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New Directions in Consumer Research (Sage, 2015)

Introduction to Volume IV – Spaces

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Literature from various disciplinary perspectives acknowledges that people often develop rich and complex relationships to places that they perceive as important, thereby highlighting the need to understand spatial aspects of consumption. Since the publication of Yi-Fu Tuan's *Space and Place* (1977), the distinction between the more abstract nature of space and experienced nature of place has been understood. As Tuan (1977, p. 6) observed, "what begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value." A space therefore becomes a place when it is consumed (Sherry 1998), often involving a process of appropriation that leads to a sense of belonging and symbolic meaning (Visconti et al. 2010). As a result, places often become important parts of the extended self (Belk, 1998) to which we develop strong emotional attachments.

A key debate in defining 'place' relates to whether it should be understood as a "stable, bounded and historically continuous entity" or rather, whether it is "a source of potential social interaction" (Lewicka 2011, p.210). In this volume, we adhere to the second perspective in recognising the active contribution made by consumers in the place making process. Many of the articles and book chapters also emphasise the importance of socio-spatial relations to the construction of place, further reinforcing the dynamic and somewhat playful nature of place definitions. Indeed, in their investigation of place attachment, Hidalgo and Hernandez (2001) found that social attachment carries greater significance than physical attachment for the house,

neighbourhood and city. Valentine (1999, p. 57) effectively summarises this perspective in suggesting that, “Throughout our everyday lives we constantly negotiate space, positioning ourselves physically, socially, morally, politically and metaphorically in relation to others.”

In the opening piece of this volume, Jackson and Thrift (1995) review literature relevant to “geographies of consumption” and effectively demonstrate the fundamental link between consumption and space. Drawing largely on work published within geography, their review of the sites of postmodern consumption, the chains that link multiple consumption sites and the spaces and places of contemporary consumerism, conveys the situated nature of consumer behaviour. Bringing in issues related to gentrification, class and gender, they demonstrate the broad scope of this research field. However, they equally note various limitations including the relative absence of the voices of consumers and the need for more ethnographic work. These limitations have since been addressed by consumer researchers as evident in the other articles selected for this volume.

In an effort to demonstrate the specialised nature of contemporary consumption, in the sections that follow, we review the key articles that appear in this volume in relation to four main themes: commercial spaces, museum spaces, city and neighbourhood spaces and online spaces.

Commercial Spaces

A growing body of work has considered the increasingly common retail strategy of the design of experiential settings in which to consume. Indeed, Pine and Gilmore (1998) viewed experience design to be equally important to product and process design. Seen as a means of brand building, the careful design of retail spaces is a strategy followed within both product

and service industries. In staging these experiences, an ordinary consumption activity is transformed into something more memorable (Hamilton and Wagner 2014). Ritzer (2005) termed these staged spaces “cathedrals of consumption” to describe how they enchant and lure the consumer. Studies have focused on flagship stores (Penaloza 1998), festival shopping malls (Maclaran and Brown 2005), brand museums (Hollenbeck et al. 2008), theme parks (O’Guinn and Belk 1989) and other leisure service settings (Wakefield and Blodgett 1994). Despite focusing on the commercial environment, the social dimension retains an important role as these are not merely spaces for economic activity but also spaces which support the social link (Aubert-Gamet and Cova 1999). Oldenburg (1999, p16) makes a similar point in his discussion of third places which he describes as “the core settings of informal public life.” These essentially social spaces provide somewhere to “hang out” and offer a sense of community and escape. The following paragraphs offer a brief review of the articles relevant to this theme.

Kozinets et al. (2002) in a case study of ESPN Zone Chicago. Such themed flagship brand stores seek to blend retail and entertainment through the use of retail theatre. Drawing on an ethnographic study, the authors illustrate how the characteristics of ESPN Zone provide narrative structure to a cable television network that “combines local meaning with universal appeal” (p21). In particular they illustrate the mythological nature of retail space and the potential for mindscape-related theming that offers enchanting and extraordinary spaces for consumption.

Borghini and colleagues (2009) sought greater understanding of why themed brandstores are so appealing to consumers in their study of American Girl Place and highlighted the relationship between place and ideology. They illustrated how the physical retail environment is constructed to represent the moral and social values of the brand. For consumers who are

attracted by these brand values, “shopping becomes pilgrimage” and consumption becomes a “subjective ideological experience.” (p. 372).

In contrast to the relatively permanent retail spaces studied in the articles so far, Moor (2003) explored a more temporary spatial strategy to brand promotion in the form of live music events. In doing so, she argues for an expansion of what constitutes a marketing space. Although temporary, the example Moor discusses of Witness music festival (a sister-brand of Guinness), is made portable with various memorabilia and a festival website. The translation of a branded experience from one context to another illustrates how branded space can become entangled with consumers’ everyday lives.

