An interdisciplinary review of resistance to consumption, some marketing interpretations, and future research suggestions

Elif Izberk-Bilgin*

Management Studies, University of Michigan – Dearborn, Dearborn, USA

This article provides an interdisciplinary review of consumer resistance, an overarching term that includes various forms of anti-consumerist behaviour. The review draws from disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, political economy, and cultural studies to explore the historical and discursive constructions of resistance and other key marketing concepts. In so doing, it identifies two distinct paradigms in the social sciences and humanities, namely, the “manipulation and enslavement” and the “agency and empowerment” discourses, and examines how these paradigms reflect onto theories of resistance in marketing. Lastly, the article suggests several new directions for resistance research that pertain to globalization, emerging markets, and ideological consumption.

Keywords: anti-consumption; consumer resistance; brand avoidance

Consumer resistance has increasingly become an overarching construct that includes various forms of anti-consumerist behavior such as boycotts, culture-jamming, and de-marketing since Penaloza and Price (1993, 123) seminally used the term in marketing literature to describe “the way individuals and groups practice a strategy of appropriation in response to structures of domination.” Although consumer resistance research is recently burgeoning in marketing, the phenomenon is deeply rooted and has been extensively explored in social sciences and humanities literatures. Following the same overarching conceptualization forwarded by Penaloza and Price (1993), this article explores the rich theoretical body of knowledge on resistance, drawing from sociology, political economy, anthropology, and cultural studies along with marketing. The purpose of this paper is threefold: (1) to examine how the notions of “market,” “consumer,” “consumer culture,” and “resistance” are discursively and historically constructed by various schools of thought in social sciences and humanities; (2) to analyze how these constructions reflect onto examinations of consumer resistance in marketing; and (3) to identify previously unexplored avenues for future marketing research.

With these goals in mind, the paper selectively reviews major works in social sciences, humanities, and marketing literatures. The scholars and works presented in this review are chosen for their prominence and seminal nature in these three fields. Particularly, the scholars and their respective works selected from the social sciences and humanities literatures (Marx, Horkheimer and Adorno, Ewen, Baudrillard, Douglas and Isherwood, Bourdieu, and de Certeau) are chosen because they constitute...
the theoretical foundations of many of the prominent examinations of consumer resistance in marketing literature (e.g., Ozanne and Murray 1995; Firat and Venkatesh 1995; Holt 2002; Kozinets 2002; Thompson and Troester 2002; Thompson 2003). As such, while this review provides a representative portrayal of the theoretical foundations of consumer resistance, it is exhaustive of neither the entire body of knowledge on resistance, anti-consumerism, and activism, nor of all the works of the scholars selected for this review.

The paper is organized in three sections. The first part identifies two distinct paradigms of resistance within social sciences and humanities literatures. Each paradigm provides a historically and discursively constructed unique perspective on the meaning of markets, the purpose of consumption, the role of the individual vis-à-vis the market as well as the potentiality and possible agents of resistance. The first paradigm, elaborated in the “manipulation and enslavement” discourse, draws from the works of Marx, Horkheimer and Adorno, Ewen, and Baudrillard as they pertain to resistance, and represents a critical perspective of consumer culture. The second paradigm provides a more positive view of consumer culture and offers new theoretical lenses to examine the phenomenon of consumer resistance. This celebratory approach is presented in the “agency and empowerment” discourse, and reviews resistance as elaborated in the works of Douglas and Isherwood, Bourdieu, and de Certeau. The next section explores the reflections of both discourses on how resistance has been theorized in marketing literature, while the last part identifies new directions for research based on this review.

A critique of consumer culture: the manipulation and enslavement discourse

This discourse is characterized by a denunciation of consumption and a cynical approach to market ideology. Adherents of this paradigm are concerned with social change, particularly the new social order and new class structures that the industrial and consumer capitalisms engender. The scholarly works of this discourse depict the market as an area of domination where capital-holders skilfully create and manage a seductive consumer culture to authoritatively influence the passive consumer. While Marx, Horkheimer and Adorno, Ewen, and Baudrillard offer different views on the likely agents of resistance to such an oppressive system, the general consensus among the scholars is that the dynamics of market economy and consumer culture would entrap all social groups equally, whether they are workers, capitalists, or intelligentsia, such that resistance to the dominance of the market is not possible.

Marx: not consumer resistance, but proletariat resistance

Perhaps one of the earliest representations of the manipulation and enslavement discourse is found in Marx’s critical analysis of industrial capitalism and the social change brought about by this new mode of accumulation. In an elaborate account in Das Kapital ([1867]1976), Marx argues that the shift from the agricultural-feudal to industrial-capitalist mode of production generated a new social order by replacing production-for-subsistence with production-for-market, which, in turn, resulted in the disruption of traditional class structures and power dynamics. Unlike subsistence economy, producing for a mass market requires that workers, in exchange for their labor, forfeit their decision-making and ownership rights to the goods they produce.
Such a trade-off, Marx contends, results in loss of autonomy, commoditization of labor, and alienation of individuals from the output of their labor.

The concept of exploitation plays an especially salient role in Marx’s analysis in that it lays the theoretical foundation of his new social order, demarcates the role of the market in that social order, and elucidates his perspective on resistance. Marx holds that in the capitalist mode of production, the institutionalization of exchange-value (i.e., maximum price anyone is willing to pay) over use-value (i.e., utility value) exploits individuals, particularly workers. One type of exploitation occurs when workers are paid based on the hourly cost of their labor rather than being allocated an equal share of profit from the goods they produce. Yet another kind of exploitation takes place when workers are lured with commodities that are supposedly imbued with supernatural powers (i.e., market mystification) whose value is measured by exchange-value rather than the cost of labor, land, and capital spent in production. Both kinds of exploitation leave workers in a disadvantaged position in relation to capital-holders and create new class structures, inequalities, and class conflicts in industrialist society.

Yet, in Marx’s theorization, it is these very inequalities and class conflicts that would ultimately cause the demise of capitalism. Marx holds that the capitalist mode of production depends on contradictory interests of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie: the success of the capitalist enterprise relies on the premise that capitalists minimize workers’ wages while increasing the value of goods and overall consumption rate. Marx envisions that the proletariat will unite in resisting the bourgeoisie’s urge to curb wages and eventually engineer a revolution that will construct a society free of class inequalities (Marx and Engels [1848]1973). By pursuing their monetary and class interests further, Marx is confident that the bourgeoisie will create the conditions of its own demise and the oppressed proletariat will naturally emerge as the agent of resistance.

Contrary to Marx’s predictions, however, early worker movements in industrialist societies are perceived more as struggles for inclusion within an emerging consumer culture than as coups of the oppressive market society. In fact, Friedman (1999) finds that strikes in the United States were quite ineffective due to the constant flux of immigrant labor and workers’ lack of economic power to refrain from work. Interestingly, the US working-class became much more successful in achieving better work conditions and terms when they realized their dual role as workers and consumers: instead of strikes, they resorted to boycotts to exert their power over the industrialist class. Undoubtedly, the industrialists’ pressing need for a mass consumer society that would absorb the growing quantities of goods they produced also contributed to the boycotts’ immediate success (Bocock 1993; Slater 1997). The social and racial tensions that materialized in worker-led boycotts in American industrial society, hence, were resolved rapidly through the institutionalization of a series of measures such as the two-day weekend, eight-hour work day, and increased wages (Glickman 1997). Admittedly, such measures helped not only to solve some of the social conflicts, but also to promote a growing consumer base and to facilitate the social construction of “consumer” as a new identity as we know it today.

