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## Liminoid Advertising and Consumer Identity

*“Your life is a story: change it. With Dulux”*

*UK TV paint brand ad<sup>1</sup>*

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### Abstract

**Purpose:** To establish the theoretical and practical grounds for a newly recognised advertising appeal, the liminoid appeal, and point to the wider implications of this type of appeal for advertising practitioners and consumers.

**Design/approach:** The paper integrates a theoretical review with a selective sample of case exemplars to illustrate the novelty, salience and contribution of the liminoid advertising appeal.

**Findings:** The study finds that the liminoid appeal is a novel and under-recognised yet widely deployed advertising and branding approach that manifests in many differing creative executions, whilst clearly carrying great resonance for consumers, and can potentially have negative social implications.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LchqLmFqnuI> accessed 11.1.2019

**Research limitations:** The empirical case examples are selective and few in number and a limited basis for generalisation.

**Practical implications:** Advertising agencies and brand managers have been practicing liminoid appeals without a theoretically grounded label with which to better understand the underlying consumer motivations. Having this knowledge will enable brand professionals to generate insights that improve training, execution and targeting of creative strategies.

**Social implications:** The liminoid appeal resonates powerfully with consumers because of its ostensibly liberatory and self-actualising potential, but on a social level the proliferation of such appeals could contribute to rising social disharmony and psychological distress.

**Originality/Value:** The Liminoid advertising appeal is a new, theoretically grounded label for a well established yet hitherto poorly understood category of advertising appeal. The study contributes a novel and previously neglected source of insight to the practice of creative brand communication strategy, whilst also contributing to the development of anthropologically informed marketing and consumer research.

## **Introduction**

From prestige cars to paint, clothing to coffee, housing developments to holidays, many branded goods, services and experiences are advertised as threshold objects, places or experiences which have the potentiality to transport the consumer into a liminoid space (Turner, 1974: 1982) of change, experimentation and self-exploration. Advertising's role in consumer rituals has been noted (Otnes and Scott, 2013) yet the anthropological concept of liminoid experience has not been theorised as an advertising appeal that brings something of the character of ritual to consumer experience. In this paper we address this gap in the literature with a new contribution that points to the significance for advertising and marketing research and practice of liminoid advertising, which we define as advertising and marketing communication that implicitly or explicitly attaches liminoid qualities to the brand.

The advertising appeal is the key element of the creative execution that resonates with and motivates the target consumer. An advertisement might for example, play on the consumer's sense of humour, their insecurity about their body shape, bad breath or hair loss, their fear of crime (in advertisements for home security systems or personal alarms), or their dreams of higher social status and peer approval in advertisements for educational courses or for upmarket luggage, cars and clothes. Numerous different types of advertising appeal have been proposed. There is no agreed taxonomy, but advertising appeals are often distinguished as having either an emotional or rational basis (Teichert et al. 2018). However, of the dozens of differently nuanced appeals, many combine both rational and emotional elements (e.g. Yang et al. 2015). For example, car advertisements often combine a lifestyle or status appeal with technical information about the car, whilst advertisements for pensions or life insurance policies sometimes combine details about financial information with imagery of older people enjoying exciting leisure pursuits. The target consumer's sense of identity is implicitly a part

of advertising appeals that focus on status or lifestyle, but we suggest that liminoid advertising goes further in implying that consumption of the promoted phenomenon can act as a gateway into a world of flux and experimentation in which consumer identities are fluid and impermanent.

Turner's ideas on liminality and ritual process (1967:1969) have been adapted across the social sciences to theorise physical, psychological and communitarian spaces that facilitate personal change, experimentation and transformation of social identity. For example, in urban studies, Roberts (2015) refers to the "liminoid zones" of urban night life areas in which young people explore alternative identities (often facilitated by alcohol (Hayward and Hobbs, 2007), whilst in marketing research, nightclubbing has been conceived as an experience laced with liminal qualities (Taheri et al. 2016). Consumer researchers have noted the liminal quality of consumer experiences such as pilgrimage (Husemann and Eckhardt, 2019), adventure sports (Tumbat and Belk, 2010) and wine consumption (Smith Maguire, 2010). In tourism research, the motivation of holidaymakers seeking liminal experiences has been documented (Taheri et al. 2017) as has the design of spaces to facilitate such experience has been researched in event management studies (Pielichaty, 2015), sociology (Lugosi, 2007), and retailing (Kozinets et al. 2004).

