ASSOCIATION FOR CONSUMER RESEARCH

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Reflections of Self in Food Sharing Interactions and Experiences

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We conceptualize the iMirror phenomenon from a netnography of consumer self-representations of food consumption. From videos of home cooking to photos of restaurant experiences, these reflections offer us patterns of representational meaning that allow us to induct general categories of the iMirror phenomenon.

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iMirror/iMirror: Digital Reflections of Self-Consumption

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Paper #1: Reflections of Self in Food Sharing Interactions and Experiences

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Paper #2: Consumer Soiveillance: Observations of the Self by Means of New Media Technologies

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Paper #3: Co-Construction of the Digital Self

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Paper #4: Self-Transformation and Performativity of Social Media Images

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SESSION OVERVIEW

Although the term "selfie" has gained wide, and often inappropriate, currency in common parlance, the use of technologies to reflect images of the self is actually much wider than mere digital self-portraiture. Indeed, beyond the varieties of self-portrait shared through social media are technologies that reflect the self back to the self, mirror-like, as well as out to the world, broadcast-like, thus playing key roles in the complex contemporary construction of combined private-public selves. Conceptually emphasizing this self-reflective quality, its technological orientation, and its co-creative aspects, this session uses the term "the iMirror" to begin a research conversation about this potential new area. The "iMirror" theoretical conversation focuses not merely on particular manifestations, such as smartphone self-portraiture, but on the wider phenomenon of public-private self-related image sharing, including images of the self in consumption, and its implications for our understanding of self-in-culture and culture-in-self. Using consumer culture research on the vanguard of the phenomenon, this session is intended to highlight and begin to systematize the theoretical implications of these ideas.

Drawing upon multiple case studies interrelated by their self-reflective characteristics, the sessions explores different facets of the iMirror. First, Kozinets, Ashman, and Patterson use their longitudinal netnography of online food-sharing practices to conceptualize these different elements. Their study of food consumption photography blends technology consumption with food, self, and other in digital consumption "networks of practice". Rob, Rachel, and Tony link these elements to notions of emancipation and participatory culture. But, showing that things are not so rosy, these notions are counterbalanced by a series of updated hegemonic and Weberian "iron cage" implications. Next, drawing on their ethnographic work with wearable camera technology, Dinhopl and Gretzel explore the notion of "soiveillance", a widely used social media term that situates self-related digital technology practices within the context of surveillance. Building on notions of the panopticon and reconsumption, Anja and Ulli develop theory that helps add qualitative aspects to the quantified self. Belk then takes us on a journey to the center of theories of the self. Building from social psychology and sociology, he skillfully adapts them to the new digital world of iMirrors. Cooley's notion of The Looking Glass Self and Goffman's theories of presentation of self are confronted with Russ's new realities of online tagging, comments, endorsements, and other such responses to consumers' digital self-presentations. He shows nothing less than that the new digital self-image is subject to a complex of old and new co-constructing responses of others. In the final paper, Rokka introduces notions of class and status. Joonas uses performativity theory to examine how champagne consumers are bounded by their own self-limits as they self-reflect their consumption online. Analyzing digital images reveals the disciplinary constraints that capital places on performative agency, and allows some speculation about what it might take to escape those limits, and engage in genuine self-transformation.

Each of these papers combines theory with fieldwork and observation. Each deals with the central topic of iMirrors. However, each assumes a unique perspective on the phenomenon—participation, surveillance, co-construction, and self-limitation. Combined into the session, this congerie of related themes reveals more than could any individual presentation. Although the session features consumer culture work, its central topics and constructs—the self and consumption—have wide appeal to those with self and social psychology orientations. The four papers were handpicked for their interrelated fit, offering different theoretical and site sampling angles on the phenomenon, but also with considerable depth. The session is well-suited to elicit and answer questions about new and existing constructs and theoretical relations to explain these new phenomena, such as: "Is there enough here to sketch out a nascent research area?" Technological and theoretical advancements and the nature of consumer-technology, consumer-consumption and consumer-consumer connection will be explored, "advancing" our understanding of consumer "connections" and also connecting "self" concepts across the field of consumer research.

Reflections of Self in Food Sharing Interactions and Experiences

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Displaying representations of food is a widespread, global, and significant social media phenomenon with many aspects. This behavior is rooted in part in food photography and recipe books, but has grown to encompass and assume many new forms, such as recipe sharing and so-called "foodporn". As it always has for scholars such Pierre Bourdieu (1984) and Sidney Levy (1981), food consumption reveals a socially embodied structure of taste and distinction. Hence, we link the sharing of food related photography to a structure of 'culinary capital' (Lebesco and Naccarato 2012), a particular language and set of meanings that is both acculturated and immediately grasped. This research combines longitudinal netnographic work in the space of food and drink display with three years of in-person ethnographic and interview work.

