



Towards a Deeper Understanding of Consumption

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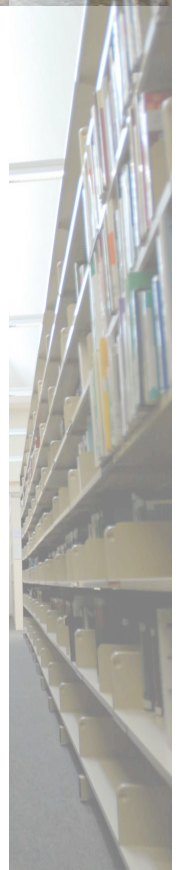
PhD Candidate and Teaching Assistant

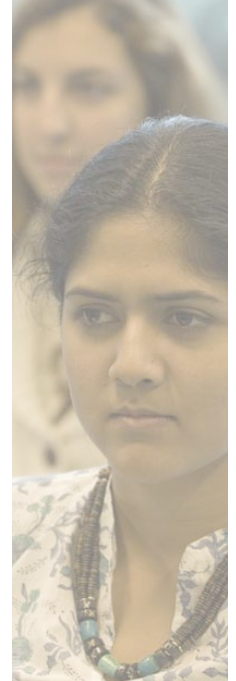
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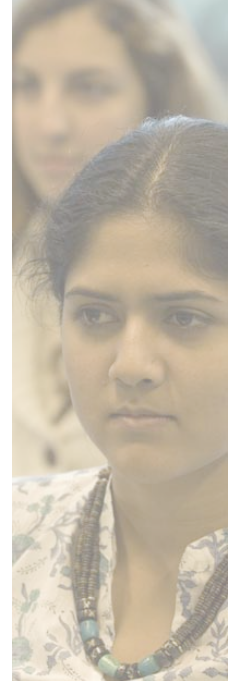
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Introduction

- Background: marketing > development, global ecology
- Part of ongoing doctoral research:
 - **Bridge the gap** between environmental and social science
 - Based on theories from **anthropology** and other social sciences
 - Draws on **qualitative interviews** to understand discourse + **observations** to understand actions
 - In a “developing country” context: Metro Manila

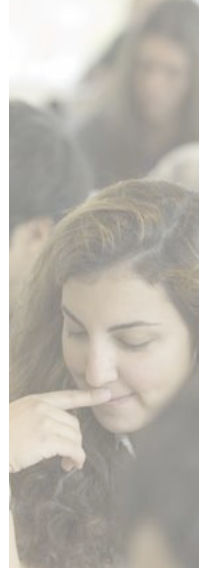


Presentation Structure

- How to define consumption? Disciplinary viewpoints and trends
- What can influence consumption?
Preliminary research results (Note: not available for distribution at this time)
- Applying the concepts: the question of eco-labels
- Conclusion and discussion points

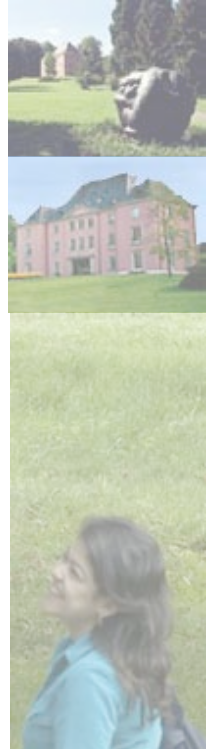


Part I: DEFINING CONSUMPTION



Neo-Classical Economic Viewpoint

- Assumption: consumers as rational, acting independently, meeting “needs”
- Decisions based on **information** and **price**
- Narrow relationship with consumers: supply meets demand
- Consumer sovereignty reigns supreme
- **Consumption = economic growth**
- **Production = jobs**
- Very limited perspective: avoids **social context** and **biophysical inputs/outputs**
- **Dominant** perspective in policy-making