In advertising research, Zhao and Belk (2006) conceived of advertising as a liminal space in the sense that they saw it helping China's transition to a market economy. Olsen (2016) has written of the liminal experience of being an advertising worker in an agency. However, other than these rare examples (also Otnes and Scott, 2013, mentioned above) there have been very few mentions of the liminal in advertising or marketing communication research, and none that articulate liminality as a component of an advertising appeal, in spite of the widespread use of liminoid appeals. One such example was the source of the strapline printed below the title of

this paper: *“Your life is a story: change it. With Dulux”*. A lengthier account of this example might help to clarify our sense of the concept of liminoid advertising.

Paint brand Dulux’s ‘Your Life is a Story’ campaign (see footnote 1) offers an example of one way in which advertising appeals can invest a brand with the power of threshold objects that act as the key to deep yet indeterminate personal change. Dulux sells paint for domestic use, and the series of ads show people transforming their dwelling, and by implication re-writing their story of personal identity, with the paint. What is really being sold is the sense that the brand makes a ‘new you’ possible, the new you being undefined and indeterminate. We term this sense of the possibility of personal transformation a liminoid advertising appeal, following Turner’s (1982) later work. Liminoid states are differentiated from liminal states (Turner, 1967) in that although both terms refer to the threshold between an old identity and a new one, liminoid states are entered into voluntarily and are not attached to a ritual process. Liminal states confer a sense of existential liminality that is engaged in playfully and has no resolution, since there is no formal re-entry into social structure under a new identity, as there is in a liminal process. The attractiveness of this state is that it is loaded with creative possibility and can be engaged in repeatedly. Turner (1982) also acknowledged that this creative possibility may result in negative and destructive outcomes as well as positive ones.

We wish to make three primary contributions to the literature with this conceptualisation. The first is to extend Turner’s (1982) later ideas to the advertising field, to focus on the liminoid as a particular category of advertising appeal. The second is to develop a new perspective on advertising by exploring some of the strategies advertising creatives use to tap into the appeal of liminoid experience, however preposterous it may be, on the face of it, for advertisers to imply that buying a tin of paint or some other commodity can transform one’s life and identity. The third is to contribute theoretically to the understanding of persuasion in advertising by

nuancing one kind of appeal to consumer identity projects as a symbolic manifestation of liminoid experience in brand advertising. Finally, we speculate on the implications for consumer culture of the relentless promotion of brands and experiences as liminoid experiences that promise to maintain the individual in a world that is, by implication, devoid of fixed social structures or fixed identities. That is, we focus not only on what consumption brings in terms of choices, fun, and fantasies (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982) but on what its liminoid aspects seem to deny or negate, such as social structures, institutions, values and identities grounded in fixed notions of class, ethnicity, and family (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995).

Below, we firstly offer the literature background, focusing on Turner's (1967) concept of liminality and noting how it has been applied in social research fields allied to marketing and management. In particular, we note that it has not hitherto been applied to theorise advertising appeals. The review then moves to consider how liminality has been used to theorise consumer identity. Following this, the paper develops a series of case examples of advertising campaigns that exemplify the liminoid appeal in various manifestations. Finally, we consider the socio-cultural and practical implications of our theorisation of liminoid advertising. We suggest that conceiving advertising appeals as having a liminoid character captures a powerful underlying motivation driving demand and consumption that has not hitherto been theorised in the marketing or advertising literature. However, we also suggest that this theorisation poses serious questions about consumer wellbeing in a consumer culture characterised by liminoid experiences.

## **Literature review**

*Victor Turner: Liminal and Liminoid Experiences*

The work for which Turner (1967) is best known drew on Van Gennepe's (1961) foundational anthropological studies on ritual process. In rituals of transformation, from single to married or from child to adult, van Gennepe (1961) observed three stages. The pre-liminal stage entail separation from the previous life: the liminal stage refers to the mid-stage of the process when the participant is neither part of their old life and identity, nor yet part of the new one. Finally, the post liminal stage occurs when the ritual process is concluded and the participant is re-absorbed into social structure with a new identity and status. Turner's work (1967: 1969: 1974: 1982) focused on the mid stage of the process, the liminal stage, and extended the theory beyond formal rites of passage (van Gennepe, 1961) into realms of consumption in advanced economies.

