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*Editorial*

## Special Issue “Conspicuous Consumption and Consumer Culture”

Dear readers,

in this very first issue of the newly established *Kiel Journal of Consumer Studies (KJCS)*, we offer our students of our research seminar the opportunity to publish their own research work. We are proud to present six research reports that utilize qualitative research techniques and address contemporary issues of our modern consumerist society.

The thematic focus of this research seminar was rather broad. In our first meeting, we embraced contemporary research on consumer culture and conspicuous consumption to create an overarching theme that could guide and motivate the research endeavors of our students. We outlined several possible research avenues that have not been addressed by consumer researchers so far but left enough space for own ideas and thoughts. Throughout the seminar, we created opportunities for the students to engage in discussions with us or among their class to truly foster platforms for creative ideas and to introduce the students to the process of conducting consumer research.

During the seminar, we held a journal club to gather a mutual understanding of research on contemporary issues on consumer culture and conspicuous consumption. Following this first approach to those highly relevant topics, the students congregated and developed research questions and research avenues that they wanted to pursue in their own research projects. With a little methodological help from us as supervisors, the students came up with several highly innovative and interesting research ideas that they thoroughly worked on throughout the semester. Subsequently, the students conducted their research with high energy, motivation, and dedication. They did netnographic (Kozinets 2015) work and in-depth interviews (Johnson 2002) to address a variety of consumption areas that 1) add to our understanding of what constitutes consumer culture and under what conditions individuals engage in conspicuous consumption and 2) illustrate how those topics interrelate.

In the first article, Döbel et al. (2022) analyze the differences between gym and home workouts and connect their findings to literature of conspicuous consumption. By analyzing posts from Instagram via a netnographic approach, they conclude that individuals which engage in fitness workouts from home and which use those workouts as content for their social media profile differ from those individuals that engage in gym workouts and post about it on Instagram in respect to their motivation, their motives, and the shared contents.

The second article, authored by Demir et al. (2022), examines the motives behind second-hand consumption and examines the role of technological changes on cultural phenomena in the realms of consumption. The authors conclude that consumption of second-hand fashion enables to represent one's own individuality and to stand out from the crowd. Thus, it becomes visible that elements of conspicuous consumption are relevant when buying online second-hand fashion.

Effler et al. (2022) focus on the relevant domain of anti-consumption research (Lee, Fernandez & Hyman 2009). In their research report, the authors examine whether the motives for anti-consumption are identical to the motives for conspicuous consumption. Their claim is that, to a certain extent, individuals that engage in anti-consumption and refrain from certain consumption activities, are not engaging in this kind of consumption for environmental or altruistic reasons but rather for egoistic reasons that coincide with conspicuous consumption – a phenomenon that the authors coin “conspicuous anti-consumption”.

Focusing on the “sustainable fashion tribe”, the fourth article examines young individuals that engage in ecological and ethical fashion consumption and analyzes the role of social media networks in their consumption and communication activities. Based on in-depth interviews, Hauth et al. (2022)

provide evidence that individuals that feel associated with the “sustainable fashion tribe” want to inform their audiences with information about ethical consumption but also strive for reputational gains and social status.

Wichtmann et al. (2022) take a deep dive into the cultural phenomenon of “Vanlifers” and report evidence of their qualitative study. They report that the hashtag #VanLife is a current phenomenon in social media and can be largely divided into two sub-groups: Nomadic-living Vanlifers (individuals that live in their van or car) and recreational Vanlifers that use their vehicle as a mode of transportation and for vacation trips. The paper focusses on the latter and explores the underlying motivations for choosing VanLife as a vacation mode and possible connections to conspicuous consumption.

Ultimately, Berning et al. (2022) analyze whether young individuals use sustainable consumption practices as status symbols. Their qualitative study examines the drivers and barriers of sustainable consumption behavior and the use of car sharing as well as personal status symbols among the tribe of sustainable students. A special focus is placed on the question of whether status-related motives represent incentives for sustainable consumption and the use of car sharing or whether these can serve as status symbols.

In the upcoming years, we hope to establish the Kiel Journal of Consumer Studies (KJCS) as a permanent outlet for our students’ research endeavors. For additional information about the papers, please see the Online Appendix of this Issue: <https://doi.org/10.38071/2023-00006-9>

Finally, we would like to thank our students for their effort and their great work!

Yours,

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