In this paper, we demonstrate how a variety of styles of self-representation can inform our knowledge of the "iMirror": public-private self-related image sharing, including images of the self in consumption, and its implications for our understanding of self-in-culture and culture-in-self. We note several major uses as consumers reflect consumption outwards, to others. Cosmopolitan and fashionable people like to be seen to eat the 'correct' foods, in the 'correct' restaurants and, as a consequence, gain admiration through display of their consumer status. However, until relatively recently, telling consumers what and where to eat has mostly been the preserve of food critics writing in newspapers. For many years, alongside the Michelin star system employed to assess haute cuisine restaurants, the system of food critics and evaluators legitimized particular per-

sons as the dominant purveyors of food knowledge. However, the disrupting disintermediation of traditional institutions of taste distribution is shifting, with voices being coopted alongside the emergence of new institutional voices (Dolbec and Fischer forthcoming; Jenkins forthcoming; McQuarrie et al. 2013; Scaraboto and Fischer 2013). In tandem with a broadening public sphere more open to exhibitionism through the sharing of intimate and personal revelations resulted in self representation which is outwardly directed and which both de-institutionalizes and re-institutionalizes consumption practices, identities, and characteristics.

The iMirror also exhibits consumption of the self to the self. The technological infrastructure equips people with unprecedented agency to reflect their own consumption to themselves through others. Although Web 2.0 technologies, according to the rhetoric at least, render a software-based architecture of participation that has led to consumer empowerment on a level previously unimaginable (Constantinides and Fountain 2008; Krishnamurthy and Kucuk 2008), we also, following Weber's famous metaphor, see this as a type of "Silicon Cage of Rationality". When media is marketplace, and when media are social, there is no escape from the gaze of the market. The implications for media scholar Henry Jenkins' (1991, forthcoming) notion of "participatory culture" is especially salient as it shows how participation in technology for consumption, even in boundary zones where it is not directly or immediately shared through social media, now performs not only a motivational function but also a pedagogical one. Emancipatory potentials are counterbalanced by marketplace hegemonies, and vice versa (Kreiss et al. 2011). Self-reflective technology teaches us how to consume, how to consumer better, hot to display and how not to consume/display. The resulting consumption process is thus much more than a simple addition of voices to an existing process. Instead, the connections enabled by social media create entirely new demands for new self-presentational practices and form of consumption. These work alongside economic and social processes requiring access to technology and a myriad of other products and services.

Although critics still exist and have (real world, and sometimes social media) klout, the creation and maintenance of food markets is therefore, to some extent, now dependent on networks of prosuming consumers, collectives composed of individuals capable of technologically-enabled production, consumption, and entrepreneurship (Moffitt and Dover 2013). Collectively, across a multitude of sharing sites, the depiction of food-related images plays an undeniable role in the arbitration of food tastes and restaurant choices. Typically, in excursions from home to restaurant, consumers are equipped with mobile phone cameras, which they use to capture and upload salivating pictures of restaurant-bought delicacies or homemade foodstuffs. These phones, and the cameras within them, made possible by the miniaturization of both electronic circuits and processors, often described as appendages of their bodies, directly linking them to social cuisine networks.

Appetites, tastes, and distinctions in such food sharing networks become complex market-community-industrial processes. Self-presentational practices in the iMirror play a vital role in these processes. Food sharing practices can include human bodies or no human bodies, depending upon the cultural codes conveyed. Patterns in distinct objectified edible objects are complex, and run from the pornographic to the sacralized. Food recipes are shared and tested regarding homemade cuisine. These recipes are subject to further elaboration and addition by other consumers, creating a collective co-creative process akin to networked new product development presaging, perhaps, such refinements in a maker movement of 3-dimensional "recipes". In addition, photographs, restaurants, recipes and their resultant foodstuffs are ceaselessly rated, presenting a quantification of the gut that has distinctly material effects.

Throughout, the iMirror's representation of the insatiably hungry and always-eating consumer is present, even when it is absent from photographs. In this netnography of online food photo networks, we find food consumption reflected back to self, food consumption reflected outwards to others, technology consumption reflected back to self, and technology consumption reflected out to others. The core categories of self and other—what anthropologists explore as "alterity" (Taussig 1993)—are present not only in every bite we take, but with every photograph we make.