The historical progress of industrial capitalism thus led to a gradual shift to a new phase: consumer capitalism (Bocock 1993; Gabriel and Lang 1995), also known as Fordism. This new phase of capitalism is the foci of a series of critical social analyses that was led by a group of scholars also known as the Frankfurt School. Following in Marx’s theoretical footprints, this group provided an elaborate critique of consumer capitalism, which is explored in detail below.
Horkheimer and Adorno: consumer capitalism and manufacturers of meaning

The leading scholars of the Frankfurt School, such as Adorno, Horkheimer, Benjamin, Marcuse, and later Habermas, develop a critique of consumer capitalism by extending Marx’s theoretical constructs of alienation, commodification, and exploitation to an emerging consumer culture. For Frankfurt School scholars, consumer capitalism is a natural outcome of mass production, which eventually necessitated a matching, if not an exceeding, amount of consumption. Yet the process of creating a mass consumer society not only involved the socialization and transformation of workers into consumers, but also required a new ideology, consumerism, to sustain itself. Accordingly, consumerism inculcates individuals into believing that “the meaning of life is to be found in buying things and pre-packaged experiences” (Bocock 1993, 50), supplanting “religion, work, and politics as the mechanism by which social and status distinctions may be established” (Gabriel and Lang 1995, 8).

Among this group of scholars Horkheimer and Adorno’s ([1944]2000; hereafter H&A) critical essay on the “culture industry” is widely recognized as a classic work that elucidates new forms of domination and power in modern society. Extending Marx’s critique of the domination of exchange-value over use-value, H&A inquire how culture, particularly autonomous and high art, become commodified and subsumed under a consumerist ideology, and how this process of subsumption, in turn, creates new forms of domination and sources of power. In particular, H&A explicate how cultural intermediaries, specifically the advertising, broadcasting, and entertainment industries, act as brokers to popularize sophisticated art for mainstream audiences. By deciding which cultural products or ideas would have currency in popular taste, these mediating agents become cultural authorities that exert power and dominance over society (Coulter, Price, and Feick 2003; Thompson and Haytko 1997).

For H&A, the mass production of art and the concomitant emergence of popular culture present several significant social, cultural, and political ramifications. The authors contend that art is the primary domain where criticism of society and the social system can be voiced. However, art can only be critical when it is autonomous from commercial interests and is apathetic to popularity concerns. When art is commodified by culture industries, it eventually becomes market-oriented, striving to please its audience, thereby losing its qualities of free expression, creativity, authenticity, and most importantly, criticism. Consequently, H&A hold that the mass production of art not only strips artists of their critical character but also eradicates consumer autonomy to choose among a truly divergent range of options by manufacturing uniform products. For these theorists, the real differences between products are, at worst illusory; at best, trivial. From this perspective, the notions of consumer sovereignty and free choice are solely chimerical; culture industries create the illusion of consumer sovereignty simply by inculcating consumers with false empowerment through similar and predictable products. For example, watching similar movies and listening to similar songs habituates consumers such that they “can guess what is coming and feel flattered when it does come” ([1944]2000, 7). H&A maintain that this illusionary empowerment turns out to reify the myth of consumer sovereignty and keeps consumers pacified.

In summary, a pessimistic picture of the consumer and the modern society emerge from H&A’s critical account of the consumer culture. According to the scholars, market society is an arena of manipulation and enslavement. The consumer is depicted as a mindless, passive creature, systematically pacified by capital-holders through
their propaganda mediums, namely, the culture industries and ideology of consumerism. Accordingly, a critique of this social order is unthinkable; the power dynamics of the market society and the consumerist ideology block all sources of resistance. Resistance can materialize from neither outside (i.e., artists, as they are no longer autonomous) nor within the system (i.e., consumers, as they are mindless). The consumer is trapped in a dominating and manipulative system, where the principle is not to leave the customer alone, not for a moment to allow him any suspicion that resistance is possible. The principle dictates that he should be shown all his needs as capable of fulfillment, but that those needs should be so predetermined that he feels himself to be the eternal consumer, the object of culture industry. Not only does it make him believe that the deception it practices is satisfaction, but it goes further and implies that, whatever the state of affairs, he must put up with what is offered. (Horkheimer and Adorno [1944]2000, 13)

Despite the datedness of H&A’s critique, contemporary consumer society exemplifies many of the issues that the authors raise. Criticism of increasing monopolization of the communications, entertainment, and financial sectors; vested interests of corporations with entertainment industry; overgenerous CEO salaries and perks; and the homogenizing power of global brands are no longer just tired themes of academic debate, but frequent tropes that occupy the mainstream agenda. Such resentments render H&A’s argument more relevant to contemporary market society than some might think. Indeed, the scholars’ account is important in constructing a historically informed understanding of the nature and dynamics of contemporary consumer resistance. Furthermore, their assessment is also suggestive of the nature and tenets of the criticism of consumer culture that are voiced later in the works of Ewen and Baudrillard, which are presented below.

**Ewen: scientific management of the consumer consciousness**

Among the prominent critical theorists of consumer culture, Stuart Ewen is notable because Ewen (1976) solidifies H&A’s abstract critique of mass culture by historically tracing the emergence and rise of the advertising industry within the socio-historical context of the 1920s. In Captains of Consciousness, Ewen examines the trade journals and academic publications of the period 1911–1932 to delineate both the discourses that the advertising industry produced to reinforce the development of mass culture and the tactics it employed to disseminate these discourses to the public. He also argues that these advertising discourses and practices generated a new “cultural logic” (Ewen 1976, 36), stimulating profound ramifications on social relations and the collective conscience of American society.

Ewen holds that promoting consumer culture and the ideology of consumerism were the business community’s answer to ideological threats posed to industrial capitalism both at home and abroad, namely, the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 and the 1919 wave of strikes emanating from a wage-slavery discourse in the United States. The business community dealt with these challenges through various accommodations. One such measure was “scientific management” (1976, 13), which employed behavioral advertising techniques to associate consumption with freedom, democracy, civilization, and success. For example, the advertisements of the 1930s promoted appliances as guarantors of women’s liberation, upheld laundry detergent as an essential element of civilized and modern life, and endorsed mouthwash as the key
to success (Ewen 1976). Concurrent with the use of scientific management, Ewen contends that the business community prepared the material conditions that would sustain a consumerist ideology through incremental increases in wages, reduction in work hours, and convenient financing options. When such incentives failed to deliver the desired increase in consumption, “the ideologues of mass industry” (24) decided to appeal to the psyche of the consumer on a deeper level by permeating them with a sense of fear. Appealing to the consumers’ psyche also helped transform the advertisers’ role from that of creators of desire to cultural authorities who spoke the unpleasant truth but, in return, comforted consumers with advice and product solutions. Perhaps the most striking example of the anxieties produced through advertising is an ad agency head’s advice to Helen Woodward, a copywriter for baby food:

Give ‘em the figures about baby death rate – but don’t say it flatly. You know if you just put a lot of figures in front of a woman she passes you by. If we only had the nerve to put a hearse in the ad, you couldn’t keep the woman away from the food. (as quoted in Ewen 1976, 98)

Ewen concludes that the business community and advertisers manipulated society and “imperialized [the] human psyche” (1976, 81) by producing and controlling countervailing discourses (e.g., frightening and consoling). In doing so, the capitalist class disguised and neutralized class conflict by presenting it as tension rising from the workers’ right to consume (as opposed to exploitative work conditions), an innate right that capitalists were supporting by increasing wages, reducing work hours, and providing credit. The author holds that these manipulative discourses resulted in other dire social consequences as well. For example, by creating a social environment of mistrust in which “people were fragmented from one another by such privatized problems as ‘sneaker smell,’ ‘ashtray breath,’ and ‘underarm offense’” (97), advertisers helped disintegrate social ties, conveniently leading to the emergence of corporations as an alternative to the dissolving community as guarantors of the good life.