Policy/Institutional Viewpoint

- **Earth Summit 1992:** population growth in the “South” vs. consumption in the “North”?
- Agenda 21, Chapter 4: “Changing Consumption Patters”
- Huge efforts now underway to address Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP)
- OECD, UNEP, UNDESA... 10 Year Framework of Programs, Marrakech Process (2011)
- Focus on **production**: cleaner production, LCA, eco-design, etc.
- **Dominant perspective:** economic reasoning, focus on growth



Environmental/Ecological Economics Viewpoint

- **Biophysical perspective**; Georgescu-Roegen > Daly
- **Definition:** human material provisioning and the draw on ecosystem services; includes non-consumption, usage, re-usage, recycling, repair and disposal...
- One extreme: all science, **no ethical or social perspective.**
- Other extreme (“environmentalism”): **moralistic judgments**; consumption as materialism, capitalism and exploitation.



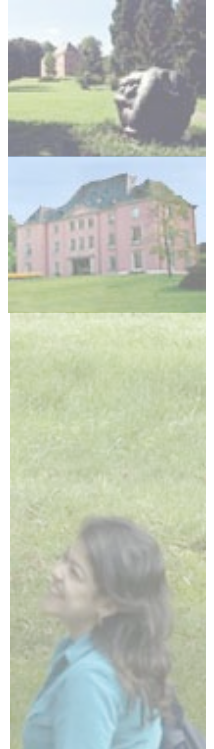
Marketing/ Consumer Behavior Viewpoint

- Consumer behavior: recent field of study (1950s/USA)
- < 1950s: How to “hook” a consumer? Classical economics.
- > 1950s: + Freudian approach, with strong “rational” sense
- **1980s:** + sociology, anthropology; consumption relates to the rest of human existence.
- Define consumers by class and purchasing power > then by demographics and life stages >> then increasingly by **lifestyles**
- Marketing strategies, **4Ps**: product, price, place and promotion
- **Trends:** mobilize meaning, influence the influencers, niche marketing, integrated marketing, under-the-radar marketing....





Anthropology/Sociology Viewpoint

- Classical anthropology: interested in systems of exchanges
 - Mauss, *The Gift*, 1950, pre-capitalist societies: “fait social total”
- > 1970s: **symbolism** vs. materialism
 - Bourdieu; Baudrillard; Douglas and Isherwood: etc.
- Considers meaning behind consumption; web of social relations, including power structures
- Object of study: consumer discourse and actions (instead of “consumer behavior”); ethnography
- Modernisation theories: Slater and Appadurai



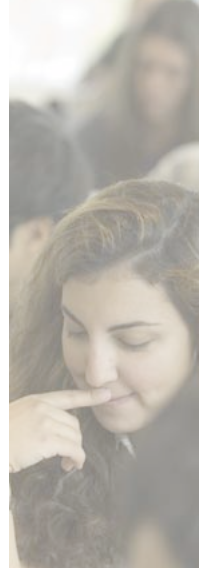
Towards a Definition of Consumption

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- **Material provisioning dimension:** consumption as using-up of resources
 - Biophysical conditions; throughput, scale, patterns
 - Life cycle thinking
 - **Cultural dimension:** consumption as a socially-embedded process, considered globally
 - Social/political/institutional factors
 - Cultural meaning
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Part II: PRELIMINARY RESEARCH RESULTS



How can we transition towards more sustainable consumption?

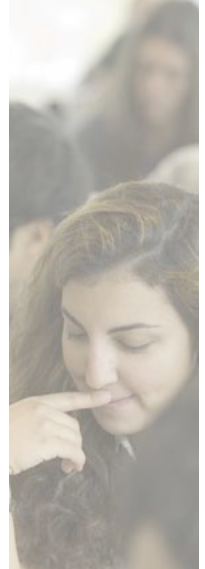
- Factors that **define** consumption
- Factors that **influence and are influenced by** consumption
- Limits and opportunities for influencing consumer actions

Please note: this section has been adapted for distribution purposes; research results are currently not available, pending publication.