Turner (1967) described the liminal stage as a time of 'fruitful darkness' (p.110) during which creative new futures might emerge from the flux. "Liminality can perhaps be described as a fructile chaos, a storehouse of possibilities, not a random assemblage but a striving after new forms and structures..." (Turner, 1986, p. 42). This liminal period ends when the individual has their new identity ritually conferred upon them as they re-enter the world of social structure. Importantly, Turner (1982) differentiated liminality from liminoid experience. With liminoid experience, this fructile chaos can be experienced as a sense of existential liminality that is not bound to a formal and compulsory ritual process, but is voluntary and impermanent. Liminoid experiences are often ludic (oriented to fun and playfulness) (Turner, 1982) and are therefore predicated on the existence of leisure as opposed to work: "One works at the liminal, one plays at the liminoid" (p 55). Liminoid experience can occur within groups, like sub-cultural movements such as hippies or in sports or celebrity fandom, but it can also be experienced through individual consumption of



entertainment experiences or commodities: “The liminoid is more like a commodity- indeed, often is a commodity, which one selects and pays for, than the liminal” (Turner, 1982 p.55). Hence, Turner (1982) explicitly linked liminoid experience to consumer experience. In this sense, we suggest that marketing and consumption tap symbolically into aspects of ritual process to mobilise the sense of potentiality for change and transformation. In other words, consumer marketing sells the imaginary future of a sense of identity that can be changed at will, merely through brand consumption. We suggest that advertising is a key site for the marketization of liminoid experience.

### *Liminal consumption and consumer identity*

It is well established in the consumer research literature that consumption, of brands, experiences and lifestyles, can be symbolically important to the sense of consumer identity (Bartsch et al., 2016; Luedicke et al. 2010; Belk, 1988; Elliott and Wattanasuwan, 1998; Warde, 2014; Larsen and Patterson, 2018). Various researchers have suggested that exploring alternative identity projects is an intrinsic aspect of human psychology (Markus and Nurius, 1986) and consumption is widely seen as a powerful site for this kind of personal exploration (Crockett, 2017; Houston, 1999; Kleine et al. 1993; Kenett-Hensel,; Schouten, 1991; Turkle, 1995; Schembri, Merrilees, and Kristiansen, 2010; Puzakova et al., 2018).

Turner’s (1967: 1969: 1974: 1982) work on liminality has been linked to consumer identity in various ways. For example, part of the appeal of body modification such as being tattooed is that the participant partakes in a liminoid experience of identity transformation (Patterson and Schroeder, 2010). Sneath and Lacey (2012) looked at the liminal character of consumption after a natural disaster, while Kozinets (2019) and Kozinets et al: (2016) conceptualise digital technology consumption as a facilitator of liminal consumer experience in relation to identity.

Cody (2012), Cody and Lawlor (2011) and Bassiouni and Hackley (2014: 2016) drew on the concept of liminality in their study which focused on children's and teens' consumption in negotiating the threshold identities of adolescence. Hobbs et al. (2000) and Hackley et al. (2013; 2015) have examined the role of alcohol and specifically drunkenness in creating a liminal psychological zone for young people in which they experiment with identity and risk, encouraged by the liminoid advertising appeals of alcohol brands. Schau, and Thompson, (2010), Pielichaty (2015) and Houston (1999) have used liminality in gender research. Liminality has been invoked in other research studies that do not foreground identity as such but refer to a consumer need for personal experimentation, change and escape (Taheri et al. 2016: Taheri et al., 2017) for example, by seeking deep personally transformational experiences through leisure pursuits (Tumbat and Belk, 2010: Thomassen, 2016) or spiritual consumption such as pilgrimage (Husemann et al., 2016; Husemann and Eckhardt, 2019). In tourism research, the airport has been theorised as a liminal space (Huang et al., 2018) even though being there is not an end in itself for consumers- rather, it is a place where people are transitioning between their usual identity and the possibility of personal change as a person embarking on a travel adventure to a new horizon.

