It Isn't Just for Image: The Lived Meaning of Luxury-brand Consumption among Wealthy Thai Teenagers

Kritsadarat WATTANASUWAN

Kritsadarat Wattanasuwan is an assistant professor in the Department of Marketing, Faculty of Commerce and Accountancy, Thammasat University, Bangkok, Thailand. She is now reading for a DPhil. (PhD.) at University of Oxford, England, under the supervision of Professor Dr. Richard Elliott.

Contact Address: Kritsadarat Wattanasuwan
Linacre College
University of Oxford
Oxford, OX1 3JA
England

e-mail: krit.watt@linacre.ox.ac.uk

At present, Thailand is facing severe economic problems. One proposed mitigation to ease the crisis is to reduce the nation's consumption of unnecessary imported products, especially luxury brands. However, it is not easy to campaign against the consumption of those luxury brands without understanding the underlying motivations of such consumption behaviour. In recent years there are a lot of Thai people, especially university students, who seem to be addicted to luxury-brand consumption. Some of them crave the consumption of those luxury brands, beyond their affordability, just to nourish their self-image or to keep up with friends. This phenomenon has not only led to economic problems but also social ones such as debt, crime or prostitution. Thus, it is essential to comprehend the in-depth accounts of symbolic meanings that are attached to the consumption of luxury brands.

Theoretically this study approaches consumption from a cultural perspective. Central to consumption is our endeavour to create our self and social identities. We make consumption choices not only from products' utilities but also from their symbolic meanings (Belk 1988; Bourdieu 1994; Dittmar 1992; Douglas 1982; Gabriel and Lang 1995; Giddens 1991; Goffman 1959; McCracken 1988a). The functions of these symbolic meanings operate in two directions, outward in constructing the social world: *Social-Symbolism*, and inward towards constructing our self-identity: *Self-Symbolism* (Elliott 1997). Evidently mass media such as advertising as well as social interactions play significant roles in the development of symbolic meanings that are attached to our everyday consumption (McCracken 1987; O'Donohoe 1994; Ritson and Elliott 1995; Willis 1990).

To acquire an in-depth understanding of this symbolic consumption phenomenon, an interpretive research approach via ethnographic fieldwork is employed. Although the approach is considered novel in marketing research, it has long been exercised by researchers, especially anthropologists, in cultural studies. Much literature suggests that this interpretive approach can help us deal with the complexity of the issues studied better than the positivist

approach (e.g., Hirschman and Holbrook 1992; McCracken 1988b; Thompson 1996).

This study explores how teenagers, studying in a well-known university in Bangkok, consume luxury brands to create, maintain and express their self-identities, as well as to locate themselves in the socially-constituted world. In the study, my objective is to understand the relationship between these teenagers' lived meanings of luxury-brand consumption and their symbolic project of the self. I do not intend to judge whether they should or should not consume those brands. With heartfelt appreciation, I would like to thank all my informants in this study for their willingness to share their thoughts and feelings towards their luxury-brand consumption with me. Without their co-operation, this study would not be possible.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

The Self and Symbolic Consumption

In the social jungle of human existence, there is no feeling of being alive without a sense of identity.

Erikson (1968)

In postmodernity, where society has become more global but simultaneously fragmented and dispersed, we are "forced to negotiate lifestyle choices among a diversity of options" (Giddens 1991). The concept of identity seems to be the "Rome to which all discussions of modern Western consumption lead since the consumer is thirsting for identity and using commodities to quench this thirst" (Gabriel and Lang 1995). Endeavours to create our self identity often involve our consumption of products, services, and media. Dittmar (1992, p. 3) comments that "material possessions have a profound symbolic significance for their owners, as well as for other people and the symbolic meanings of our belongings are an integral feature of expressing our own identity and perceiving the identity of others."

The self is conceptualised not as a given product of a social system nor as a fixed entity which the individual can simply adopt, but as something we actively create, partially through our everyday consumption (Dittmar 1992; Gabriel and Lang 1995). Thompson (1995, p. 210) describes the self as a *symbolic project*, which the individual must actively construct out of the available symbolic materials, materials which "the individual weaves into a coherent account of who he or she is, a narrative of self-identity." Symbolic self-completion theory (Wicklund and Gollwitzer 1982) suggests that if individuals feel insecure in social roles then they will attempt to 'complete' their discrepant self-concept by the use of symbols they believe to demonstrate role competence.