The next article by Gregson and Rose (2000) continues with this focus on the transient, temporary and somewhat unstable nature of space. The authors draw on two distinct research projects to demonstrate the relevance of performance and performativity to understandings of space. The first project involving community arts workers highlights the centrality of power in the production of social actors with examples relating to the consequences of labelling people according to geographical community. The second project on car boot sales illustrates the interrelational qualities of space: performances bring spaces into being in that “performances articulate their own spatialities, as opposed to being just located in space” (p. 446-447).

These articles show us that the spaces that contextualise the various studies reported in this volume and beyond do not pre-exist as willing and cooperative landscapes; rather they require the active involvement of consumers and other social actors to make them come alive and become vibrant. Together this body of work demonstrates that consumers can develop a strong

sense of attachment to commercial spaces. Debenedetti et al. (2014) likened the experience of commercial place attachment to gift giving; drawing on a social exchange perspective they argued that consumers may demonstrate supportive reciprocal behaviours to places that are meaningful for them.

Museum Spaces

Many different spaces are relevant to the study of arts marketing including theatre, music festivals, cinemas and dance halls. In this volume we focus on the museum space which in recent years has witnessed increased attention with various marketing and consumer behaviour journals devoting special issues to the topic. The research in this area reveals a number of themes that are similar to those found within the commercial spaces literature. For example, in an article written by a museum practitioner, the active role played by consumers is evident as Devine (2014) discusses how they collaborate in the knowledge creation process within the museum space.

Another similarity is found in Jafari et al.'s (2013) piece about the social nature of the museum. Based on a qualitative study of Kelvingrove Museum and Art Gallery in Glasgow, Jafari et al. (2013) introduce the concept of interactive sociality to describe the social interactions that are facilitated via cultural consumption of the museum. Interactive sociality can either strengthen existing ties or establish new ones. However, it is distinctive from the sociality evident in other forms of consumer tribes and communities in that it is not focused on engendering a sense of belonging but rather, is often temporary in nature and based on "shared interests or moments of sociality" (p. 1745). Importantly, the authors argue that this form of interactive sociality can extend beyond the physical space of the museum into other online and offline spaces.

The next article also considers the Kelvingrove Museum and Art Gallery but with a specific focus on a temporary celebrity fashion exhibition depicting a range of costumes associated with the career of pop icon Kylie Minogue. The exhibition presents fashion and celebrity as spectacular devices and allows consumers to step closer to the glamour of celebrity lifestyle. The article suggests that the exhibition space provides a stage to broaden celebrity appeal beyond other more commercial aspects of celebrity culture. As such, it might be argued that the boundaries between art and popular culture are becoming increasingly blurred.

City and Neighbourhood Spaces

The next articles consider the urban and neighbourhood consumption experience, the original contexts for exploring place attachment. A growing body of work illustrates the potential for consumer researchers to expand their investigations into this domain, not least the trend towards more entrepreneurial governance meaning that increasingly cities across the world are being marketed as shopping destinations (Kavaratzis, 2004). Indeed, Miles (2010) argues that the consuming city has become central to urban life to the extent that policy-makers and urban planners focus on consumption at the expense of anything else. Together the contributions related to this theme demonstrate the broad theoretical scope stemming from this research stream. For example, the articles demonstrate that space has a role to play in discussions of consumer agency (Visconti et al. 2010), status (Saatcioglu and Ozanne 2013), and ethical or green consumption (Chatzidakis et al. 2012).

The first contribution in this section considers the importance of the metonymical process, that is, the way in which the meanings of particular words transfer over time. Root (2005) focuses on the Argentine *peinetón*, a large hair comb that was a popular fashion accessory in the

nineteenth century. She suggests that wearing these exaggerated hair combs (measuring up to one yard in both width and height) was linked to spatial transformations by supporting women's claims to public space, both physically and symbolically. However, in time, the meaning of *peinetón* shifted to become associated with prostitution thereby returning women to the private domestic space. Root traces these transformations of meaning in line with the political discourse of the country.

Visconti et al.'s (2010) multisited ethnography of street art practices calls attention to the consumption of public space. The street art context allows for a sense of ownership beyond institutional policy and by considering the perspectives of street artists and urban dwellers the authors demonstrate the various forms of agency evident from these multiple entitlements to public space. In doing so, they unpack four consumption ideologies of public space based on the agentic interactions of the individualistic and collectivistic appraisals of dwellers and street artists.