#### *Liminality and communitas in social research*

As we note above, the linkage of consumption with identity projects is well established in the context of global consumer culture that putatively liberates individual identity from previously fixed social institutions such as class, religion and family (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995). The concept of liminality, and the connected notion of communitas, the almost intuitive temporary and transient bond of collective kinship experienced within and through the group, have gained wide currency in social science (e.g. Szokolczai, 2000: Horvath et al., 2009; Sharpe, 2005; Taheri et al., 2016; Baker, 2018), usually in order to point to a state of flux and

imaginative potential in the midst of personal and/or social change. Sharpe (2005) argued that *communitas* tends to emerge when “people step out of their structural roles and into an anti-structural sphere, .... where the rules of everyday life can be altered” (Sharpe, 2005, p.256). However, Turner (1969) argued that *communitas* is not the same as solidarity or community: it cannot persist over time and occurs in momentary experiences ‘in the interstices of social structure’ (p.153). One example might be the connection felt by a group of friends the summer holiday after finishing high school, before they move on to their new lives and that connection is lost.

Some liminoid advertising and branding seems to promise the illusion of *communitas*, such as in examples of British alcohol advertising that portray the sense of *communitas* between young drinkers (Szmigin et al., 2008; Griffin et al., 2009). A similar inferred *communitas* seems to also appear in ads for soda brands (Brick et al., 2017). In such examples, the alcohol or the soda brand is the key to the liminoid experience, of which a transient sense of *communitas* with the group (of fellow brand consumers) is part. Turner (1969) also coined the term ‘existential *communitas*’ to reflect the temporary sense of intense group identification that could accompany liminoid experience in advanced economies: “The very flexibility and mobility of social relations in modern industrial societies...may provide better conditions for the emergence of existential *communitas*, even if only in countless and transient encounters, than any previous forms of social order” (p.56). We suggest that countless transient consumer experiences facilitated by advertised brands provides a major platform for consumer identity experimentation in contemporary advanced economies.

### **Liminality in Advertising**

As noted above, advertising and marketing communication research has made very little use of the concept of liminality, although the ludic quality of advertising has been noted by Cook (2001) whose linguistic analysis of advertising discourse suggested that advertisements fulfil a human need for communicative play. (Leiss et al. 2005) referred to the narrative quality of advertising as *ameium* in which we tell stories about ourselves, to ourselves. Turner (1986) citing Myerhoff (1979) refers to the importance of social dramas, especially for conveying the third phase of liminal process, redress (after breach and crisis). Social dramas can be conceived as a kind of collective autobiography, “a means by which a group creates its identity by telling itself a story about itself...” (Turner, 1986 p.40). Advertising, we suggest, can hence be understood as a particularly vivid, resonant and visible source of autobiographical social drama when it leverages liminoid appeals.

Such biographical dramas, then, clearly sell the possibility of personal change, experimentation, and new identities, but this way of conceiving advertising appeals is currently not acknowledged or theorised either in practice or in the literature. Copywriting tropes such as ‘A New You’ and ‘Transform Your Life’ are tiresomely common in advertising, and not just in the self-help book or cosmetic surgery sectors. We tend to take this kind of exaggerated claim for granted as part of the absurd puffery or fantastical claims of advertisements, yet there has been relatively little attempt to theorise this phenomenon as it manifests as a form of advertising appeal.

Liminoid experiences can be indulged in through consumption, of products, services, experiences, brands, ideologies, and group memberships, and repeated without limit since, with brand consumption, there is no point at which the participant is received back into social structure formally conferred with the new identity- what the participant has bought is a symbolic new identity that they can change, in effect, buy buying another branded experience

next week. In sum, what advertisements that use liminoid appeals are selling, is the possibility of personal transformation that, being detached from formal ritual processes, is never subject to closure and can be extended indefinitely. Liminoid experiences can be seen as playful yet also potentially meaningful “ludic offerings placed for sale on the free market” (Turner, 1982, p.54). They engage with consumer needs for fun, fantasy (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982) and identity experimentation (Larsen and Patterson, 2018). The product, experience or service that is advertised may or may not be liminoid in character: it is through the advertising and branding that any potentially liminoid aspects of the brand are brought into being in the consumer imagination.

There are many examples of brand advertising that imply vaguely that deep personal change can occur through brand consumption, such as the Red Bull tagline ‘it gives you wings’<sup>2</sup> and the Axe campaign ‘Even Angels will fall’<sup>3</sup>. The Axe theme in this famous campaign was double edged, since it suggested that the (male) user would suddenly become sexually irresistible to women, transforming even angels into rapacious sexual predators. Of course, the theme was intended to be humorous, but, as Tanaka (1999) points out, just because an advertising appeal is absurd does not necessarily mean that it does not resonate with consumers (and Axe/Lynx was a top-selling male deodorant brand throughout this long running campaign). A problem for brands is that consuming the brand might not do as promised and then dissonance could set in as consumer register their disappointment. However, as noted above, the liminoid process can be repeated again and again without resolution, so what can be sold is not a specific new identity but a ‘storehouse of possibilities’. If the desired identity transformation does not occur, then the only recourse is to consumer more, and more. With no