Additionally much literature suggests that we are what we have, since our possessions are viewed as major parts of our extended selves (Belk 1988).

Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) explain that we invest "psychic energy" such as attention, effort and time in an object. This energy and its products are regarded as a part of the self because they have grown or emerged from the self. The symbolic meanings of our possessions may either portray essences of our individuality, or reflect our desirable connections with others (Kleine *et al* 1995).

Lived vs. Mediated Experience

The symbolic resources available to the individual for the construction of the self can be distinguished as being either lived experiences or mediated experiences (Thompson 1990). Lived experiences constitute the practical activities and face-to-face encounters in our everyday lives. They are situated, immediate, and largely non-reflexive, in that we take them for granted as 'reality'. Mediated experiences are an outcome of a mass-communication culture and the consumption of media products and involve the ability to experience events which are spatially and temporally distant from the practical context of daily life. This is re-contextualised experience, in that it allows the experience of events that transpire far away, and will vary widely in its relevance to the self.

The individual can draw selectively on mediated experience and interlace it with lived experience to construct the self. The life history and social situation of individuals will lead to differential valorisation of forms of experience, varying between those, at one end of the continuum who value only lived experience and have little contact with mediated forms, and others, at the opposite end of the continuum for whom mediated experience has become central to the project of the self.

Advertising and Symbolic Meanings

Advertising is recognised as one of the most potent mediated sources of valorised symbolic meanings (Lannon and Cooper 1983; McCracken 1987;

Mick and Buhl 1992). With the decline of traditional social signification systems such as religion, politics and the family, advertising fills the gap with its privileged 'discourse through and about objects' which allow us to orientate ourselves to the social meanings of our everyday consumption (Slater 1997).

A vital marketing tool in capitalist society, advertising has often been criticised as manipulating the consumer, thus generating artificial demand in the market. It has been condemned for stimulating consumer desire far beyond necessities and creating spurious meanings for products in a culture of consumerism, hence imprisoning consumers in the world of materialism. Nevertheless, it has been argued that advertising does not have such power to manipulate consumers.

Although advertisers aim to create particular meanings for their brands in advertising, meanings interpreted by the consumer may be varied and diverse. There is growing recognition that we are an active and participating audience (Anderson and Meyer 1988; Livingstone 1995; Mick and Buhl 1992; O' Donohoe 1994). We may attend only to certain messages and interpret or make sense of meanings according to our personal perception (Lannon 1992) and our social knowledge (Livingstone 1995). The meaning of a particular advertisement is not given within the advertisement itself, for as Anderson and Meyer (1988) point out, "meaning is not delivered in the communication process, rather it is constructed within it."

Symbolic Meanings: Self-Symbolism vs. Social-Symbolism

The creation of meaning does not conclude in a negotiation process between advertising text and the audience during the exposure. "Shared meanings involving media content will arise among participants in the social action performances of reception and subsequent accommodation" (Anderson and Meyer 1988, p. 47). Yet, these meanings are not definite. Anderson and Meyer (1988, p.34) note that "sense making is an ongoing process in which meanings emerge in layers of time and circumstance and the development of one meaning does not preclude the development of others. We are prolific in our sense making,

developing a depth and complexity of meaning." A variety of meanings are created as outcomes of our personal interest-driven, culturally-situated acts of advertising interpretation (Mick and Buhl 1992).

Ritson and Elliott (1995) suggest that the issues of cultural and interactive advertising can be integrated by a model of advertising literacy. Modelled within the framework of contemporary literacy studies (e.g., Heath 1980; Scribner and Cole 1981), advertising literacy is not only the skill to be able to understand and transfer the meanings from an advertisement but also the ability to use those meanings within the social context of existence. Advertising literacy becomes a significant factor employed by many consumers, especially teenagers, to locate and re-locate their social groups and their identities within those groups, because advertising literacy is used by group members to evaluate each other (O'Donohoe 1994). The social consumption of advertising signification has always involved the process of *discursive elaboration* (Thompson 1990) in which we describe, discuss, argue about or laugh at a certain advertisement. It is in such processes that symbolic meanings evolve.

