CONSUMERS OF THE POSTMODERN WORLD:

THEORIES OF ANTI-CONSUMPTION AND IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT

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Abstract

This manuscript examines the underlying interconnectedness of consumerism, postmodernism, globalisation and anti-consumption with a basic conceptual approach. Philosophical foundations of key terminology are explicated with a juxtaposition of modernism and postmodernism to elucidate their similarities and differences effectively. Furthermore, the complexities of consumer buying behaviour in a post-modern environment, stemming from impression management and resulting in anti-consumption practices are analysed. The need to study anti-consumption tendencies as a vital element of consumer behaviour is also identified, as the traditional approach to consumer research appears inadequate and insufficient in the context of a post-modern world.

Key words: anti-consumption, consumerism, consumption, globalisation, impression management, modernism, postmodernism.

POSTMODERN TOPLUMDA TÜKETICİLER: TÜKETİM KARŞITLIĞI VE ETKİLEME YÖNETİMİ TEORİLERİ

Ozet

Bu araştırma, tüketim toplumu, tüketicilik, postmodernism, küreselleşme ve tüketim-karşıtlığı (anti-consumption) fenomenlerini kavramsal açıdan incele-mektedir. Bu kavramsallaştırmanın felsefi kaynağı, modernizm and postmodernizm arasındaki benzerlik ve farklılıkları ortaya koymaktadır. Ana hat olarak, postmodern çerçevedeki tüketici satın-alım davranışlarındaki karmaşıklığın etkileme yönetimi (impression management) teorisinden kaynaklanıp, tüketim karşıtlığı (anti-consumption) hareketi ile sonuçlanmasını analiz etmektedir. Geleneksel tüketici araştırmalarının uyumsuz ve yetersiz kaldığı bir post modern dünya anlayışında, tüketici davranışları bilimleri çerçevesinde, tüketim-karşıtlığı eğilimi inceleyen araştırmalara duyulan ihtiyaç belirlenmektedir.

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Anahtar Kelimeler: tüketim-karşıtlığı, tüketiclik, tüketim toplumu, postmodernizm, küreselleşme, etkileme yönetimi,

Introduction

This manuscript examines the underlying theoretical interconnectedness of consumerism, postmodernism, globalisation and anti-consumption. The extensive literature review of the relevant concepts allow the perception of anti-consumption endeavours to be viewed from a new standpoint, namely, impression management which is hoped to expand the understanding of this very exciting phenomenon. Thus, this conceptual study is an attempt to contribute to the literature of anti-consumption by analysing this phenomenon from the angle of impression management. Specifically, this manuscript provides a comprehensive review of the modernist position and introduces and integrates impression management as an additional lens with which to view anti-consumption.

The evolution of the world, humankind, society and the perception of common and individual values are the manifold phenomena that encapsulate the gist of consumerism in its multifarious forms[1]. The pinnacle of consumerism has surfaced with the spread of globalisation and also as a result of the inconspicuous yet pragmatic social shift from modernity to post-modernity. While modernity and post-modernity are built on certain selfsame grounds, both concepts are largely differentiated with conflicting perspectives. In essence, the arrival of post-modernity is seen as a major paradigm shift as well as an epochal transformation[2]. This has given rise to growing complexities in consumerism and consumer behaviour. These complexities are vivid not only in the process of consumption but also in the pursuit of anti-consumption endeavours; that is, the practice of avoiding or refraining from the consumption of certain goods and services[3]. Hence, individuals, as a result of the shift to postmodernism, are no longer identified only in terms of what they consume, but are also prolific representatives of staunch notions that withhold consumption.

Additionally, the concept of impression management and its relevance to consumption proposes the identification of previously unknown attributes of the contemporary post-modern society[4]. Iyer and Muncy[5] identify impression management as a characteristic of 'public self-conscious people' who frequently engage in practices of self-monitoring. In definition, impression management refers to the process through which individuals attempt to control the impressions others

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[1] M. Friedman, **"Consumer Culture: History, Theory and Politics by Roberta Sassatelli"**, The Journal of American Culture, **(March) Vol. 31, Iss. 1, 2008, s. 110.**

[2] R. Chia, "From Modern to Postmodern Organizational Analysis"; **Organisation Studies**, Vol 16; No. 4, 1995.

[3] M. Lee, Motion and Conroy (2008) "Anti-consumption and Brand Avoidance", Journal of Business Research, *Journal of Business Research*, 2009, Vol.62, No. 2.

[4] R. Iyer, and Muncy, J., A., "Purpose and Object of Anti-consumption" **Journal of Business Research,** 2009, Vol.62, No. 2.