Consequently, from Ewen’s vantage-point, consumer culture is an instrument of domination, through which the capitalists and their salaried cultural authorities control and pacify the individuals. Producers and advertisers create the social discourses that generate a “spectacle of change” (87) by promoting mundane and trivial stimulations, such as going to a movie or buying a new dress, which falsely empower consumers and create an illusion of social change. This false empowerment diverts the consumers from seeking radical ways of social change such as collective resistance and revolution.

Although Ewen presents an authoritative account of marketing circa 1920s (Holt 2002), his analysis is still very informative because it sheds light on the historical roots of contemporary consumer resistance as it pertains to consumer resentment towards manipulative and misleading marketing techniques. Even though the marketing practices and advertising strategies have changed considerably over the years by moving away from cultural engineering to postmodern branding (Holt 2002), recent research suggests that the legacy of advertisers’ authoritarian role operates as a folk theory, compelling contemporary consumers to develop ad-avoidance and subversion strategies (Handelman 1999; Klein 2000; Lasn 2000; Rumbo 2002).

Common across the analyses of Marx, H&A, and Ewen is a critical evaluation of the social change brought about by industrialization, modernization, and the emergence of market society. Perhaps the most notable social change (from a marketing standpoint) depicted by these authors is the emergence of market as an institution
constructed by particular social and historical conditions unique to Western societies (e.g., enlightenment, industrialization, and modernization). As the traditional marketplace transforms into market and the market becomes institutionalized in modern societies (Slater and Tonkiss 2001; Venkatesh, Penaloza, and Firat 2006), market assumes a pivotal role in ordering social life, establishing new class structures, and replacing old values with new ones. Not surprisingly, the practice of consumption in market society becomes the primary means through which new class structures, values, and identities could be constructed, maintained, and contested in the absence of hereditary feudal and noble power hierarchies. In this regard, Baudrillard’s theory of consumption as a system of sign value is particularly pertinent in understanding the increasing centrality of consumption in market society.

Baudrillard: the sign system and the “unbearable lightness” of fashion revolutions

Primary to Baudrillard’s ([1970]1998) critique of consumer culture is the concept of sign-value. Baudrillard argues that in contemporary society, commodities are no longer defined by their function (use-value) or by their market price (exchange-value), but rather by what they signify (sign-value). Yet, an object by itself is nothing: according to Baudrillard, objects can only become meaningful if they are presented in a constellation and consumed as such. In other words, the sign-value of objects is derived from their holistic relationship to the entire system of commodities and signs. Therefore, the meanings of objects are created through their collective consumption. For example, an Armani suit in and of itself does not signify much; but when combined with a Mercedes car, Valentino shoes, and a Bvlgari watch, it communicates a particular lifestyle.

Constellations are meaningful within a unique value system which Baudrillard calls the “social logic of consumption” (60). According to Baudrillard, the first dynamic of the social logic of consumption is the institutionalization of consumption as a “process of signification” in modern society, where signs become a code akin to language that individuals are socialized to read and thus understand the messages that objects convey. For example, while the above-mentioned constellation of Armani, Valentino, and Bvlgari would be meaningless in primitive societies, it finds a high level of significance in today’s modern society. The second characteristic of such a value system is that it utilizes consumption as a “process of social differentiation” by hierarchically ordering the sign-value of objects: consumption of certain constellations is imbued with status, power, and prestige, while others signify the lack thereof (e.g., poverty, lack of taste). As a result of these two dynamics, consumption is institutionalized and legitimized as a language that operates beyond the control of the individual, yet one in which individuals need to be literate, so that they know what to consume to distinguish themselves.

Under such a Baudrillardian code, objects are bestowed with tremendous power to transform human ideals such as happiness, affluence, equality, democracy, and sovereignty into measurable entities through their sign-value. For example, happiness is signified and measured with the consumption and display of material belongings. Such associations serve three purposes all at once: they solve social tensions, maintain the workforce that growth depends on, and promote consumption. More specifically, in contrast to pre-modern societies where status was hereditary, market society institutes status and social class as attainable through consumption, and as such minimizes social conflict by advocating the idea that anyone could accomplish the “good life”
through hard work. Hence, the work–spend–work cycle is formed and nourished by what Baudrillard calls the myths of happiness, equality, and sovereignty.

Like the previous adherents of the enslavement discourse, Baudrillard describes consumption as a terrain of domination where individuals are powerless. Consumers are imprisoned by the authority of the code, which dictates what is right and wrong to consume. Ironically, the same code that renders individuals powerless also assigns them tremendous responsibility. For example, the myth of equality places the fault on the individual if s/he does not succeed in making a good life and adorning her/himself with the material signs of success. From Baudrillard’s perspective, this line of thinking conveniently benefits the state, whose liability to its citizens is reduced to legitimizing the discourse that equality and affluence can be attained within the market economy and that democracy is all about a vote in the marketplace (Gabriel and Lang 1995). Thus, such myths not only conceal social inequalities, but also render the notion of consumer sovereignty absurd, since the myths reflect the needs of the industry (pace Marx) that continuously produces and manipulates social signifiers (i.e., the code). For example, while market research claims to ensure “real demand and the deep wants of the consumer govern the market, [it] exists solely to stimulate that demand in order to create further outlets for products while constantly masking this objective process by staging its opposite” (Baudrillard [1970]1998, 72). In other words, even though satisfaction is promised through consumption, it is technically impossible because the code is in a constant flux, generating new needs that reflect the interests of producers. Considering this “entrapped consumer” portrayal, it is not surprising that Baudrillard ([1970]1998) deems resistance unlikely:

No revolution is possible at the level of the code – or, alternatively, revolutions take place every day at that level, but they are “fashion revolutions,” which are harmless and foil the other kind. (Baudrillard [1970]1998, 94)

Summary of the manipulation and enslavement discourse

In summary, proponents of the manipulation and enslavement discourse are mainly concerned with the transformation of value (i.e., use-, exchange-, sign-value) and concomitant dynamics such as commodification, debasement of high culture, and dissolution of traditional identities. Marx ([1867]1976), H&A ([1944]2000), Ewen (1976), and Baudrillard ([1970]1998) view the market as an arena of domination and power struggle. Accordingly, consumerism is an enslaving and manipulative ideology, crafted by the ruling class, which reduces individuals to powerless dupes. As such, resistance is unlikely to come from consumers, who are assumed to be passive and blinded by seduction of consumer goods and discourses of consumer culture.5

A celebratory approach to consumer culture: the agency and empowerment discourse

In contrast to the previous paradigm, the agency and empowerment discourse celebrates consumption as a fundamental enterprise for self-expression, sustainability of social relations, and even negotiation of social inequalities (Table 1). This perspective contends that individuals are indeed capable of playing with and adulterating cultural resources such as language, objects, images, and music to re-interpret and modify their everyday practices, rendering consumption a domain where social order is challenged,
negotiated and transformed as much as it is reproduced (Slater 1997). In comparison with the enslavement discourse, the empowerment paradigm bestows individuals with more autonomy in relation to the enslaving strategies of “culture industries,” while casting consumption a more positive role as a sustainer of social relationships. Therefore, the emphasis in this perspective is on micro-tactics (i.e., how individuals subtly and skillfully use consumption to challenge the status quo) rather than macro-strategies (i.e., how the bourgeoisie/culture industries establish dominance over workers/consumers). These everyday micro-level tactics are fully explored in the renowned works of Douglas and Isherwood, Bourdieu, and de Certeau, reviewed below.