Part III: QUESTION OF LABELS



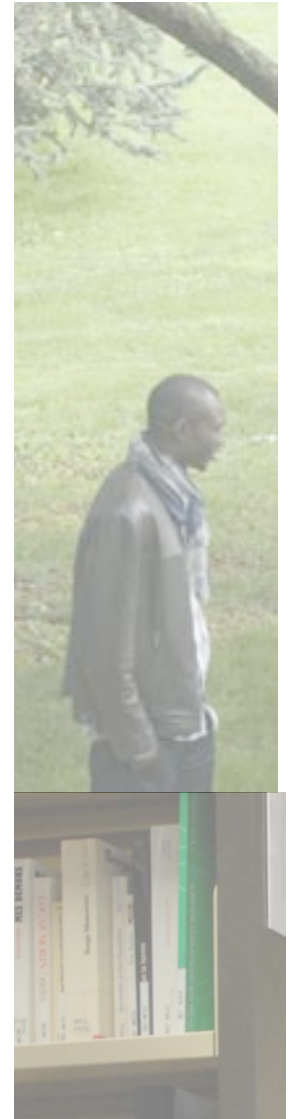
Limits....

- More in line with the **information** and price mindset
- A one-way model of communication
- Consumers confronted with a **sea of labels**
- Are product labels useful, connected to other forms of meaning, coherent (packaging/transport), symbolic....



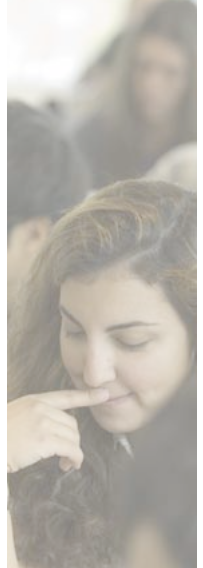
Opportunities...

- Labels as **one tool** in a fully-integrated marketing campaign
 - Help **prioritize**: what is significant?
 - Tie into **lifestyle and connect to other products/ services**: what is meaningful? (high vs. low involvement)
 - **Engage** consumers/influencers
 - Deepen “**life cycle thinking**”



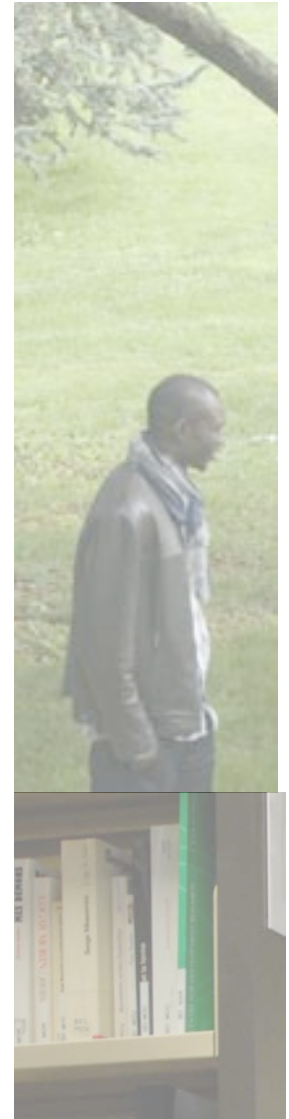


CONCLUSION



The « individualization » of consumption issues:

- Are we not placing too much responsibility on consumers?
- 2006 UK report: *I Will If You Will*. **Consumers want choice editing.**
- **Before the label**, what should we **not be finding** on retail shelves?
- Who should take responsibility: consumers, policy-makers, private sector/retailers?
- Returning a sense of **citizenship** to consumer action



Sustainable consumption, Pandora's Box

If opened, Pandora's Box is said to
unleash all kinds of evils on mankind...
...but at the bottom, there lays Hope.





Thank you for your attention.

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