[5] R. Iyer, and Muncy, J., A., "Purpose and Object of Anti-consumption" **Journal of Business Research,** 2009, Vol.62, No. 2.

form of them[6]. This need being subjective and circumstantial, leads to the pursuance of multifaceted personas, often conflicting or contradictory in nature causing eccentric consumption patterns. Furthermore, it results in the simultaneous practice of consumption and anti-consumption activities. While there may be innumerable reasons for withholding consumption[78], impression management offers a self-conscious perspective to this practice.

Thus the relationship between impression management and anti-consumption is evident as a phenomenon of the post-modern world, while conversely the emergence of the post-modern world can be marked by these defining changes in consumer societies. Another critical catalyst in the manifestation of the post-modern world is technology and its burgeoning nature. Therefore, the arrival of post modernity, the processes of impression management and anti-consumption and society's inexorable pursuit of technological advancement, pose ramifications for all business functions particularly marketing activities, practices and communications[9].

Foundations of consumerism, the concepts of modernity and globalisation

The three basic concepts that lay the foundation for all proceeding discussions are consumerism, postmodernism and globalisation. The amalgamation of these concepts will lead to the emergence of anti-consumption theories and their relevance to impression management.

Consumerism

The first of the three concepts to be discussed is consumerism. Consumerism is a concept that encompasses consumer culture and consumer society, and fundamentally describes material possessions and consumption as the single most essential route to personal happiness, and economic development[10]. Consumerism saw the light of day several centuries ago, with its criticism forming

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[6] M.R. Leary, and Kowalski R., M., "Impression management: a literature review and two-component model", **Psychology Bulletin**, American Psychological Association, 1990., Vol. 107; No.1; s. 34-47.

[7] O. Sandıkcı and Ekici A, (2008) "Politically motivated brand rejection", *Journal of Business Research*, 2009, Vol.62, No. 2.

[8] Ulku Yuksel and Victoria Mryteza 'An Evaluation of Strategic Responses to Consumer Boycotts', *Journal of Business Researc h*, Vol.62, No. 2, 2009, s. 248-59.

[9] A. Vankatesh, Dholakia, R; Dholakia, N. "New Visions of Information Technology and Postmodernism: Implications for Advertising and Marketing Communications*"; Walter Brenner and Lutz Kolbe (eds.), **The Information Superhighway and Private Households: Case Studies of Business Impacts**, 1995, s.319-325.

[10] M. Friedman, "Consumer Culture: History, Theory and Politics by Roberta Sassatelli", **The Journal of American Culture,** (March) Vol. 31, Iss. 1, 2008, s. 110.

the basis for the works of Karl Marx[11], yet it is said to have come in full fruition through the process of globalisation[12].

According to the Oxford dictionary[13], Consumerism is defined as: (1) the protection or promotion of the interests of consumers, and (2) the preoccupation of society with the acquisition of goods. The first definition sees consumerism as an economic philosophy, while the later sees it with a sociological standpoint. The definition relating to economics places the core of consumerism in the interest of the consumer and the delivery of goods and services that fulfil this interest; while maintaining the assumption that goods and services and their consumption are in essence the only means of serving the interest of consumers. The sociological perspective suggests the riddance of peace, holism and spirituality from within individuals as a result of mass distraction, preoccupation and fascination with material belongings. Effectively, the concept outlines society's fixation with material possessions and the role of producers in encouraging materialism in the coax of fulfilling consumer interest, while in actually pursuing self-interest. Consequently, a culture that is predominated by consumerism is referred to as a consumer culture[14], while a consumer society is one that is highly dependent on the production and consumption of consumer goods and in essence endorses a widespread consumer culture. Consumer societies place consumers at the centre of all activities and regard them as the Kings/Sovereign, directing all economic institutions and forces with their choices and preferences. This is related to the political thought of liberalism, in which individuals are the basic unit of analysis and states and regulatory institutions are facilitators of individuals to achieve their self-interest. Marxism, in addition to discussing class struggles, notes the progression of society as 'historical materialism', in which growth is achieved with increased consumption of goods and services.

These concepts of consumerism and consumer society however, require alteration when described with a post-modern perspective. The above mentioned 'modern' definitions describe consumerism as *society's preoccupation with the acquisition of goods* and define consumer society as one that is *highly dependent on the production and consumption of consumer goods*. The post-modern world, however, is one in which anti-consumption endeavours are actively pursed and consumer rebellion, consumer resistance, rejection, avoidance, and boycotting are some of the key active elements of the contemporary consumer society[15]. These

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[11] K. Marx, "Alienated Labor'" from 'The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts in T. B. Bottomore, **Karl Marx, Early Writings**, New York, McGraw Hill, 1963, s. 120-34.

[12] T. Veblen, **The Theory of the Leisure Class: an economic study of institutions**, 1899.*;* Dover Publications, Mineola, N.Y., 1994.

[13] Oxford: AskOxford.com (2008) *"noun: Consumerism"* <http://www.askoxford.com/results/?view=dict&freesearch=consumerism&branch=1384257 0&textsearchtype=exact> accessed 01/05/08

[14] M. Friedman, "Consumer Culture: History, Theory and Politics by Roberta Sassatelli", **The Journal of American Culture,** (March) Vol. 31, Iss. 1, 2008, s. 110.