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=azDUNRPT9Xs> accessed 11.1.2019

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EqGQCM\\_JIUc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EqGQCM_JIUc) accessed 11.1.2019

resolution required for liminoid experience, there need be no end point, and no lasting disappointment. Consumers merely buy the sense of the possibility of change, and when the fun wears off, they buy another sense of possibility. In this sense we suggest that all consumers who engage with branded consumption for purposes of identity experimentation and transformation are in effect consuming an indeterminate identity, one that neither disappoints, because it can always be changed, and never quite fulfils, because it is never formally acknowledged. If we consume branded items that are endorsed by a movie star, we might feel that we are engaging in the fantasy of being like a movie star ourselves, but we will never win an Oscar nor walk the red carpet.

The quote at the top of this paper refers to a long-running advertising campaign for paint brand Dulux that places painting one's home as a source of personal transformation- change your home, the implication is, and you change your personal story, and your sense of self. Note that the slogan does not posit the person who repaints their home as an aspirational identity. Rather, it is the act of painting (with Dulux paint) that opens up the 'fructile chaos' from which new identities can emerge. The print version of this ad was found in The UK *Sunday Times Magazine* of April 19<sup>th</sup> 2015, and this magazine offered a useful convenience sample of similar advertising appeals. For example, an ad for BMW's then new i8 model appeared with the tagline of 'Hello Future', conflating the intriguing world of technology with the (equally intriguing) future of the person who buys the car. A full-page colour advertisement for the Bentley Mulsanne luxury car was adorned with the distinctively liminoid strapline, 'Explore the space between yesterday and tomorrow'. There is a hint that consumption of the brand can act as a portal into a liminoid zone of transformative possibility. An ad in the same issue for Emirates airline asks the consumer to consider 'Hello Tomorrow: Hello World'. Here, the consumption of air travel with Emirates is positioned as a source of a possibly transformational

future. Yet another ad in the same magazine for an open top car declaims ‘Watch the drama unfold’. The theatrical pun has the passengers as audience for the dramatic and ever-changing vistas that come into sight for the traveller as the car is driven on mountainous roads with the soft top down.

Liminoid elements can be discerned in overtly aspirational ads such as Nike’s 2018 Dream Crazy<sup>4</sup>. Consumers are not seriously expecting to become the ‘greatest ever’ in their chosen sport, but they can engage ludically in the playful fantasy of sporting achievement when they perform their sport wearing the brand, even if they are running in their neighbourhood and not in an Olympic stadium. Nike consumers can ‘dream crazy’, as the ad implores, and the aspiration to be the greatest is both genuine, and an indulgent fantasy of personal change that, for most of us, will never occur. The appeal is to create a liminoid experience, a playful and volitional fantasy of deep personal transition, somewhere betwixt and between the humdrum reality of the present self, and the ‘crazy dream’ of a super-realised self powered by the pursuit of happiness through experiential consumption. The dramatic portrayals of different levels of personal achievement using vivid cinematography and powerful evocative sound tracks heighten the sense that Nike sportswear renders every training session not just a chore, but a dramatic performance. The reference to drama touches on the performative element of social identity- we perform identity to others, and also to ourselves (Slama et al. 1999) and Turner (1982) links liminoid experience to his notion of social drama, as noted earlier. He suggests that social drama fulfils a deep human need, and advertising has come to be one of the platforms on which we view the social dramas of stories that are about ourselves.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fq2CvmgoO7I> accessed 12.1.2019

The liminoid advertising appeal is not bound to particular cultures or regions. Examples can be found from advertising around the world. For example, in Egyptian real estate TV advertising, homes are sold as liminal spaces that can transform identity and experience. We see taglines such as ‘A Life to look up to’, ‘Where life imitates art’<sup>5</sup>, or ‘because you deserve a better life’<sup>6</sup>, promising the possibility of an indeterminate future filled with the possibility of change and transformation for the consumer in terms of a “better” or more creative life or future. Presumably, when a new home does not necessarily result in the new life that was expected, one moves to another.