**Douglas and Isherwood: consumption as communication**

Challenging the enslavement discourse’s portrayal of consumption as passive reception of goods, Douglas and Isherwood ([1979]1996; hereafter D&I) re-conceptualize economic definitions of consumption to include the ways in which objects are used after they have been acquired. In doing so, they move beyond the “manipulative consumer culture” hypothesis and focus on the active role of consumers in skillfully using goods to communicate, mark, and classify social relations. Viewed from this perspective, consumption is a way of communicating individual taste, status, aspiration or even protest. Whether it is as mundane as home decoration, cooking, or eating, each consumption practice helps individuals to communicate and establish relationships by conveying and making visible “something about himself [consumer], his family, his locality… The kind of statements he makes are about the kind of universe he is in, affirmatory or defiant” (68). Therefore, D&I view consumption as a system of information in which an active and autonomous consumer “constructs an intelligible universe with the goods he chooses” (65).

Yet, the authors show that the role of goods extends beyond constructing an intelligible universe to structure social relationships. Goods, when consumed in constellations as Baudrillard proposes (i.e., patterns of consumption), also serve as exclusion and inclusion criteria to construct social class boundaries. Illustrating with an example from social mobility statistics, D&I argue that it is vital for members of lower social classes, who are seeking upward mobility via marriage, to prove their suitability for elite membership through consumption that displays taste and wealth. The authors assert that it is only by enacting a “nonhuman capital” through the consumption and knowledge of exotic geographies, food, wine, and clothing, that lower social classes are granted inclusion to a higher social clique (87). Accordingly, consumption (and

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<th>Manipulation and enslavement discourse</th>
<th>Agency and empowerment discourse</th>
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<td><strong>Market</strong></td>
<td>Realm of development and source of identity</td>
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<td><strong>Consumer</strong></td>
<td>Passive, dupe, spectator, slave</td>
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<td><strong>Consumption</strong></td>
<td>Means of satisfying needs; false empowerment</td>
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<td><strong>Resistance</strong></td>
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therefore market) is a “field in which exclusion can be applied, usurpation attempted, or withdrawal enforced by private individuals against one another” (89).

In summary, D&I present a significantly different view of consumption than the one proposed by the enslavement discourse. First of all, D&I view consumption as a cultural and ritualistic activity that binds individuals to each other and organizes the social order, rather than a problem that threatens social solidarity and engenders dissolution of social ties. Secondly, the authors offer new avenues of scholarly debate and research by incorporating post-purchase behavior in the consumption process, effectively revealing the individual creativity and agency in consumption. Both of these distinguishing points are illustrated in D&I’s well-known housewife example:

The housewife with her shopping basket arrives home: some things in it she reserves for her household, some for the father, some for the children; others are destined for the special delectation of guests. Whom she invites into her house, what parts of the house she makes available to outsiders, how often, what she offers them for music, food, drink, and conversation, these choices express and generate culture in its general sense. (Douglas and Isherwood [1979]1996, 57)

Through this example, D&I ([1979]1996, 59) urge scholars to consider goods not solely as essentials for subsistence and competitive display, but also as objects for “making visible and stable the categories of culture.” In doing so, they also shift scholarly attention from the mere act of consumption to the ways or practices of consuming; for it is in these everyday practices that the social order is resisted, as much as it is reproduced.

**Bourdieu: consumption as social distinction**

While D&I’s anthropological perspective that underlines the cultural aspects of consumption is invaluable for scholars of consumer culture, it is not without criticism. Perhaps as a reaction to the overly deterministic accounts elaborated in the manipulation and enslavement discourse, the authors’ effort to highlight consumer agency over social structure in organizing social order comes at the expense of their negligence of the latter in D&I’s theory. Bourdieu, however, eloquently redresses this problem in his theory of practice. Bourdieu’s concept of “habitus” presents a more balanced account of social ordering through consumption by granting equal importance to pre-existing social structures and social agency in establishing social status. For a comprehensive understanding of habitus, however, a brief discussion of Bourdieu’s (1984) key concepts of capital and taste is first necessary.

According to Bourdieu, individuals utilize three resources, namely, economic, social, and cultural capital, to establish and maintain their social standing in society. Primary to his analysis is cultural capital, a concept distinct from that of economic (wealth) and social (relationships) capitals. Cultural capital is a knowledge of and competency in practising the codes of legitimate culture. Cultural capital is perhaps most vividly enacted through consumption, where it translates into taste in our consumption choices (e.g., reading *Travel and Leisure* versus Martha Stewart magazines) and socially distinguishable practices in the way we consume (e.g., appreciating aesthetics versus functionality) (Holt 1997).

While Bourdieu is not concerned with establishing a direct correlation between social class and taste, he nevertheless finds that different social classes exhibit distinct tastes regarding the object of consumption. To further explain the complex
relationships among cultural capital, taste, and social status, Bourdieu (1990) offers the concept of habitus, a system of predispositions serving as a cognitive schema that maps individual’s social world and guides action. It is, in other words, a lens through which individuals interpret and categorize objects, people, and events. Habitus is an amalgam of the material conditions of existence as structured by class and the sociocultural conditioning it entails. It is this amalgamated nature of the concept that allows habitus to be reproduced while being expressed through consumption; for habitus does not just structure tastes, but also “results in the construction of a distinctive set of consumption patterns, a lifestyle that both expresses and serves to reproduce habitus” (Holt 1997, 4). Accordingly, Bourdieu argues that tastes informed and shaped by habitus function as a resource whose practice through consumption establishes, legitimizes, and distinguishes individuals’ place within the social stratification.

In summary, consumption is a principal field where taste and habitus are practised to acquire and maintain social positions within the social hierarchy. The market, through the myriad of consumption choices it provides, presents the consumer with an opportunity to reproduce, resist, and transcend social standing. Thus the market, once again, is identified as the domain of a power struggle. However, in contrast to the enslavement discourse, in Bourdieu’s account the social tensions do not arise from a conflict between an allegedly totalizing marketplace and duped consumers, but from the power struggle among social classes to determine which tastes and practices are legitimate. This power struggle is perhaps most prominent between the holders of economic capital (e.g., nouveaux-riches) and cultural capital (e.g., intelligentsia) over the legitimate forms of consumption in Bourdieu’s analysis. Legitimacy not only determines the acceptable forms of ordinary practices such as entertainment (e.g., American Idol versus modern ballet) and nourishment (e.g., hamburger versus wholegrains); it also subsequently influences what types of occupations, lifestyles, and worldviews are valued in a particular social order.

de Certeau: consumption as everyday resistance

Like Douglas and Isherwood and Bourdieu, de Certeau (1984) contests the portrait of the passive individual characterized by the enslavement discourse while holding that the market is a realm of domination. Yet for this very reason, he argues, resistance is inevitable, because individuals are not naturally programmed to operate in modern markets; he likens consumers to “immigrants in a system too vast to be their own, too tightly woven for them to escape from it” (xx). Contending that cultural consumption is the terrain of struggle, de Certeau centers his analysis on consumers’ “ways of operating” (xi), that is, ways of using objects and cultural resources in everyday life to resist the dominant system from within.