[15] Sardar Zavestoski, *"The social-psychological bases of anti-consumption attitudes"*, **Journal of Psychology and Marketing**, 2002, Vol 19; No.2, s. 149-165.

modern definitions therefore fall short in aptly defining consumerism as it is known in the post-modern world, where anti-consumption activities are equally practiced, if not more than conventional consumption activities. Modern definitions thus confined in their sphere, limit their focus to acts of consumption, overlooking the growing significance of anti-consumption tendencies of consumer societies. Yet, prior to indulging in the details of anti-consumption and postmodernism, it is essential to understand the basics of postmodernism.

Postmodernism

Following consumerism, the core concept being examined by this manuscript is postmodernism and its intrinsic association with globalisation and consumption. Postmodernism is a term applied to *"a wide-ranging set of developments in critical theory, philosophy, architecture, art, literature, and culture, all of which are characterized as either, emerging from, in reaction to, or superseding, modernism"*. However, to adequately grasp the concept of postmodernism and effectively mark the arrival of post-modernity, it is critical to understand the development of society through pre-modern and modern times.

Societal Shift from Pre-Modern, to Modern to Postmodernism

Sue McGregor[16] in her article 'Postmodernism, Consumerism, and A Culture of Peace', very competently explicates the shift of society through pre-modern, modern and post-modern times. The author identifies the pre-modern era as the "The age of Faith of Superstition", adequately defining the gist of early civilisations. The modern era is tagged as "The age of Reason, Empiricism and Science", while post-modern era is "The age of Holism and Interdependence". McGregor's proficiency in reducing historical eras into a couple of highly pertinent words tends to suffice as reasonable indicators of the terms. Yet for further elucidation, these eras are discussed in the subsequent paragraphs.

Pre-Modern Era

Pre-modernity is the period in Western civilization that came after ancient history and before modernity, and is said to have begun in the mid-1400[17]. Pre-modern cultures largely encompassed religious or sacred worldview in which people lived according to their guiding spirits and religious beliefs[18]. Hence, during this era, facts of life were seen as miracles of the supernatural, and reasoning was clouted by myth and unquestionable belief. Religious officials were considered intermediaries

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[16]Sue McGregor, "Postmodernism, Consumerism, and A Culture of Peace", **Kappa Omicron Nu Forum (Kon Forum),** 2003, Vol 13, No.2.

[17] Sue McGregor, "Postmodernism, Consumerism, and A Culture of Peace", **Kappa Omicron Nu Forum (Kon Forum),** 2003, Vol 13, No.2.

[18] J. Scheurich, "Postmodernism"; **University of Texas at Austin; College of Education**, 2001, <http://www.edb.utexas.edu/faculty/scheurich/proj6/pags/pm101_1.htm>accessed 30/05/08.

between the ultimate power and earthlings and were perceived to have great knowledge only from their spiritual proximity to the divine. Great emphasis was placed on tradition and sacred values as they guided the universal way of life and outlined the concepts of right and wrong (McGregor 2003). These spiritually derived concepts of right and wrong guided consumption patterns where 'permissible commodities' were consumed to the extent of need.

Western civilization made a gradual transition from pre-modernity to modernity with the emergence of science and the use of empirical evidence to provide reasoning to the previously incontestable versions of truth. As scientific methods gave way to logical perspectives of thinking, truth was seen as discoverable by empirical observation, and a new belief that all worldly phenomena were justifiable by science, was established[19].

Modern Era

As the Enlightenment period initiated during the 18th century, intellectuals began to emphasize the need for society to rebuild its foundations on a more secular worldview. The new society was less inclined towards religious doctrine and advocated holistic progression through science and scientific methods[20]. The new age saw a shift from blinded belief to cognitive understanding. Emphasis was shifted from tradition and sacred values to the power of human thought and justifiable perceptions of right and wrong. Science and empirical observations were considered the new source of enlightenment as apposed to religious intermediaries with spiritual knowledge. As the branches of science grew, the roots of tradition became weaker. From a society predominant with two classes of people; the aristocrats and peasants, the modern society saw the emergence of the middle class. Power was placed in the hands of centralised governments following man-made laws and regulations. Changes were brought not only to consumption patterns but also to production patterns.