These selected examples are few but by no means unusual- indeed, a casual perusal of almost any advertising platform suggests that it is extremely common to find ads that promise some kind of personal renewal or transformation. You can, it appears, step into a threshold toward a new you, if you drive a BMW, live in Mountain View or Palm Hills, holiday with James Villas, visit Dubai, wear Gucci, smell of Chanel, drink Nespresso or RedBull, read The Economist, or shop at Marks and Spencer. The specifically liminoid advertising appeal, we suggest, is based on a nuanced reading of advertisements that display this type of appeal. Although personal change is a common trope for advertising copywriters, it is, we suggest, far more than mere puffery but a powerful articulation of the ritual force (Otnes and Scott, 2013) of advertising and consumption.

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<sup>5</sup> [https://www.instagram.com/p/Bjfd9o9hxOO/?utm\\_source=ig\\_share\\_sheet&igshid=djr394taqg5s](https://www.instagram.com/p/Bjfd9o9hxOO/?utm_source=ig_share_sheet&igshid=djr394taqg5s) accessed 12.1.2019

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DviloQXiWh8&feature=youtu.be> accessed 12.1.2019



## **Discussion**

### **Socio-cultural and practitioner implications of liminoid advertising**

We have offered a relatively small number of case examples of liminoid advertising appeals with the intention of illustrating how flexible this appeal is in advertising campaigns. As the literature review above shows, liminality and liminoid experience have been used to theorise consumer demand and motivation in the research literature for sectors such as event management, alcohol marketing, nightclubs, retail design, airports and other tourist spaces, pilgrimage, wine consumption, body modification, marketing to children, video games and digital technology, and adventure sports, amongst other sectors. The research areas that employ these foci include sociology, urban studies, tourism, marketing, consumer research and gender studies. Predominantly, liminality was used to theorise the design of consumption spaces, experiences, products and services that facilitated consumer identity exploration and change. Our case examples in the section above illustrate that industries as diverse as sportswear, fashion, fragrance, paint and home décor, automobiles, real estate, energy drinks, and deodorant brands use the liminoid appeal in their advertising and branding. Neither the advertising nor the marketing communication research literature have hitherto theorised liminoid consumption. The very limited coverage that we could find in our literature search was confined to a mention of the liminal character of advertising in general (Zhao and Belk, 2006) and a small number of studies that use liminality to theorise the professions of advertising and branding (Olsen, 2016; Loacker and Sullivan, 2016) but not the outputs. We could find no research studies that theorise a liminoid advertising appeal. This is clearly an under-recognised yet influential area that carries importance for advertising, branding and marketing

communications strategies. We suggest that there are also far-reaching implications for consumers.

Liminality characterises contemporary social, cultural and political life in ways that are profound and far-reaching for individuals and societies (Thomassen, 2016). To return to Turner (1969: 1982) for a moment, the notion of liminality has been applied to small groups, sub-cultures, historical epochs, entire nations or to individuals (Horvarth et al. 2009). Psychoanalysis, for example, can be understood as a liminal process, while Turner (1969) noted the hippy movement and charismatic political movements as examples of liminality. Another example Turner (1969) gave was in the Judeo/Islamic/Christian traditions where life on earth is a liminal experience, a process of transition, with the desired resolution occurring only after death (and indeed the same may be said of Buddhism and Hinduism, with different eschatologies). The liminal zone is often seen as a positive state of becoming, a zone of infinite possibility and optimism on both a personal and a cultural (or religious) scale. However, Turner (1969) pointed out that it can also be pathological, using the example of the Manson family as a charismatic but murderous movement that played on a sense of liminality. In addition, Turner (1969) gave the example of citizens living under a semi-permanent state of political chaos and/or warfare. In such circumstances, the experience of being in a state of transformation may not be resolved during a life course. At such times, the social and moral order is absent and, sometimes, chaos reigns. Existential liminality, then, might be experienced as part of a hippy movement, as a member of a charismatic church group, or as a member of a pseudo religious cult, or of a Hell's Angels gang, or a nihilistic religio-political movement such as ISIS, with clearly differing ideologies and values at work. The dissolution of social structures in such movements, the sense of anti-structure, may be a precursor to renewal, re-birth and creativity, but it can also foster instability, and a loss of cultural and ethical points of reference. At its

most bleak on a national level, it results in failed states in which a perpetual state of war and propaganda subsist amidst horror and deprivation. The permanent suspension of social structure seems potentially destructive and chaotic.