In particular, de Certeau (1984) argues that consumption is never a passive enterprise; rather, it is another form of production, a “poiēsis” (xii), because it involves consumers’ art of using and making-do with objects. Despite its silent and invisible poise, poiēsis can be intended for subversion of or diversion from the dominant system. To elucidate, de Certeau (1984) refers to indigenous Indians’ resistance to the Spanish colonizers:

Submitive, and even consenting to their subjection, the Indians nevertheless often made of the rituals, representations, and laws imposed on them something quite different from what their conquerors had in mind; they subverted them not by rejecting or altering them,
but by using them with respect to ends and references foreign to the system they had no choice but to accept... they escaped it without leaving it. The strength of their difference lay in procedures of consumption. (xiii, emphasis in original)

Such “ways of operating,” in de Certeau’s view (1984, xv), constitute a myriad of “tactics” that are articulated in everyday practices such as reading, cooking, talking, and shopping to form an “antidiscipline.” In this sense, consumers are “poachers” armed with “clever tricks, knowing how to get away with things, hunter’s cunning, maneuvers, polymorphic simulations, joyful discoveries” through which they negotiate, re-interpret, and appropriate the dominant meanings (xix). Unlike strategy, the calculated and organized series of acts employed by the dominant forces, tactics are “the art of the weak” and thus opportunistic and isolated actions that are reminiscent of trickery and wit (37).

de Certeau’s (1984) depiction of consumer-as-trickster has been also employed by Fiske (1989), who, perhaps too optimistically, interprets an apron that reads “Woman’s place is in the mall” as women’s subversion of patriarchy; taking this interpretation further, he compares shopping women with guerrillas for the way they resist marginalization by spending their husbands’ money. Fiske (1989) contends that buying commodities offers a sense of freedom and subversion of dominant ideologies; therefore, consumption should be celebrated for its empowering quality.

Summary of the agency and empowerment discourse
In comparison with the enslavement discourse, the empowerment discourse provides a significantly different perspective on the nature and social purpose of consumption as well as the extent of consumer agency. This celebratory approach offers an alternative theoretical lens through which consumption is viewed as a practice that consumers engage in to make sense of their world, as well as to mark and communicate social distinctions. However, this is not to suggest that the practice of consumption is just another means of consumer conformity to the consumer culture. On the contrary, the empowerment discourse affords consumers the agency to challenge and contest the dominating power of consumer culture. Indeed, this perspective holds that consumption is the primary arena where social order is challenged, negotiated, and transformed (Slater 1997).

However, the empowerment discourse is not without criticism. In particular, the works of de Certeau and Fiske have been criticized for interpreting any ways of operating or consumers’ meaning-making labour as subversion. One may question whether the apron example Fiske uses can still be considered a sign of subversion if the slogan has been conceived by a male designer or if the apron is a gift from a man. Furthermore, de Certeau and Fiske seem to underestimate the extent that acts of consuming are socially structured and bound by social relations as well as institutions. While there may be a cornucopia of meanings that consumers can choose from, as Morley (1992, 21) puts it, “there are within it signifying mechanisms which promote certain meanings, even one privileged meaning, and suppress others.” As such, it could be argued that powerful institutions such as multinational corporations, increasingly consolidated and globalized media, and international organizations overshadow individual consumers in producing the privileged and precedent meanings of contemporary society given their vast financial resources, human capital, and influence on society. This suggests that despite de Certeauian characterizations of
wholly empowered poacher-consumers, any informed theory of consumer culture and resistance should consider the role of institutions in creating, legitimizing, and instituting meanings. The next section reviews the reflections of the enslavement and the empowerment discourses in marketing discipline.

**Reflections in marketing**

The theoretical body of knowledge on consumer resistance in marketing literature is only recently burgeoning. Although earlier examinations of consumer activism (Friedman 1985; Garrett 1987) exist, as Penaloza and Price’s (1993) framework indicates, these studies focused on collective actions directed at changes in marketing mix structure and composition. Recent research, however, has directed attention to individual acts of resistance. Responding to subsequent calls for an integrative theoretical perspective of consumer resistance by Penaloza and Price (1993) and Fournier (1998), researchers have analyzed personalized meanings of boycotting behavior (Kozinets and Handelman 1998), consumption strategies of environmentally sensitive women (Dobscha and Ozanne 2001), consumers’ emancipatory practices to distance themselves from the marketplace (Kozinets 2002), and use of natural health alternatives (Thompson and Troester 2002), as well as consumer reactions to marketing strategies (Holt 2002) and hegemonic brandscapes (Thompson and Arsel 2004).

Within this growing body of research, it is possible to identify two distinct perspectives on the nature and enactment of resistance, which, to a great extent, resonate the enslavement and empowerment discourses that emerged in social sciences and humanities. These reflections are presented in the following liberatory and market-bound perspectives.

**Liberatory perspective**

The liberatory perspective in marketing shares common traits with both the enslavement and empowerment discourses previously elaborated. The proponents of the liberatory perspective critically view the market as a dominating realm that wields consumer culture as its seductive instrument, echoing some of the key arguments of the enslavement discourse. Yet, they significantly diverge from this school of thought by acknowledging consumer agency to resist the market structures described by scholars of empowerment discourse. Drawing from the central tenets of both schools of thought, this marketing perspective assumes a liberatory character by advocating an emancipatory space for consumer resistance outside the market system.

One of the most prominent representations of the enslavement discourse can be found in Ozanne and Murray’s (1995) seminal work on reflexively defiant consumers. Grounding their theoretical reasoning on Baudrillard’s (1970) critical conceptualization of consumption as a dominating cultural code, Ozanne and Murray (1995) hold that the marketplace is a chaotic realm through which consumers must sail even though they are ill-equipped in navigation skills. Paradoxically, providing easy access to product/producer information and educating the consumer to improve his/her decision-making skills serve to “recreate the existing system by more firmly entrenching people into their primary role in life as consumers” (Ozanne and Murray 1995, 521). In other words, the more consumers seek information and become more knowledgeable about product features, facts, and prices, the more they become preoccupied with consumption through the process and subsequently further embed themselves in the...
marketplace. Therefore, Ozanne and Murray (1995) contend that consumers can be truly critical (i.e., better decision-makers) only if they radically distance themselves from the code. The “reflexively defiant” consumer that Ozanne and Murray (1995, 522) envision is one who forms “a different relationship to the marketplace in which they identify unquestioned assumptions and challenge the status of existing structures as natural.” Through this reflection, reflexive consumers “may choose to defy or resist traditional notions of consumption, become more independent from acquisition and disposition systems, or define their own needs independent from the marketplace” (522). In other words, true resistance is achievable only if the consumer, rather than mastering the code, breaks away from it, which would involve moving outside the marketplace.

Firat and Venkatesh (1995, 255) voice a similar idea by envisioning a “lifeworld,” a liberated space from the “totalizing logic of the market.” The authors hold that as long as individuals are situated in the market, emancipation cannot be realized. Hence, Firat and Venkatesh (258) suggest: “it is therefore necessary to identify a social space beyond the reach of the market by positioning the consumer in the ‘lifeworld’ and outside the market system. This is one of the ways the postmodern consumer can successfully distance himself/herself from the logic and presence of the market system… True emancipation of the consumer can materialize if s/he were able to move in these social spaces without the perennial panoptican of the market.”

Such code-conscious consumers and liberated lifeworlds theorized by Ozanne and Murray (1995) and Firat and Venkatesh (1995) are indeed found in Dobscha and Ozanne’s (2001) eco-feminist analyses of the female members of an environmental action group. The authors find that these cynical consumers “seek to live outside the marketplace and reluctantly enter the marketplace only when other nonmarket options are exhausted” (205). The women hold an unfavorable view of consumption and associate it with wasting, squandering, and polluting, an understanding that is synonymous with the original definition of the term in the fourteenth century (Gabriel and Lang 1995). Consequently, these consumers distance themselves from the marketplace and demonstrate resistance to the consumerist ideology through radical practices such as picking up trash, making toys out of soda cans, maintaining a subsistence economy, and refraining from many convenience products.