According to Firat and Venkatesh[21], modernism was marked by the emergence of the rule of reason and the establishment of a rational order. Greater trust was placed in human thought with increased emphasis on material progress through the application of scientific technologies, as a result of the rise in science. Additionally, the philosophical theory of realism finds its origins in the modern era, as the world was now seen with an objective view. Despite having developed in the course of the last four centuries, a coherent definition for what is considered modern (modern values, ideas and attitudes) remained unavailable until the arrival of a new concept that required a concrete definition for 'modernity and modernism'

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[19] Sue McGregor, "Postmodernism, Consumerism, and A Culture of Peace", **Kappa Omicron Nu Forum (Kon Forum),** 2003, Vol 13, No.2.
[20] Sue McGregor, "Postmodernism, Consumerism, and A Culture of Peace", **Kappa Omicron Nu Forum (Kon Forum),** 2003, Vol 13, No.2.
[21] A.F. Firat and Venkatesh, A. "Libratory Postmodernism and the Reenchantment of Consumption"; **Journal of Consumer Research**, 1995, Vol 22, No. 3.

emerged[22]. The new concept challenged the premise of modernism and offered a plethora of ideas encapsulated in one brief term: 'Postmodernism'.

Post-Modern Era

Postmodernism is used to designate the era beyond modernism. It incorporates the essence of modernism, identifies its flaws and proposes the arrival of a new phase in the culture of the universe. *Post-modernity* is a term coined to describe the prevailing era, and *post-modern* includes the norms, beliefs, attitudes and common perspectives relative to this era. While the post-modern era is said to have arrived subsequent to the explosion of global capitalism, the growth in highly sophisticated technological solutions and the emergence of the global village phenomena via the globalisation of cultures, races, ideas, images, media and products, the concept of postmodernism is still considered revolutionary rather than evolutionary. Postmodernism questions the modern philosophy of progression from ignorance and irrationality to liberal thinking and wisdom with a sceptical approach. Theoretically, postmodernism criticises all that modernity has engendered and offers alternate and innovative perceptions of all spheres of life[23].According to Ziauddin Sardar[24]:

> *"Postmodernism is a key term of our times. It conditions our thought and politics, shapes our art and architecture, frames much of the entertainment industry, and is actively shaping our future. We can watch it, hear it, read it, shop within its precincts, be awe-struck by it – in short we live and breathe it. It is a theory, a contemporary practice and a condition of the contemporary era. Slowly, but surely, postmodernism is taking over the world we inhabit, the thoughts we think, the things we do, what we know and what we do not know, what we have known and what we cannot know, what frames our nature and our being. It is the new, or perhaps not so new, all-embracing theory of salvation."*

To further clarify this quotation by Ziauddin Sardar, a juxtaposition of the fundamental assertions of modernism and postmodernism has been drawn in Table 1 table which has been derived from the works of Martin Irvine[25].

Modernism/Modernity – Postmodernism/Post-modernity Comparison

[22] S. Podestà, and Addis, M., "Long life to marketing research: a Postmodern view", **European Journal of Marketing**, 2005., Vol.39, Iss. ¾.

[23] P.M. Rosenau, **Postmodernism and the Social Sciences: Insights, Inroads, and Intrusions**, 1995, Princeton University Press', Ch.1.

[24] Sardar Ziauddin, **Postmodernism And The Other: The New Imperialism of Western Culture**, Pluto Press, 1998, s.6.

[25] Martin Irvine, **The Post-Modern, Postmodernism, Post-Modernity – Approaches to Po-Mo**, 1998, http://www9.georgetown.edu/faculty/irvinem/theory/pomo.html> accessed 02/05/08.

MODERNİSM/ MODERNİTY	POST-MODERN/ POST-MODERNİTY
Master Narratives and metanarratives of history. Myths of cultural and ethnic origin accepted as received. Master narratives or metanarratives are grand explanations of historical events intending to provide comprehensive understanding of historical experiences or knowledge. Modernism perceives history as told by master narratives and accepts these views as actual accounts of history.	**Suspicion and rejection of Master Narratives for history and culture.** Post-modernists view master narratives and metanarratives with scepticism and claim that these accounts of history have no credibility. Meta narratives are viewed as biased perspectives of history, aimed to glorify the narrator, (who is largely the victor or authority of the time) and are seen to fail to provide objective explanations of historical facts.
Classification and categorisation based on identifiable similarities. Hierarchies of social-class and ethnic/national values. Modernism tends to view every individual as an object and has created sufficient categories and demographics to fit every subject into a set of attributes. It thus attends to each category with a prescribed set of activities deemed appropriate to best suit its collective needs.	**Social and cultural pluralism, disunity, disregard for classifications and categories.** Postmodernism denounces the practice of reducing individuals to categories and believes that no set of attributes can adequately define individuals, and each individual is uniquely different to the other. It does not endorse the unification of cultures via globalisation and recognises the intricate cultural differences of societies.
Focus on "individualism," unified identity. Individuals of a modern world are seen to have a unified self and a concentrated understanding of an inner self.	**Fragmented individuals; multiple, conflicting identities.** Post-modern world individuals are multi-faceted with conflicting identities and conflicting needs and behaviours relative to those identities.
Idea of "the family" as central unit of social order. Conventional view of families as foundations for the development of society and future generations.	**Growing shift towards alternative family units.** Multiple forms of family structures, growth in coupling and homosexual family units. Families seen as unification by preference as opposed to foundations for the development of society.