Consumer Soiveillance: Observations of the Self by Means of New Media Technologies

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Soiveillance is a term used in social media to situate self-related practices within the context of the "veillance" family (sur-, trans-, sous-, etc.) and refers to consumers' own observations of the self by the self by means of new media technologies. This paper will build on this term, examining how the consumption of new devices affords consumers increasingly complex ways to expose aspects of the self that are not visible unless tracked or recorded technologically. Wearable technologies, such as diet or activity trackers, in particular have become important tools in aiding consumers track and communicate aspects of their selves. Such user-generated data and technology not only allow insights into people, but give consumers agency: Technology acts as a digital mirror that enables consumers to engage in self-reflection (Lupton, 2013) and personalized interpretation of and interaction with data (Nafus and Sherman, 2014). Previous research on self-tracking has focused exclusively on users' interaction with 'objective' numeric data. Yet, consumers increasingly engage in self-tracking and self-reflection via new media technologies that deliver rich visuals.

Technology now affords consumers the opportunity to watch themselves and their own consumption experiences through video-recording their consumption experiences with wearable cameras. Wearable cameras that offer continuous, hands-free recording have become a global consumer phenomenon, specifically in the action and sports markets. Despite wearable cameras' innovation being the ability to record video from a point-of-view perspective, consumers often use accessories that enable them to record themselves to later rewatch their experiences (Dinhopl and Gretzel 2014). By rewatching their experiences, consumers engage in a variation of volitional reconsumption (Russell and Levy 2012), that is, the conscious seeking to relive their consumption experiences. This volitional reconsumption is not a simple hedonic re-experiencing but is mediated by and reflected upon through a technological lens. It is reflective reconsumption turned on its head: rather than engaging in reflective reconsumption to reflect on oneself at one's current point in life (Russell and Levy 2012), consumers engage in reflective reconsumption to reflect on their past self at the point of their (recorded) experience as well as in regards to their future consumption and social media represented future self.

The self and its consumption experiences thus become images and bits of data that are carefully monitored and scrutinized by consumers themselves or those with whom the records are shared. Self-tracking approaches have previously been linked to Foucauldian themes of surveillance (Albrechtslund 2013; Bossewitch and Sinnreich 2013; Lupton 2012), and in this paper, we equally take a Foucauldian perspective to theorize consumers' practices of self-tracking via wearable cameras as both a classic panopticon (1977),

engaging consumers in a disciplinary gaze onto themselves, thereby governing consumer behavior, as well as an obverse panopticon (Kozinets et al. 2004), playing to consumers' enjoyment of being watched. We therefore seek to better/more broadly conceptualize soiveillance with respect to consumption experiences.

Drawing from a year-long field study with wearable camera users (snowboarders, skiers, skateboarders, water park visitors, and cyclists), we explore the roles in which consumers use wearable technology for observations and reflections on the self. The camera performs at once as a neutral observer, a quasi-social actor, an arbiter, and an enabler of consumption. As a neutral observer, consumers use wearable cameras as sources of evidence to document their consumption. For example, cyclists mount wearable camera equipment to their bicycles to have visual proof of their innocence in case of traffic accidents. As a quasi-social actor, consumers use wearable cameras as a stand-in for their intended future audience, either themselves or others. They openly integrate the camera into their consumption by talking to it, or engaging in performativity (Larsen 2005, conceptualizing Butler's notion of performativity for the tourist context), for example, by 'mugging' for the camera. As an arbiter of consumption, consumers use wearable cameras to track their consumption, often related to the notion of progress to be critiqued by themselves or others. For example, skateboarders will film tricks and then (re)watch them to critique themselves and their consumption. As an enabler of consumption, consumers use wearable cameras as facilitators of the consumption experience in its own right. Filming consumption is prioritized over the consumption that is being filmed. In order to capture satisfying video, consumers engage in consumption behaviours they otherwise might not have enacted. For example, snowboarders will decide to jump over trees with snow on them for a more stunning visual.

The technology thus becomes both a digital mirror and an always-on panopticon through which consumers are able to reflect on and understand their own consumption experiences but also change their behaviours and self-perceptions. Consumers hereby respond as predicted by Foucault's panopticon with self-disciplining, but they also engage in the obverse panopticon (Kozinets et al. 2004), where they take pleasure in being recorded (and in recording) and being observed (by their future self or others). Indeed, while others may be involved in this process, the self-tracking phenomenon suggests that ever more technology is developed that supports new levels of self-reflection through quantitative and qualitative data: It allows consumers to watch their quantified selves consume, altering how they engage in reflective reconsumption. With this paper, we hope to prompt discussions on the role of technology for shaping consumption and reconsumption practices in the age of consumer soiveillance.