Paralleling the enslavement discourse, Ozanne and Murray (1995), Firat and Venkatesh (1995), and Dobscha and Ozanne (2001) portray the marketplace as a dominating realm that legitimizes and re-institutes its reign by socializing individuals as consumers (Schor 2004). However, unlike the cultural critiques, these scholars foresee that resistance is possible and imbue the consumer with the agency to resist the market structures. From this perspective, emancipation from the domination of the market and its enslaving ideology is possible by stepping outside the marketplace (i.e., not participating in the market economy) and detaching from its code.

Even though the liberatory perspective is theoretically captivating, it conceptualizes resistance as an emancipatory project whose success depends on the extent of the costs consumers are willing to take. The reflexive resistance approach assumes that consumers would be willing to undertake not just physical hardships of producing for their livelihood, but also social costs (i.e., potential isolation from friends and family members, because they no longer share the same cultural code). This perspective also marginalizes resistance by suggesting that true resistance can only be found in peripheral enclaves or, as Ozanne and Murray (1995) put it, in “subcultures acting as insurgent movements.” Such a peripheral view of anti-consumerist behaviors not only
romanticizes resistance (Abu-Lughod 1990), but also fails to acknowledge the subtle ways in which consumers may selectively challenge market ideology and offerings while actively participating in a market economy (Izberk-Bilgin 2006; Kozinets 2002; Thompson and Arsel 2004).

**Market-bound perspective**

This perspective shares the key tenets of the empowerment discourse such as advocating consumer agency and creativity in resisting the market, the binding — as opposed to dividing — nature of consumption in maintaining social relationships, and the facilitating role of the market as a realm of self-expression. As such, similar to the empowerment discourse, this marketing perspective is concerned with how consumers subtly and skillfully use consumption in everyday life to challenge the status quo and the dominant market ideologies. However, this research stream diverges from the optimistic emancipatory views of both the empowerment paradigm and the liberatory group in marketing; the empirical findings of this school of thought suggest that consumers cannot be completely emancipated from the encapsulating logic of the market. On the contrary, even the choice of what is to be resisted or the form in which this resistance should be expressed conveys a desire for social distinction from non-resistant consumers (e.g., shopping at Whole Foods, buying organics, and carrying a reusable canvas shopping bag quickly become signs of social distinction and cultural capital). From this perspective, such politics of distinction subject activist consumers to the same dominating market logics that they seek to evade; hence this perspective is labeled “market-bound.”

Although this submission to market dynamics may be reminiscent of the manipulation and enslavement paradigm, the market-bound perspective differs from this pessimistic outlook in three aspects. First, it conceptualizes resistance at the individual level rather than anticipating a mass revolution as envisaged by the scholars of the enslavement discourse. Secondly, it underscores that resistance can be enacted subtly within the marketplace through everyday consumption choices and practices, not requiring the consumers to exit the marketplace or move beyond the market “code” as commonly held by the enslavement and the liberatory perspectives. Lastly, the market-bound view focuses on the lived experience of resistance and how this transforms both consumers and market agents.

Scholars of the market-bound perspective are primarily concerned with the personally enriching and liberating aspects of resistance as a lived experience rather than the processes through which consumers can attain a critical stance to consumption. For example, Kozinets and Handelman (1998, 476) explore the personal meanings of boycotting and find that expressing a unique identity is more prominent than self-perceptions as “crusaders, who used boycotts to seek widespread social change.” This account varies from the depiction of consumer as the agent of social change by Ozanne and Murray (1995) and implies that resistance need not be oriented toward social change. On the contrary, resistance can simply be pursued for personal gratification as a form of self-expression or morally transforming experience to “ensoul” consumption by reconnecting it to producers and the conditions in which products were manufactured (Kozinets and Handelman 1998, 479).

In a similar theoretical vein, Kozinets (2002, 36) delineates the Burning Man festival, a week-long anti-market event, as a “youtopian” project which gives precedence to creating an enriching temporary space where participants can “consider, play with
and within” the social tensions that the market creates over bringing those tensions to a resolution. Creating this emancipatory space entails particular market-distancing practices such as discursively debasing the market and utilizing alternative forms of exchange, such as gift-giving and barter. These Burning Man rituals temporarily redeem participants from the market-infused everyday life and leave them reborn as authentic and sovereign. Hence, in Kozinets’s ethnographic account, it is the desire to create an authentic anti-consumerist identity within a temporal community to express market criticism – rather than the grand project of completely evading the oppressive market system – that motivates postmodern consumer resistance. Indeed, Kozinets (2002, 36) concludes:

Perhaps it is not possible to completely evade the market. For even with its subversive discourse and alternative practices, the seduction by particular symbols or regimes of appeal continues unabated at Burning Man... the urge to differentiate from other consumers drives participation at Burning Man and does not release them from the grip of the market’s sign game and social logics.

Holt (2002) reaches a similar conclusion in his case-study of two defiant informants’ reflexive and creative resistance tactics. These informants’ resistance projects are centered on constructing authentic and sovereign identities divorced from the symbolism and authority of the market. Paradoxically, consumers’ endeavors to resist the marketplace re-embed them in the consumer culture as their overly zealous pursuit of an anti-market identity locates “their identity work within the marketplace rather than other organizing spheres of social life such as family, religion, community, and work” (79).

Taking a macro-historical perspective, Holt views resistance as a natural outcome of the dialectical and dynamic relationship between social institutions (firms and branding paradigms) and concomitant ideological embodiments (consumer culture). The relationship is disrupted when marketers develop new branding techniques that create contradictions in the consumer culture. Consumers respond by challenging the accepted status of marketers. In turn, firms and consumers engage in a cultural experimentation process through which a new consumer culture and branding paradigm become institutionalized and are maintained until a new contradiction arises. As such, Holt concludes that “consumer resistance is actually a form of market-sanctioned cultural experimentation through which the market rejuvenates itself” (89). Because this experimentation re-embeds resistant consumers in the consumer culture, emancipation from the marketplace through resistance is futile (Holt 2002).

Building on Ozanne and Murray’s reflexively defiant consumer and Firat and Venkatesh’s lifestyle spaces has rendered emancipation a central theoretical point in early works of the market-bound perspective. Holt (2002), Kozinets (2002), Thompson and Troester (2002), and Thompson (2003) challenge the premise of emancipation in previous resistance theories and show that distancing self from the market and subverting the market ideology do not leave the individual sovereign and emancipated from the realm of the market. Thompson and Arsel (2004) contribute to this debate by exploring the emancipatory and political tensions that hegemonic brand discourses engender.

Thompson and Arsel (2004, 632) develop the construct of hegemonic brandscape – that is, “a cultural system of servicescapes that are linked together and structured by discursive, symbolic, and competitive relationships to a dominant experiential brand.” The authors use this construct to examine how the global and influential Starbucks...
discourse structures local coffee shops and, subsequently, the anti-Starbucks discourse. They find that American consumers experience this particular global–local encounter through a criticism of Starbucks based on aesthetic and political qualms. While the authors delineate “a cosmopolitan desire to experience authentic local cultures, where authenticity is understood through a symbolic contrast to the commercialized experiences offered by conventional tourist sites and McDonaldized service-scapes” among café flâneurs, other consumers are motivated by an “emancipatory desire” (639) to topple the corporate homogenization of everyday life in their resistance to Starbucks.