Mass culture, mass consumption, mass marketing.	Demassified culture; niche products and marketing, smaller group identities.
Modernism focuses on efficiency via mass production, to be sold to a mass culture through mass marketing for mass consumption.	Postmodernism demassifies the modern approach and places focus on meticulousness and precision to deal with smaller units of consumers.

Table 1: 'The Modern and the Postmodern: Contrasting Tendencies'[26]

Comparing modernism/modernity to postmodernism/post-modernity, reveals certain exclusive attributes of the latter that strongly indicate the growth in anti-consumption sentiments in consumer societies particularly in relation to impression management. As noted in Table 1, post-modernity denounces the practice of reducing individuals to categories and opposes the modern practice of segmentation according to perceived collective attributes and corresponding needs for consumers. Post-modern consumers thus reject, avoid and boycott the consumption of commodities that aim to respond to the collective needs of 'similar' consumers within a segment or category. In the process of anti-consuming and resisting these commodities, consumers make a conscious choice to define themselves in opposition to the established consumer culture. This is directly related to adopting impression management in anti-consumption decisions. Additionally, post-modernity is marked by individuals with multifaceted personalities and conflicting needs and behaviors relative to those identities, which again results in incorporating impression management in consumption patterns; effectively attributing anti-consumption and impression management as central elements of the post-modern consumer society. The proceeding sections of the paper will attempt to further elucidate these points.

Globalisation and the rise of anti-consumption

Globalisation is the third concept being discussed to build the foundation of the remaining relevant concepts to be examined. Generally, globalisation is the key terminology used to describe the reigning era and is acknowledged as a distinct and highly momentous period in world history[27]. The term however is used noticeably apart from the way it is used in modernity; such that its interpretation in modernity is the basis for one of post-modernity's greatest criticisms of the prior[28]. It is also one of the contributing factors in the emergence of anti-consumption behaviour.

While globalisation can be defined as the increased integration of world economies to form a global village, it is also referred to as a process through which

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[26] Martin Irvine, **The Post-Modern, Postmodernism, Post-Modernity – Approaches to Po-Mo**, 1998, http://www9.georgetown.edu/faculty/irvinem/theory/pomo.html> accessed 02/05/08.

[27] D. Kellner, "Globalization and the Postmodern Turn", **Globalization and Europe: Theoretical and Empirical Investigations**, Continuum International Publishing Group, 1998.

[28] A.F. Firat and Venkatesh, A. "Libratory Postmodernism and the Reenchantment of Consumption"; **Journal of Consumer Research**, 1995, Vol 22, No. 3.

the people of the world are unified into a single society. This, in particular, is the modern way of perceiving the concept. During modern times, this unifying characteristic of globalisation had offered the expansion of cultural imperialism[29]. Post-modern philosophy however deplores the imperialistic nature of hegemonic cultures and advocates the distinctness of individuals as a compound of culture, language, beliefs, environment and self[30]. The result is behaviours of brand avoidance and rejection of brand hegemony. Cromie and Ewing[31] in their article 'Rejection of Brand Hegemony' describe the adverse impacts of high profile, dominant global brands as growing feelings of disempowerment and enslavement among consumers; leading to rejection of brand hegemony as a motive for, and as an expression of anti-consumption. They illustrate this through a study on the development of the Open Source Software (OSS) community in reaction to the global dominance of Microsoft in the software market. Furthermore, globalisation is also criticised by post-modern philosophers as an engine of global warming (Bigelow and Peterson 2002) and a means of exploitation of developing countries by developed nations. This has resulted in environmentally and politically motivated behaviours of anti-consumption, particularly in the form of consumer boycotts; that is, 'the collective action of forgoing or withholding consumption in response to perceived wrongdoings of a company, or perceived flaws in the product itself…'[32]. One such example is the collective consumer boycott movement against Nike in 1996 following the discovery of Nike labour abuse in developing countries. The resultant surge of internet users towards websites, forums, blogs and discussion boards as a means to 'enlighten' and 'educate' other users and potential consumers exemplifies the growing impact of anti-consumption sentiments in consumer societies. The growth of the internet since the advent of globalisation can be seen as a facilitator of anti-consumption activities and consumer boycott initiatives while the vast availability of substitutes, also as a result of increased global integration, further aids consumer boycott decisions[33]. Post-modern consumer societies thus instil the need for businesses, particularly global businesses, to study the motives and drivers of anti-consumption in addition to the traditional study of consumer behaviour that largely focuses on consumer purchasing preferences, in order to successfully market to post-modern consumers.

[29] Sardar Ziauddin., **Postmodernism And The Other: The New Imperialism of Western Culture**, Pluto Press, 1998, s.6.