A Model of Consumption and the Symbolic Project of the Self

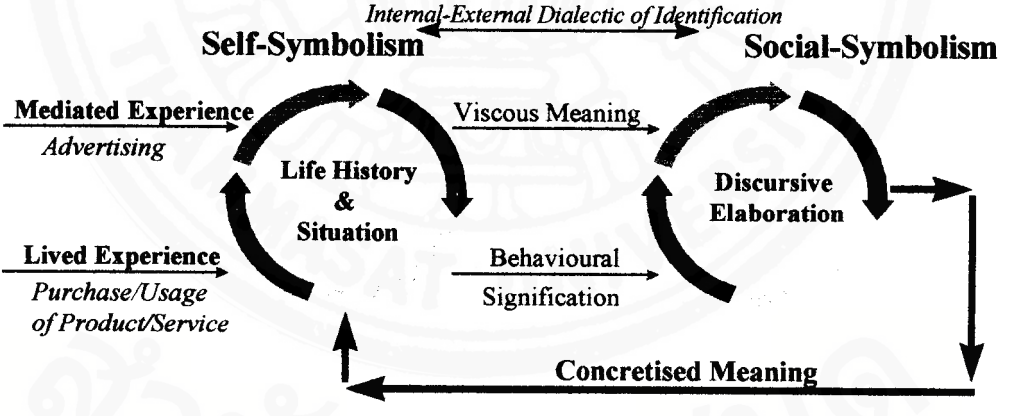
The development of individual self-identity is inseparable from the parallel development of collective social identity, and this problematic relationship has been described as the *internal-external dialectic of identification* by Jenkins (1996). He maintains that self-identity must be validated through social interaction and that the self is embedded in social practices. To pursue our symbolic project of the self, we draw symbolic meanings from mediated experiences like advertising and interlace them with lived experiences in the dialectic process between the two realms of self-symbolism and social-symbolism.

Differential valorisation of forms of experience depends on the life history and social situation of individuals, and simultaneously, we will validate those

symbolic meanings from both forms of experience through the process of *discursive elaboration* in their social interaction (Elliott and Wattanasuwan 1998a). Until meanings from mediated experiences of advertising have been subjected to discursive elaboration in a social context and interwoven with behavioural significations derived from lived experience, they remain viscous, liable to be rejected or just forgotten. Only after this discursive elaboration can symbolic meanings be fully concretised and become what Eco (1979) calls 'realised text.'

The process of the consumption of both mediated and lived experience and the two realms of self-symbolism and social-symbolism are illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1
Consumption and the symbolic project of the self



Symbolic Consumption and Luxury brands

Under capitalism, we live in a rich 'brandscape' (Sherry 1987) from which we must select a personal 'brandspace' within which to live (Biel 1993). Brands are often used as symbolic resources for the construction and creation of the

self (Elliott and Wattanasuwan 1998b). The symbolic consumption of brands can help to establish and communicate some of the fundamental cultural categories such as social status, gender, age, and cultural values like family, tradition and authenticity (McCracken 1993). In order for the meaning of brands to become fully concrete, the mediated meaning derived from advertising must be negotiated with the lived experience of purchase and use – particularly for brands with social-symbolic positioning strategies. In such circumstances, these meanings must be validated through discursive elaboration in a social context.

Elliott and Wattanasuwan (1998b) postulate that brands can also be used to counter some of the threats to the self posed by postmodernity, such as fragmentation, loss of meaning and loss of individuality. In postmodern society, we are threatened by a number of 'dilemmas of the self' (Giddens 1991, p. 201): fragmentation, powerlessness, uncertainty and a struggle against commodification. These dilemmas are driven by the 'looming threat of personal meaninglessness' as we endeavour to construct and maintain our identities which will remain stable throughout a rapidly changing environment. Overtly, brands – especially luxury brands – offer resources which may be used to anchor ourselves in the unruly fragmented world. Luxury brands are also used creatively to achieve 'an ego-ideal which commands the respect of others and inspires self-love' (Gabriel and Lang 1995, p.98).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Objectives and Research Questions

This study was undertaken with two primary research objectives:

(a) to examine in-depth accounts of symbolic meaning phenomena in the context of luxury-brand consumption and answer the initial research questions.

(b) to identify and analyse emergent themes to expand the understanding of the issue studied.

Initially the following research questions were empirically examined:

(1) How do Thai teenagers use their luxury-brand consumption to construct their self and social identities?
(2) To what extent do they draw symbolic meanings from their mediated and lived experiences?
(3) How does self-symbolism interact with social-symbolism in their symbolic project of the self?