Thompson and Arsel’s (2004) study is particularly noteworthy because it reproves optimistic accounts of glocalization, which presume globalization to engender a reciprocal transforming experience among cultures autonomous from power hierarchies by recognizing the hegemonic influence global brands may exert upon local alternatives. Thompson and Arsel’s approach and the empirical research of Kozinets and Holt offer new avenues for future research at the nexus of globalization, resistance, and culture, some of which are explored below.

Future research suggestions
The overarching goal of this paper has been to provide an interdisciplinary and integrative review of consumer resistance literature with an analytical focus on how key marketing concepts such as market, consumer, and consumer culture are historically and discursively constructed in relation to resistance. As this review demonstrates, the notion of resistance and some of our key marketing constructs are deeply rooted in social sciences and humanities; and as such, these concepts are closely interwoven with broader issues of social order, agency, and power. Lately, these issues also have been receiving scholarly attention in marketing since Penaloza and Price (1993) identified the inherent power struggle in consumer–marketer encounters and marketers’ co-opting of resistance as impelling areas of research. Accordingly, recent marketing research has progressed ambitiously exploring issues of agency and power embedded in the resistance phenomenon. In the same spirit of moving consumer resistance research forward, this article concludes by identifying several interesting and previously unexplored avenues of research.

Resistance and globalization
Perhaps one of the most immediate gaps in consumer resistance research that requires attention is how the phenomenon is informed and shaped by economic and cultural globalization. The movements of capital from one country to another, shifting of jobs, devaluation of national currencies, pollution of natural resources, erosion of traditional values, transformation of local practices, and acquisition of local small businesses by chains or conglomerates are only a few of the economic, cultural, social, and political consequences of globalization that concern consumers on a daily basis. After all, these are the main issues voiced by thousands at key demonstrations such as the 1999 World Trade Organization protests in Seattle, the 2001 Free Trade Area of the Americas protests in Quebec City, and the G8 summit protest in Genoa in 2001 and Evian in 2003 (Farro 2004).

At first sight, these demonstrations may better represent social movements than acts of consumer resistance, yet the very concerns that motivate these demonstrations
materialize in everyday life in the form of rejection of market offerings, posing particular threats to global products and services with iconic images (Holt 2004). Indeed, in the face of global competition and domestic job losses, anti-globalist brand resistance has become more pronounced, even in the United States, where the “Buy American” campaign of the 1970s is reviving. While news commentary, blogs, and bumper stickers favoring local brands against foreign competitors (e.g., “I work for Ford, I drive Ford”; or “Out of your job yet? Keep buying foreign”) are becoming commonplace, “Made in America” rhetoric also inspires the creation of new brands built around a homespun image (e.g., American Apparel). Surprisingly, while the consequences of globalization of production and consumption have been extensively explored by sociologists (Bauman 1998; Beck 1992), anthropologists (Appadurai 2000), and political scientists (Micheletti 2003), they have not been sufficiently addressed in marketing literature.

A notable exception is Thompson and Arsel’s examination of consumers’ anti-corporate discourses, which offers valuable initial insights into the hegemonic influence that brands with global presence and iconic images, like Starbucks, may exert upon local alternatives (2004). Yet, the global Starbucks–local coffee shop dyad that the authors examine admittedly remains a predominantly local–local encounter, since both Starbucks and the neighborhood cafés studied are deeply rooted in and products of American culture. Undoubtedly, cross-cultural contexts more potently present the social, political, and cultural tensions that global–local encounters truly bear. For example, issues of national sovereignty, preservation of national idiosyncrasies, and authenticity and ownership of cultural products (e.g., protectionist policies issued on Feta cheese) that do not surface otherwise may arise in cross-cultural examinations, powerfully revealing previously unexplored motivations and forms of resistance.

Resistance, globalization, and developing countries

Continuing in this vein of thought, analyzing resistance at the nexus of globalization and developing countries may offer the most interesting and fertile research avenues in expanding the boundaries of our understanding of consumer resistance. Whether they are called “Third World countries,” “less advanced nations,” or “emerging markets,” these countries are generally characterized by their infant democracies, belated attempts at modernization, and most importantly, asymmetrical participation in global flows of capital, culture, and technology. As such, the aesthetic and post-materialistic qualms that aptly depict consumer resistance in the consumptionscapes of Western, postmodern, and economically advanced societies cannot be conveniently extended to developing nations. Rather, these country contexts bear distinct economic, social, political, and cultural tensions that compellingly reflect the challenges posed by uneven globalization in everyday life. For example, our bourgeoning domain is yet to explore the ideological and social tensions that a Frappuccino® might engender in Brazil, China, Malaysia, and Turkey (emerging markets that Starbucks and other global corporations are vigorously pursuing), considering that it is priced at usually 20 times the cost of staples like bread and rice in these countries. While such conflicts are initially theorized in the works of manipulation and enslavement discourse scholars, as well as in the dependency theory and world-systems approach, they remain empirically unexplored within the marketing literature. Expanding the geographical boundaries of our research beyond the economically advanced economies of the
Western world may also advance our existing theorization of resistance as a predominantly postmaterialist and postmodern phenomenon.

For scholars interested in pursuing this research avenue, studies undertaken in transitional economies represent a fertile starting-point. While these works primarily explore consumer desire for Western products in developing countries (Arnould 1989; Belk 1988; Coulter, Price, and Feick 2003; Eckhardt and Houston 2002; Friedman 1990; Ger, Belk, and Lascu 1993; Wilk 1995), they also provide valuable insights onto the symbolic values of foreign products in economically less advanced countries. Because a majority of these studies were conducted in the wake of significant economic transitions in these countries where the opening-up of markets led to a peak in consumer demand for Western goods, future research can inquire how the consumer desire for and the meaning of prestigious Western goods may have changed over time to convey antagonistic attitudes, reflecting the fact that purchasing power generally fails to match the abundance of market offerings in many developing countries. In addition, future research can comparatively examine the variability in anti-consumptionist attitudes and behaviors with respect to the degree and duration of market openness across developing countries. In this respect, Ger and Belk’s (1996) notable discussions of potential reactions to global consumer culture such as return to roots, resistance, and appropriation of product meanings, may serve as a conceptual framework for future research examining anti-consumerist behavior in developing consumptionscapes.

Resistance and religious fundamentalisms

Exploring the intricate link between religion and resistance also presents promising research avenues. Sherry and Kozinets (2007) decipher this complex relationship at the Burning Man festival, where consumer resistance assumes religious undertones as participants perform ritualistic and sacrificial practices, artworks are imbued with altar-like sacred properties, and “burners” act as pilgrims. This most recent line of research exploring the religion–resistance dynamic suggests that resistance is as much about “ensouling” consumption as it is “ensouling” the anomic modern individual (Kozinets and Handelman 2004; Kozinets and Sherry 2004, 2007).

While these studies cogently demonstrate that resistance is imbued with spiritual innuendo or can be performed as a puritanical activist identity, the question of how religious ideologies, particularly fundamentalisms, inform and shape consumer resistance remains a timely yet unaddressed issue in marketing literature. For example, the revitalization of Islam in many developing countries in Asia, North Africa, and the Middle East has been interpreted as a critique of capitalism and consumerism (Ray 1993; Sklair 1995). Indeed, Izberk-Bilgin (2008) identifies Islamist discourses such as social justice and brotherhood against anti-Muslim causes (e.g., Western countries’ perceived sympathy and financial support of Israel vis-à-vis Muslim Palestine) as potent motivations for rejecting global brands among Islamist consumers. Similarly, recent boycotts of Danish goods by Muslims in Denmark and the Middle East in response to the ill-perceived cartoon depictions of Prophet Mohammed powerfully demonstrate how religious sentiments may mobilize consumer resistance.