[30] A.F. Firat and Venkatesh, A. "Libratory Postmodernism and the Reenchantment of Consumption"; **Journal of Consumer Research**, 1995, Vol 22, No. 3.

[31] J.G. Cromie, and Ewing M., T., "Rejection of Brand Hegemony", **Journal of Business Research**; JBR-06584, 2009, Vol.62, No. 2.

[32] Ulku Yuksel and Victoria Mryteza 'An Evaluation of Strategic Responses to Consumer Boycotts', **Journal of Business Research**, Vol.62, No. 2, 2009, s. 248-59.

[33] S. Sen, Gurhan-Canli, Z. and Morwitz, V., "Withholding Consumption: A Social Dilemma Perspective on Consumer Boycotts, **Journal of Consumer Research,** 2001, Vol.28; No.3, s.399-417.

The Amalgamation of Concepts

Having established a basic understanding of consumerism, post-modernism and globalisation, this manuscript will now attempt to amalgamate these concepts to reveal the pervasive phenomena of anti-consumption and impression management. As indicated in Table 1, the increase in internationalisation of capital and commodity flows, and the globalisation of cultures resulting from growing migratory movements has rekindled the need for a vivid distinction between individual nations, states and societies. In the post-modern era, globalisation has become exceedingly intense in its possibilities, and intricate in its implementation. The arrival of postmodernism has driven the need for sophisticated technological methods of identifying each individual on an individual basis, as opposed to being categorised according to a set of demographics. Consequently, this has escalated consumer expectations to be treated exclusively rather than as a subject from within a category. Consumerism today is more complex than ever as it involves greater consumer facets and ulterior motives such that Firat and Venkatesh[34] highlight the consumption of images as oppose to commodities as a fundamental characteristic of complex post-modern consumerism. They proclaim that the age of postmodernism may truly be called *'the age of symbol and spectacle'*, with a casual example of a McDonald's BigMac. The authors elucidate that while a McDonald's BigMac essentially offers no more than a homemade hamburger, it is the associated global image of the BigMac that is in actuality sought and consumed by the consumer. Thus in a post-modern world no object has any inherent function or value independent to the symbolic association made with it. 'Marketers spectacularize the living environments, while consumers actively engage in the aesthetics of life experiences'[35]. This is directly related to the adoption of impression management as an engine of consumption and anti-consumption. Impression management is derived and implemented by altering the consumption of symbolic associations made with consumer goods. The desired projected imagine may therefore require consumption, anti-consumption and/or the simultaneous practices of consumption and anti-consumption by consumers in a post-modern world as these consumers are multifaceted with conflicting identities and conflicting needs and behaviours relative to those identities. The rise of anti-consumption sentiments and the need to adhere to them categorically is in fact a phenomenon of the post-modern world, while the magnitude of the impact of impression management on consumption patterns is magnified in this prolific era. Ultimately, traditional approaches to consumer research will again prove inadequate, as merely identifying why consumers choose to consume a product will fail to unveil why consumers choose to avoid a product, which is noticeably, a highly pertinent concern for businesses today[36].

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[34] A.F. Firat and Venkatesh, A. "Libratory Postmodernism and the Reenchantment of Consumption"; **Journal of Consumer Research**, 1995, Vol 22, No. 3.
[35] A.F. Firat A.F and Venkatesh, A. "Libratory Postmodernism and the Reenchantment of Consumption"; **Journal of Consumer Research**, 1995, Vol 22, No. 3.
[36] Michael Lee, Motion and Conroy (2008) "Anti-consumption and Brand Avoidance", **Journal of Business Research**, *Journal of Business Research*, 2009, Vol.62, No. 2.

Anti-consumption

The relevance of anti-consumption and postmodernism, as noted in the preceding segments, can be found in the assertions of postmodernism and the characteristics of post-modern individuals. Post-modern individuals are aware (due to vast availability of diverse information), assertive (due to constant increase in customer power), and exposed to multifarious options. Their reasons for anti-consumption may be numerous ranging from political, environmental or personal. While political and environmental are related to external factors and influences, personal reasons include those that stem from self-consciousness or impression management.

According to Iyer and Muncy[37], a counter movement of anti-consumption exists from the very beginning of mass-consumption societies. Angeline and Zinkhan[38] identify anti-consumption sentiments to have dated back since the seventeenth century, yet surprisingly the significance of anti-consumption theories in marketing literature has remained rather subdued throughout time. While consumption and consumer behaviour have continued to lie at the core of marketing, their counterpart – anti-consumption has failed to attract the limelight that it deserves; given that one concept cannot be adequately understood without attention to the other[39]. Furthermore, anti-consumers and their conviction may prove to be sterner than frequent consumers and brand loyal customers[40]. While consumers may be tempted to switch by competitor marketing activities, anti-consumers often resist with a sense of passion. The approach to consumer research therefore is inadequate if it solely focuses on why consumers chose to consumer[41]. A vital aspect of understanding a consumer of the post-modern world is about recognising the various reasons behind why consumers choose not to consume; that is withhold consumption. The scope of this manuscript, however, is limited to the concepts of consumption and anti-consumption in respect to impression management as a post-modern phenomenon.

