

Special Issue on Consumer Research Guest Editors' Letter

Welcome to this special issue of the Nordic Journal of Business. The special issue consists of four articles presented at the 3rd Nordic Conference on Consumer Research which took place in May 2014 in Vaasa, Finland. Researchers from the Nordic countries gathered together to present their research on different aspects of consumer behavior. The presentations provided a rich variety of consumer research combining different theoretical perspectives, methodologies and schools of thought.

Contemporary consumer research is multidisciplinary, heterogeneous and multifold in nature. It aims to understand consumers in order to provide knowledge for managerial decision making. Often some emotionally strong, peculiar contexts are able to identify and reveal meanings and hidden processes that are deep in our culture and guide our way of knowing, feeling and behaving. In this issue, there are four diverse contexts explored, namely horsemeat, story-telling, luxury and energy. At the first glance these contexts seem surprising but they are all connected to mundane behavior – eating meat, reading stories, evaluating brands and adopting new products.

Culture and consumption are closely interwoven. For example, in the context of food, cultural

meaning structures determine what is considered edible or inedible. In the first article, *Revealing the paradoxes of horsemeat – the challenges of marketing horsemeat in Finland*, Minna-Maarit Jaskari, Hanna Leipämaa-Leskinen and Henna Syrjälä look into horsemeat markets and reveal the deep-rooted cultural meanings that Finnish consumers are unable to escape. The article was inspired by the horsemeat scandal that raged over Europe in early 2013. The media coverage suggested that there is more to horsemeat consumption than first meets the eye. By analyzing Finnish media texts, the authors are able to reveal five horsemeat paradoxes, namely consumers' simultaneous dislike and like of eating horsemeat. These paradoxes are deeply entwined in our cultural meaning structures.

While culture and consumption are tied together, culture can also be consumed. In the second article, *The consumer experience and the absorbing story*, Magnus Söderlund and Sofie Sagfossen look into consumption of stories and argue that absorption is a central aspect of both experiences and story consumption for consumers. The authors examine factors that have an impact on story absorption and assess the consequences of absorption in the field of books and movies. The

authors find that both empathy and sympathy for the story characters contribute positively to story absorption and they conclude by discussing the implications for marketing of experiences.

Sometimes there is a mismatch between the views of consumers and management as in the case of luxury fashion brands. The field is fragmented and blurred for the consumers thus making it more difficult to understand what luxury is and what it is not. In the third article, *Challenging the hierarchical categorization of luxury fashion brands*, Linda Turunen takes the consumer perspective as a starting point and studies how consumers make sense of the heterogeneous field of luxury fashion brands. The author reveals how consumers determine and consider different brand characteristics in relation to other brands and reflect them against their personal consumption experiences as well as the social context and time. Thus, consumers constantly interpret and renegotiate the definition of luxury that the brands represent.

Segmenting has traditionally been one of the key areas in marketing. Especially in the phase of new product and service development, it is essential for the companies to find the leading customers, the forerunners that are the first ones in the

adoption process. In the fourth article, *Service interest and cluster membership - Who are the pioneering users in energy efficiency service markets?*, Kaisa Matschoss and Nina Kahma study the structure of the energy efficiency service markets in Finland and try to find out who are the most pioneering users of energy efficiency services and how they differ from other users. The authors identify clusters that differ in relation to their level of interest in energy efficiency services, to their environmental attitudes, to activism in home upgrading and to loyalty to electricity retailer.

These four articles illustrate how contemporary consumer research is used to deepen our understanding on consumers and how this knowledge can be applied to managerial decision making. We are indebted to the anonymous ad hoc reviewers for their time and effort in helping shape these and other articles submitted to this special issue. We hope you will find these articles interesting and insightful, and that they will also inspire further research in each area.

Guest Editors,

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