In the following article the focus shifts to the home, arguably the most significant place in one's life. Saatcioglu and Ozanne (2013) explore the marginalised space of a trailer park neighbourhood where mobile homes and their residents are often stigmatised as undesirable. By adding a moral dimension to the concept of habitus, they demonstrate the stratification of social life both within and outside the trailer park. The social space of the park is characterised by five social groups with varying moral dispositions and trajectories. Moral identities are constructed via social comparisons and consumption practices around informants' homes that in turn contribute to the microsocial hierarchy within the park.

Shifting from moral capital to social capital, the next study by Chatzidakis et al. (2012) takes inspiration from Foucault and explores Exarcheia, a neighbourhood in Athens, as a heterotopian space. They demonstrate how Exarcheia challenges the norms of the dominant consumer culture in terms of its anti-capitalist ethos, evidenced in its built environment, social practices and events. Although there are a diverse range of social movements in Exarcheia, the sense of community and place facilitated collective and political action.

The context of the next article by Hamilton and Alexander (2013) is Adopt a Station, a partnership scheme between the railway franchise operator and individuals/groups who adopt their local railway stations in pursuit of various individual/community agendas. The authors discuss the place attachment adopters feel for the railway stations, evidenced by their commitment to preserve and enhance these community spaces. Their activities often transform and regenerate railway stations into aesthetically appealing gateways to the town by recapturing a sense of place. Findings illustrate the benefits of this cocreated approach for both individuals and the broader community.

The emphasis on active consumers is continued in the next article by Miles (2012) in his consideration of neoliberalism and associated commodification of the city. Neoliberal cities are identified by images of prosperity and consumption that often eradicate any sense of distinctive place identity. Miles critiques previous work on the neoliberal city for failing to acknowledge consumer agency. He argues that the neoliberal city should be understood as a “negotiated entity” (p. 223) and the spaces of consumption within “represent a meeting point between the society or structures that determine us and the way we interpret them as individual agents” (P. 224). Overall such spaces of consumption are not only physical but also emotional environments.

Online Spaces

In the final two articles the focus shifts to cyberspace and the new theoretical and methodological possibilities afforded by the ever-growing influence and scope of online spaces and interactions (see also articles in Volume II – Sharing, especially John, 2012, Kozinets et al, 2008). Both articles employ netnography (Kozinets 2002) as a basis to explore celebrity culture and fandom. First Hamilton and Hewer (2010) explore two virtual communities of Kylie Minogue fans where the shared affiliation provides social benefits for members. Through these online tribal gatherings consumers find a space for conversations and emotional connections that are absent in their everyday lives. The authors illustrate how these spaces allow new forms of innovation and tribal value to emerge through fan creativity and synergy amongst members. Although this offers significant marketing opportunities, brand managers must proceed with caution as these online spaces are owned and controlled as much by tribal members as by companies.

Second, Hewer and Brownlie (2013) consider the celebritisation of culinary culture through analysis of an online community forum devoted to Nigella Lawson. The emphasis is on the forum as a space of domesticity where talk of cooking practices provides a platform to explore and resolve other issues, including family and relationship tensions. The authors illustrate how the celebrity culinary brand enlivens the mundane with the online forum acting as a platform for enchantment and seduction.

Suggestions for Future Research

Several of the articles in this volume have demonstrated the theoretical value of exploring spaces that are temporary in nature such as car boot sales (Gregson and Rose 2000) or live music events (Moor 2003). Future research could develop this line of enquiry by investigating in more depth the characteristics of temporary spaces and how they differ to more permanent consumption spaces. For example, it would be interesting to consider consumer attraction to and consumption meanings associated with temporary spaces.

As we have demonstrated, much of the focus within the literature on commercial spaces concentrates on strategies to entice and facilitate consumption, such as the staging of experiences. Much of this research is associated with high budget, architecturally sophisticated, large retail spaces. In contrast, there has been less interest on understanding more mundane spaces which tend to remain taken for granted. Future research could address this imbalance, for example, it might consider whether consumers still invest in the coproduction of commercial spaces that are low budget and simply designed. Alternatively, researchers could consider what kinds of spaces create barriers to consumption.

We suggest that future research considers the relationship between spaces as opposed to approaching a space as distinctive and stand-alone. For example, how do consumers participate in place making within standardized chain stores? How is consumption in/of virtual space and physical space related? How do consumers negotiate neighbourhood boundaries within the urban environment?

Finally in terms of context, we also encourage future studies that focus on art spaces beyond the museum. We would benefit from a deeper understanding of the role of space in arts consumption both in terms of the physical environment and social-relational practices. Studies

that focused on rural consumption spaces and consumer meanings associated with nature would also be a welcome addition to existing literature.

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