Co-Construction of the Digital Self

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

One of five ways in which Belk (2013) contends that the extended self is modified in a digital era is through the co-construction of self that occurs online much more than offline. This paper is an extension and update elaborating on the observation that despite the vastly increased possibilities for representing the self online, there is also a welcome or unwelcome loss of control to known and unknown others whose online activity helps to shape the way we and others view our self. The idea that others help construct the way we see ourselves was formulated by Charles Cooley (1904/1964) who posited that our self presentation is interpreted and reflected back to us by others we encounter in daily life. Zhao (2005) takes up

Cooley's looking glass metaphor and suggests that online we have more resources available for self presentation (Goffman 1959) to telecopresent others: we are able to provide more information about our self online, engage in more self-disclosure, provide more elaborate self-narratives, and possibly present multiple and "retractable" selves untethered from our bodies.

But the sort of audience mirror that Zhao (2005) envisions online is passive one like a fixed mirror that reflects more or less what is presented. The co-construction of self that Belk (2013) envisions and that I pursue here involves a more active audience. Take the case of Justine Sacco, former Senior Director of Corporate Communications at IAC (InterActiveCorp). While on a long journey from New York to visit family in South Africa, she made a few quick Tweets from JFK and Heathrow airports, including these:

"'Weird German Dude: You're in First Class. It's 2014. Get some deodorant' – Inner monologue as I inhale BO. 'Thank God for pharmaceuticals.'"

"Chilly – cucumber sandwiches – bad teeth. Back in London!"

"Going to Africa. Hope I don't get AIDS. Just kidding. I'm white!" (Ronson 2015).

She then wandered around Heathrow for half an hour and boarded the plane for the 11-hour flight to Cape Town. It was only while the plane was taxiing that she received a call from her best friend saying that she was the number one worldwide trend on Twitter. That's when the baffled woman had to shut off her smart phone for the flight. Although she had only 170 Twitter followers, the racist tone of her last comment caused great offence and led to viral follow-up messages like these:

"All I want for Christmas is to see @JustineSacco's face when her plane lands and she checks her inbox/voicemail."

"Oh man, @JustineSacco is going to have the most painful phone-turning-on moment ever when her plane lands."

"We are about to watch this @JustineSacco bitch get fired. In REAL time. Before she even KNOWS she's getting fired."

Someone even came to the Cape Town airport and posted a photo of her leaving the plane behind the scant disguise of sunglasses. Belk (2013) and Solove (2007) detail other such incidents of public Internet shaming. While social groups have long used shaming to gain conformity to social norms, such incidents are usually small scale and soon forgotten. Not so with the Internet.

If the power of the Internet to co-construct and alter identity in the blink of the eye is not already evident, consider the following account of a small dinner party by a *New York Times* columnist:

Over the course of the three-hour dinner, the poor sap eventually discovered, "my friends posted seven photos on Path, sent six Twitter messages (five with photos), six photos on Instagram and two people checked in on Foursquare. When I added up the collective follower counts of the people in the room, my little dinner party was potentially viewed by more people than watch The Late Show on CBS: over three million." (Two of his guests have large numbers of followers on Twitter.) And, to add insult to (self-inflicted) injury, a few days later he telephoned someone in a work-related call, only to be told by the other person – who has never crossed his threshold – how much he "just loved" the lamps hanging above the Bilton kitchen table (Naughton 2012). Not all of such co-construction is negative of course. But the point is that it is increasingly out of our control. We are becoming a character in our biography rather than its director.

The online "reputation economy" (Madden and Smith 2010; Zimmer and Hoffman 2011) works not only on individual identity on blogs, forums, sharing apps, and dating and rating cites (e.g., Schoeneman 2013), but also on corporate identity co-construction on

sites like Yelp, Urban Spoon, Angie's List, and Amazon. The shift in power to the consumer is well recognized in the commercial realm, but less so in the personal realm. We can see the potentially devastating effects of online others in the cases of revenge porn, sabotaging our social media pages by former partners who have our passwords (Gershon 2010), and cyberbullying. Surveillance by current or potential employers or schools can also dramatically affect lives and careers, as one rescinded early admission invitee to Bowdoin college learned when she Tweeted about their lame presentation.

