompson & Ustuner	2010, Moisio & Beruchashvili								
	2010, Tumbat & Belk								
	2010, Ustuner & Thompson								
	2012, Penaloza & Barnhart								
	2013, Saatcioglu & Ozanne								
	2014, Humphreys & Thompson								
	2016, Giesler & Thompson								

**FIGURE 2: Foucault's concepts contributions to CCT**

PAPER	Number of Foucault citations	FOUCAULT's CONCEPT	CONTRIBUTION TO CCT
1995, Firat & Venkatesh	19	regimes of truth, knowledge, cultural discourses, power structures, normalization	exposes the limitations of modernist view of consumptions processes and proposes a epistemology of postmodern consumption
2003, Belk, Ger & Askegaard	18	strategies of modern governance, discipline, self-care and the techniques of the self	Foucault concepts about discipline are used to describe the social borders that embrace and limit individual choice and desire realization
2014, Tian et al	13	medical gaze, power structures, knowledge	The concept of medical gaze is used to argue that dehumanization within health care services serves the purpose to put patients under the control of doctors
1995, Thompson & Hirschman	12	discipline, normalization, self-control, panoptic	Introduction of the concept of disciplinary gaze to argue that self-perception is forged and controlled by social forces
1999, Thompson & Tambyah	10	knowledge, cultural discourses, power structures	exit from Marxian ideological opposition of knowledge and power to foucauldian co-determining relationship of power and knowledge
2013, Belk	9	technologies of self, confession, exomologies	updates the idea of extended self from individual to collectively created
2009, Goulding et al.	7	discipline, punishment, ideological resistance, power	new perspective to former CCT understanding of liberation and opposition
2014, Humphreys and Thompson	7	countermemories, dispositif, disciplinary apparatus, analytics of power	inspiration to the theorization of analytics of ideological containment, proposing that ideological and institutional dominant narratives create marketplace myths that influence consumer's risk perceptions, preferences and decision making
2011, Karababa & Ger	7	regimes of truth, discourses of power, resistance, discontinuities	Discourse analysis is used to find constructions in discursive practices of consumers and institutions.  Discontinuities in discursive practices in order to discover the formation of a new consumer subject and institutional transformations
2014, Giesler & Veresiu	7	technologies of the self, regimes of truth	formation of the responsible consumer subject, using technologies of the self, narrative structure for the management of populations and things
2004, Thompson	4	discourses of power, resistance	social acts opposing power structure