Impression management and Consumption Patterns

Impression management as an engine of consumption is a post-modern phenomenon looming as an implication of globalisation. It is defined as the process of individuals engaging in scripted behaviour in order to persuade a desired mode of

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[37] R. Iyer, and Muncy, J., A., "Purpose and Object of Anti-consumption" **Journal of Business Research,** 2009, Vol.62, No. 2.

[38] Angeline Close and Zinkhan, GM., "Market-resistance and Valentine's Day events"; **Journal of Business Research**, JBS-06582, 2009, Vol.62, No. 2.

[39] Angeline Close, and Zinkhan, GM., "Market-resistance and Valentine's Day events"; **Journal of Business Research**, JBS-06582, 2009, Vol.62, No. 2.

[40] Helene Cherrier, "Anti-consumption discourses and consumer resistance identities"; **Journal of Business Research**, JBR-06580, 2009, Vol. 62, No.2.

[41] Michael Lee, Motion and Conroy (2008) "Anti-consumption and Brand Avoidance", Journal of Business Research, *Journal of Business Research*, 2009, Vol.62, No. 2.

action from the audience or recipients of behaviour[42]. With this perspective, people gauge the responses of behaviour and alter it to create a desired impression within a particular environment. Impression management is a social psychological term that finds its origins several decades prior to postmodernism, yet its impact on consumerism and dysfunctional consumer behaviour can be viewed as a post-modern phenomena. Impression management theory states than any individual or organization must establish and maintain impressions that are congruent with the perceptions they want to convey. Consumers are thus not only propelled to consume in order to impose an impression, but are also led to behaviours of product avoidance or anti-consumption. Avoidance, resistance, rejection and anti-consumption are terms used interchangeably to describe the practice, behaviour and attitude of refraining from the consumption of certain goods and services[43]. For example, consumers who have great concern for the environment, or who wish to project so, will purposefully avoid products that they consider environmentally unfriendly[44]. For the latter, however, anti-consumption of environmentally unfriendly products will solely be a means of fulfilling particularized impression management objectives.

The role of impression management in consumer societies has magnified in post-modernity because of mass-exposure to diverse cultures, practices and ways of life. This exposure, often tilting towards over-exposure has led to increased complexities in self-identification. Individuals feel the need to convey their individuality overtly with social symbols such as brands, life-styles, and attitudes[45] due to the ever increasing fear of remaining unnoticed, insignificant or indistinct in a vast global arena. This may include embodying not only a single idealistic character, but multiple personalities to be congruent to varying environments. These varying environments may be vastly contrary to one another, leading to the embodiment of drastically different personas by a single individual, resulting in highly dysfunctional and inconsistent consumption patterns. Hence, this art of displaying an artificial persona or several thereof in order to paint a desired impression on others is directly related to assuming altered, unnatural and distorted consumption, leading individuals to over-consume or anti-consume in order to maintain their fabricated lives. This inference immediately nullifies the practicality of market segmentations and categorisations made by traditional marketing practices that attempt to encapsulate consumers within defined parameters. The very theory of impression management and its impact on consumption patterns disregards the application of categories, as post-modern consumers fail to suitably fall into reasonably defined rational categories as they in fact no longer assume reasonably definable, rational personalities. For example, in a hypothetic scenario, a family originating from South-East Asia migrates to a country in the Western hemisphere where cultures,

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[42] J.A. Holstein, and Gubrium, J., **The self we live by: Narrative Identity in a Post-modern World**, New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

[43] Helene Cherrier, "Anti-consumption discourses and consumer resistance identities"; **Journal of Business Research**, JBR-06580, 2009, Vol. 62, No.2.

[44] R. Iyer, and Muncy, J., A., "Purpose and Object of Anti-consumption" **Journal of Business Research,** 2009, Vol.62, No. 2.

[45] C.J. Thomson, "An Existential Analysis of the embodied self in Post-modern consumer culture", **Consumption, Markets and Culture**, 1998, Vol. 2, No. 4, pp. 337-465.