Others can also initiate rather than respond to our digital self-presentations. They can post and tag us in photos, mention us in their social media pages, endorse our skills on LinkedIn (and expect us to reciprocate with our own "unsolicited endorsement"). Posting selfies when trying on clothes at a retailer can garner instant feedback shaping our self image and purchase likelihood before we leave the dressing room (Denton 2012). Even our pre-natal and post-mortem images can be shaped by others online (e.g., Carroll and Romono 2011). This talk addresses and illustrates these and other ways in which our digital self is very much a co-construction rather than simply a self-presentation. Cooley's looking glass is no longer the reflector of a scripted dramaturgical presentation of self as Goffman (1959) envisioned. In the digital era it has become an improvisational stage play with other actors who are often anonymous and unseen. Whether they are benign or malicious they introduce an entirely new facet to the mirror of old.

Self-Transformation and Performativity of Social Media Images

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Recent debates on theories of 'performativity' (Butler 1990; Mason et al. 2015) have started to resonate among marketing scholars theorizing markets (e.g. Callon 1998), market(ing) practices (Kjellberg and Hagberg 2007), market research (Diaz-Ruiz 2013; Cluley and Brown 2015), branding (Lucarelli and Hallin 2015), and marketing devices such as advertising (Cochoy 2015). However, despite this apparent potential, applications in the field of consumer research are in many ways lacking. In this paper, the aim is to adopt a performative lens on consumer identity work and to analyze the ways in which consumer-made images shared online effectively partake in identity transformation and regeneration. The analysis stems from empirical materials gathered on the luxury and status-related consumption of champagne in order to assess the multitude of potentialities social media images open up for self/selves to emerge, abound and re-configure.

Similar way to both advertising (Cochoy 2015) and researcher-produced images (Bramming et al. 2010), consumer-produced images shared online can be understood as powerful articulation devices that not only represent realities but also effectively *perform* and consequently work on to produce and enact emergent social relations. Consider the consumer social media responses to Kim Kardashian's image that famously aimed to "break the Internet" by spurring such a volume of reactions. The image features a provocative 'champagne incident' where Kardashian pops open a champagne bottle landing on a glass perched on her bottom. While being deliberately staged, crafted, and photoshopped by a professional photographer, the image effectively created 'credible illusions' of the celebrity's extravagant life, but also opened her identity towards further new potentialities and emergence by provoking plentiful reactions, likes, dislikes and commentaries – even from those who chose not to view the image in the first place. In similar way, this paper aims to consider such visual expressive and performative capacities (Bramming et al. 2010; Co-choy 2015) that social media images posted by consumers employ by way of acting in the world and in bringing about new relations and identities.

With an analytical focus on concept of self and the ways in which images of the self posted online may regenerate and transform the self through visual performances of consumption, this research hopes to extends prior work on consumers' online identity work (e.g. Schau and Gilly 2003; Belk 2013). Importantly, the aim is to use luxury self-consumption images to question identity as a relatively stable and holistic entity – not unlike Butler (1990; see also Cluley and Brown 2015) – by examining the ways in which identities are performed and enacted through various activities, such as selfies posted online. For Butler, whose work perfectly illustrates the usefulness of performative approach, the meaning of identity does not pre-exist beyond its performances. This is why the continuous online streaming of images we engage in and the ways in which these performances are intertwined with particular social, material and institutional relations and circumstances, produce who we are but also entail momentum of change. For example, in addition to consumers' own performances and doings, their identities are constantly shaped by a network of market actors and devices that "make up people" via market practices (Cluley and Brown 2015; Cochoy 2015).

Turning back to the performativity of images, it is important to acknowledge how images not only contain or capture meanings and representations but they express social-material-bodily configurations and ideologies through which images effectively perform, generate and project potentialities of the self. This ontology of images here is similar to Gilles Deleuze's (see Bogue 2003) view of the 'moving image' where a much greater emphasis is put on the expressive power of images as well as the potentialities of change showing the images to others may possibly generate. The empirical materials for this study consist of self-consumption images gathered from Instagram (popular social media photo-sharing device) featuring consumer images that tagged six of the most talked about champagne brands. These images were analyzed and read in relation to literature on status consumption (e.g. Eckhardt et al. 2014) and related identity transformation. The studied sample of images represent a "slice" of common champagne tagged images gathered over the span of six weeks in 2014.

Findings highlight in particular the heterogeneity of self-expressions that consumers employed in various status-related performances. These images, above all, project the self in relation to ideals of a good, affluent, happy, or "better" life. However, they also offer critical contestations of existing norms, boundaries, and the world of conspicuous consumption. Implications for studying consumer-produced online images are discussed.

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