The contrast between the dark potentialities of liminality and the ostensibly playful liminoid experiences promoted in consumer culture seems stark. Social structure can be oppressive but it confers stability of meaning and values. Postmodern theorisations of consumption suggest that consumer identities are no longer grounded only in class, ethnicity and family, but are more fluid and mobile, lending a liberatory character to contemporary consumer culture (Boutlis, 2000; Firat and Venkatesh, 1995; Gilovich et al., 2015). What can be more personally liberating than experimenting harmlessly with identity and lifestyle change through brand consumption? But, what happens when millions of individuals are engaged in perpetually repeated liminoid consumption, within a consumer culture that powerfully promotes liminoid products, brands, services and experiences as liberatory influences for fun, fantasy and identity experimentation, often in geo-political climates that are in a seemingly permanent state of liminoid chaos and flux? What happens if individuals spend a lot of their time playing fantasy role-play games, wearing clothes that mimic celebrities, talking about (and, on social media, to) celebrities as if they are personally acquainted, and promoting themselves and their lives to their personal audiences on various social media platforms? Is marketing in general, and the tendency of advertising to use liminoid appeals in particular, contributing to a collapse in social structures that, in turn, might be very enabling for some, but for others might lead to psychological illness and cultural alienation? What becomes of moral and social sensibility when ubiquitous brand marketing perpetually promotes a state of anti-structural flux that putatively undermines established loci of social identity?

Glib though it may be to turn from the dark potentialities of widespread liminoid advertising, branding and consumption to its strategic advantages, it seems clear from the above examples and research evidence that brands have found liminoid advertising and branding appeals to be powerfully motivating for consumers. Self-evidently, a desire to lose oneself for a time to engage in lifestyle and identity experimentation, excitement and life-changing experiences is a component of travel, tourism and leisure consumption for many (Tumbat and Belk, 2010) as are nightclubbing (Taheri et al. 2017), body modification (Patterson and Schroeder, 2010), travel (Huang et al. 2018) and spiritual consumption (Husemann and Eckhardt, 2019), but we have also demonstrated through our case examples that liminoid appeals can be similarly applied to product consumption of paint, cars, clothes, and, no doubt, almost any other commodity, subject to the creativity with which the association is portrayed. The value of liminoid advertising and marketing communications to brands should be formalised as part of the lexicon of creative strategy for advertising agencies, brand consultancies and marketers. Notwithstanding the potential social and personal costs of a consumer culture that promotes identity as a consumer choice that can be shed and changed at will, liminoid advertising taps into a consumer cultural moment that seems liberating, exciting and powerfully motivating for many consumers. The desire for personal change and development is universal (Maslow, 1943) and allied to the need for variety and experimentation with identity (Markus and Nurius, 1986). There is a need for marketing communication professionals and academics to have a deeper understanding of both the commercial force of liminoid advertising and brand communication, and the potentially dark wider social, political and cultural movements of which it is a part (Thomasson, 2016).

## **Concluding comments**

This paper has offered a new contribution to advertising, marketing communication and brand marketing research and practice in the form of a new theorisation of advertising and brand appeals based on a new application of Turner's (1967) well-established theory of liminality. Specifically, the three intended contributions of the study are, firstly, to extend the notion of liminality and the related concept of liminoid experience into the advertising and marketing communication research literature. We have demonstrated that liminality has been highly influential across many areas of social research related to marketing and management, but is largely absent in the advertising and marketing and communication research. The second aim was to demonstrate the flexibility and popularity of liminoid advertising appeals, which we have done with a number of old and more recent case examples. Thirdly, the study inflects theories of persuasion in advertising with the contribution of a previously un-theorised form of advertising appeal, the liminoid advertising appeal. Finally, the study speculates not only on what liminoid consumption brings in terms of choices, fun, and fantasies (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982) but on what its liminoid aspects seem to deny or negate, such as social structures, institutions, values and identities grounded in fixed notions of class and family (Thomasson, 2016).

Future research could include empirical studies to categorise liminoid advertising appeals by creative strategy, targeted consumer groups, sector and regionality. Additional studies could qualitatively investigate liminoid consumer experiences broken down by sector and consumer demographics. It would be useful to identify the sectors and segments' areas in which liminoid advertising appeals are most salient, and to examine those consumer groups most vulnerable

to the negative effects of liminoid advertising appeals to inform consumer policy and advertising regulation.

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