norms and practices are diversely contrary to the family's origins.   This family includes parents and teenage children, all of whom may attempt to 'diffuse' into the new society, by adopting considerable amounts of impression management techniques. While striving to maintain the traditional non-alcoholic, vegetarian atmosphere at home, all members of the family will appear to 'anti-consume' these commodities within the realm of their household or in each others presence, however in order to 'fit-in' and to project an image of permissiveness and open-mindedness, the father may consume alcohol when with office colleagues, while the teenagers may chose to consume non-vegetarian food items when among peers. From clothing to choice of music to basic attitudes and behaviours, all members of the family, particularly the younger impressionable teenagers, will eventually assume conflicting and contradictory consumption patterns in various situations throughout a single day. They will be representatives of contrary notions and beliefs, pursuing and withholding consumption of similar commodities. This demonstrates the role of impression management in fostering complex and distorted consumption patterns. In addition, as described by Firat and Venkatesh[46], the post-modern world is the *'age of symbol and spectacle'*, wherein consumers seek to consume associated images of commodities as opposed to commodities themselves.   Hence, the consumption or anti-consumption of the symbolic associations made with commodities enables the impression management process for post-modern consumers. Carrying a Louis Vuitton handbag is about the prestige of owning a high-end brand, while refusing to sign up on Facebook is the sign of a counter-conformist who avoids popular brands in pursuit of individual sovereignty[47]. Both actions identify impression management as engines of consumption or anti-consumption. Therefore, as post-modern consumers embody multifaceted personas, and strive to construct various perceptions of themselves, the role of impression management in consumption and anti-consumption activities becomes exceedingly imperative.

Discussion and Conclusion

Philosophies and philosophical enlightenment are often considered overwhelmingly perplexing with rhetorical tendencies. However, within the surface of these theories lie realities that tend to be overlooked, misunderstood or remain unnoticed. Such are the philosophies of modernism and postmodernism that have over time, been researched, discussed and scrutinized by philosophers and intellectuals to be adequately defined. Yet a fact identified by this manuscript is that either one of these concepts cannot be adequately defined without a comprehensive understanding of the other. Unlike the ease in distinction between pre-modern and modern times, the arrival of postmodernism has been a lot more obscure and difficult to mark.   An additional ordeal has been to categorically distinguish modernity and post-modernity and their inherent beliefs, norms and attitudes. For

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[46] A.F. Firat and Venkatesh, A. "Libratory Postmodernism and the Reenchantment of Consumption"; **Journal of Consumer Research**, 1995, Vol 22, No. 3.

[47] L.P. McGennis and Gentry J.W., "Underdog consumption: An exploration into meanings and motives"; **Journal of Business Research**, JBR-06581, 2009, Vol. 62, No., 2.

this very reason the theory of postmodernism was initially denounced by modern philosophers as vague and inconsequential[48], however since the late twentieth century some influential work by Brown[49], Featherstone[50], Firat, Dholakia and Venkatesh[51], Turner[52] etc., have provided more concrete, enlightened frameworks to comprehend post-modernity and its diversity.

This study considers consumerism as the single most significant reality of today, the past, and the future. Consumerism and its study alone have the ability to describe volumes of history and the evolution of society within its sphere. On the other hand, globalisation and technology have the ability to redefine all concepts of life, living and lifestyles, particularly in relation to consumerism. Yet, while globalisation has allowed an unprecedented consumer culture to emerge, postmodernism sees the world, societies and individuals with a broader lens than that of globalisation. Globalisation in its endeavour to reduce boundaries and eliminate distances concurrently eliminates the fragile and highly pragmatic differences between nations, cultures and individuals. Post-modernism however strives to maintain these differences.

Conclusively, the interrelatedness of the theories of consumerism, postmodernism and globalisation have been noted to give birth to eccentric consumption patterns. These consumption patterns are a result of impression management, and lead to practices of anti-consumption. Two inadequacies have been identified in traditional marketing research approaches. The first is the stereotypical categorization of consumers; that is market segmentation. The second relates to marketers' narrow focus on *why* consumers buy overlooking why consumers do *not* buy. Categorizing consumers within defined, stereotypical groups does not accommodate for the various other characteristics that are adopted during impression management, while solely focusing on why consumers buy, limits the understanding of why consumers chose to anti-consume.

There are limitations to the amount of data available on impression management and anti-consumption. Yet, recognizing their profound impact on consumer behaviour, marketing researchers are likely to invest more interest in these concepts in the future. Time can only tell what postmodernism will offer regarding the future trends of consumption. Nevertheless, this evolution and dynamic revolutionary process will invariably present implications for marketing practices and communications through out time.

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[48] P. Cilliers, **Complexity and Postmodernism: Understanding Complex Systems**, Routledge, Taylor and Francis group, London, UK, ISBN: 978-0-415-15287-7, 1998, s. 159.
[49] S. Brown, Postmodern Marketing", **European Journal of Marketing**; Vol. 27, No 4, 1993, s. 19-34.
[50] M. Featherstone, "In Pursuit of Post-modern: An Introduction.", **Theory, Culture and Society**, 1988, Vol:5 (June) s.195- 217.
[51] A.F. Firat, Dholakia, N. and Venkatesh, A., "Marketing in a Post-Modern World", **European Journal of Marketing,** 1995, Vol 29; No.1.
[52] B.S. Turner, **Theories of Modernity and Post-modernity**, 1990, London: Sage.

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