Parallel resentments to consumer culture are observed among Christians and other religious groups. For example, Friedman (1999) discusses religiously motivated consumer protests in the United States as early as 1933. Most recently, Christian
conservative groups such as the Southern Baptist Convention, Assemblies of God, the Catholic League, and the American Family Association have expressed resentment against Disney over its perceived promotion of the homosexual lifestyle and Paganism (www.religioustolerance.org/disney.htm, www.afa.net/disney). Further exploration of religiously motivated consumer resistance may provide an interesting and fruitful avenue of research.10

Resistance and nationalism
Another potentially interesting direction of research can explore the relationship between nationalist ideology and consumer resistance. Countries with a history of colonization may represent fertile grounds for reactionary nationalism and patriotic resistance, particularly towards Western consumer culture and foreign goods, considering that cultural imperialism was found to be a prevalent discourse of resistance even in countries that lack direct experience with colonialism (Askegaard and Csaba 2000; Hooper 2000; Izberk-Bilgin 2008). Exploring the saliency of imperialist and nationalist discourses in consumptionscapes with colonial history (Djerdjerian 2003), particularly with respect to the degree of their current involvement in global economy, would present a both theoretically and managerially interesting research direction.

Colonial history may indeed motivate consumer resistance in emerging markets of Latin American, North African, and some Southeast Asian countries that fall behind India and China in participating in the global economy.

In addition to colonial history and potent nationalistic sentiments, historical conflicts between nations can motivate resistance to the products of a particular culture despite these products’ reputable quality. Jewish consumers’ disinclination towards German products, Chinese animosity to Japanese goods (Klein, Ettenson, and Morris 1998), and the second Intifada (i.e., Palestinian uprising) that resulted in a boycott of not just Israeli, but also American and European products throughout Egypt, Pakistan, and a host of other Muslim countries are among a few examples of how historically rooted political conflicts may spur consumer antagonism (Djerdjerian 2003).

Resistance, brand/product meanings, and communities of consumer activism
Exploring how seemingly mundane products are diversely interpreted as symbols of resistance by subcultural groups and how these oppositional readings possess the potential of mobilizing political and cultural resistance represents yet another interesting research direction. Just like Hebdige’s ([1988]2000) renowned scooter example, ordinary products such as clothing (DeBerry-Spence and Izberk-Bilgin 2006; Sandikçı and Ger 2005), music (Kelley 2002), and shoes (e.g., Adbusters’ Blackspot Unwooosher) are increasingly imbued with oppositional symbolisms that signify cultural and political resistance. This counter-culture symbolism is congruent with the above review findings that resistance has historically become understood as enacted through consumption with the evolution of market societies. Whether it is through the consumption of kente cloth, Islamic veil, or rap music, political and/or cultural resistance is increasingly articulated in consumption in contemporary market societies where the main platform and the primary means of self-expression are the market and consumption, respectively.

Not surprisingly, the counter-culture symbolism easily extends beyond products to brands in a prominently consumerist culture. Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) find that
Apple assumes underdog status and oppositional meanings in relation to mainstream brands like Microsoft and IBM. Such underdog positioning bestows a “David versus Goliath” aura to these brands (Thompson and Arsel 2004), thereby driving consumer participation in oppositional brand (Muniz and O’Guinn 2001) and activist communities (Kozinets 2002; Kozinets and Handelman 2004). Theoretically interesting expansions may be advanced by examining whether other types of oppositional communities exist in addition to brand communities, hypercommunities (Kozinets 2002), or consumption communities (Thompson and Coskun-Ball 2007) where social solidarity is longer-lasting and not based on brand loyalty, and to which membership cannot be purchased. Future research could also extend existing theories on brand/product meanings and oppositional communities by inquiring how instrumental these communities are in creating magical meanings (Muniz and Schau 2005) that culminate in marketplace mythologies (Thompson 2004).

**Resistance and stakeholders**

Existing anti-consumption literature predominantly assumes a consumer-oriented perspective. This exclusive focus inadvertently ignores the equally important and interesting viewpoints of other stakeholders, such as marketers and public policymakers. One particularly interesting stakeholder is the marketer. How marketers respond to and manage consumers’ anti-consumptionist tactics remains a provocative yet unexplored topic. Recent changes in consumer culture have been transforming not only the authoritarian role of marketers within market economies (Holt 2002), but also the strategies they employ to reach their audiences. Faced with an increasingly multicultural and fragmented consumer society, marketers have been devising innovative methods to engage consumer creativity in the meaning production process to come up with seemingly more authentic and individual offerings. However, coupled with growing consumer awareness of sweatshop labor, genetically modified foods, and environmentally unsound business practices, marketers’ strategies to incorporate the consumer unexpectedly have been resulting in more corporate fiasco and ridicule than triumph. For example, Nike’s mishandling of a witty consumer’s request to customize his sneakers with an inscription inferring the company’s use of sweatshop labor has led the corporation to a public relations quagmire and left Nike feeble in the public eye. Likewise, Chevy recently found that it abruptly had to end its web-based promotional campaign designed to stimulate user-generated advertising for its Tahoe brand when visitors created demeaning videos of the SUV. Instead of loyal Tahoe fans sharing personal stories and videos, brand managers were faced with critical consumers who skillfully used the images and music Chevy provided to create anti-commercials that pointed a finger at the SUV brand for contributing to global warming and even the Iraq war (Bosman 2006). Such faux pas may become more commonplace, given how ill-equipped marketers are to anticipate the responses of astute consumers. Examining how marketers tackle such critical consumers may offer interesting opportunities for future research, as well as providing valuable management implications.

**Notes**

1. Although Marx keenly hopes for a proletariat-led resistance to initiate a revolutionary reconstitution of the society, his writings nevertheless underscore the vulnerability and hence passivity of both the working and bourgeoisie classes vis-à-vis the market. For Marx,
the market as a system of exchange operates beyond the will and interests of individuals, be they capitalists or members of the proletariat. In short, for Marx, market is a realm of mystification that lures and captivates individuals with commodities; this enchantment leaves all social subjects entrapped and unable to resist the dominance of the market, regardless of their class.

2. The meaning of consumerism differs depending on intellectual traditions. Throughout this article, consumerism is used to imply an ideology that promotes consumption. For different meanings of the term, see Gabriel and Lang (1995).

3. Among the Frankfurt School scholars, it was Marcuse (Kellner 1984) and Benjamin (1936) who, respectively, initially demarcated “false needs” from true ones and “authentic art” from mechanically reproduced art devoid of aura and magic. Their theorization formed the basis of H&A’s delineation of culture industries as cultivators of false needs and conclusion that commodified art is stripped of its potential for criticism and autonomy.

4. For a more comprehensive view of management of consumer consciousness via advertising, see Ewen and Ewen (1982), Lears (1994), Marchand (1985), Richards (1990), and Williams (1982).

5. For a contemporary extension of this discourse see Ritzer (1993, 2004) and Schor (1998), who attribute the consumer with more autonomy to resist the marketplace and solve the culture-consumption problematic.

6. While de Certeau portrays a dominating view of the modern market, his claims of a natural milieu for marketplace behavior inevitably convey a much-criticized nostalgic and unrealistic view of a lost Golden Age of the market (Lears 1994; Brown 2001).


8. For a different interpretation of Starbucks’ hegemonic brandscape in the European context, see Kjeldgaard and Osterg (2007).

9. The term “Islamist” is used for individuals who are not just “much more pious than other Muslims, but also search for an alternative Islamic life politics and new social order” (Saktanber 2002, 257).

10. For a more elaborate analysis of Christianity and consumer culture, see Miller (2003).

References