Research Informants

Three units of individuals: one, a group of five friends, and two different pairs of close friends, studying in a well-known university in Bangkok were purposively recruited as research informants. These informants have used luxury brands intensively in their everyday consumption. Since teenagers are more receptive to the media and are also in an important period of creating their self and group identities (Erikson 1968; Gabriel and Lang 1995; Willis 1990), they are the best and most crucial subjects to explore the relationships between self-symbolism and social symbolism. Willis (1990, p. 7) advocates the importance of studying teenagers: "it is where they form symbolic moulds through which they understand themselves and their possibilities for the rest of their lives."

Altogether there were nine informants involved in the study. McCracken (1988b, p.17), a prominent consumer researcher, advocates "less is more" as the first principle to study the logic of culture. He comments, "It is more important to work longer, and with greater care, with a few people than more superficially with many of them. For many research projects, eight respondents will be perfectly sufficient." For reasons of confidentiality, all informants are referred to by pseudonyms throughout the paper. A profile of the informants is presented in Table 1.

Table 1:A Profile of the Informants

Name	Sex	Family Background	Examples of Possessions
A	F	Eldest daughter with four sisters. Family owns several businesses. Parents are heavily into luxury brands.	Rolex watches, Louis Vuitton handbags, Prada backpack, Celine, Gucci, Joose, Next, Mobile phone and pager.
B	F	Eldest daughter with a brother. Father is a government officer. Mother runs her own businesses. Parents are into brands.	Tag-Heuer and Baby-G watches, Louis Vuitton handbags, Prada, Chanel and Ferragamo shoes, Mobile phone and pager.
C	F	Second daughter with two sisters and a brother. Family owns small business. Close cousins are heavily into brands.	Rolex watch, Louis Vuitton wallet. Celine handbag, Sisley and Benetton clothes, Replay jeans, Mobile phone and pager.
D	F	Second daughter with two sisters. Parents work in the state enterprises. Into sport with boyish personality.	Nike, Reebok, K-Swiss shoes, Levi's jeans, DKNY, Morgan, Polo T-shirt, Black Label Whisky, pager.
E	M	The youngest son with an elder brother. Father is a retired politician. Parents are into brands.	Rolex watch, Versace shirts and jeans, Armani, Prada, BMW coupe, Black Label Whisky, Mobile phone and pager.
F	M	The only son, lives with widower father. Father owns businesses. Quite shy and quiet.	Armani jeans, Versace and Gucci neck-ties, Timberland and Next shoes, Black Label Whisky, Mobile phone.
G	F	Second daughter with two brothers, lives with a widow mother. Mother runs own businesses. Mother is into brands.	Rolex watch, Gucci handbag, Prada Jacket, Chanel dress, Tommy jeans, DKNY, D&G, Mobile phone and pager.

Name	Sex	Family Background	Examples of Possessions
H	F	Eldest daughter with a sister. Family owns businesses. Parents are into brands.	Rolex watch, Prada handbag, Louis Vuitton, Prada coat, Gucci, Mobile phone and pager.
I	F	Eldest daughter with two sisters. Family owns businesses. Interested in politics.	Gucci handbag, DKNY T-shirt, D&G, Christian Dior, Mobile phone.

Data Collection Methods

This study is based on the philosophical assumptions that consumers (informants) are socially-constructed; thus their behaviour involves interactions with others. The phenomena are lived experiences that are temporal and situational. Moreover, they are not entirely deterministic since they actively search for and interpret symbolic meanings to exercise their consumption choices. These meanings are dynamic and each symbolic consumption choice is unique. Thus, there is no absolute reality. Multiple realities exist according to different consumers, time and contexts. Essentially, they should not be studied in isolation from their cultural context, rather they should be analysed holistically in the natural world of lived experience. The phenomena should be considered from the perspective of the informants. More importantly, the researcher-informants relationship should be interactive and co-operative.

The study, therefore, adopted the interpretive approach to seek idiographic knowledge of the symbolic consumption of luxury brands. To explore in-depth accounts of symbolic meaning in the context of the informants' luxury-brand consumption, I employed a naturalistic mode of inquiry via ethnographic

fieldwork. The study is conducted overtly as recommended by Wallendorf and Belk (1989, p. 69): "by being open with informants about purposes and researcher identities, we have often been allowed access to a wider range of behaviors than would otherwise have been the case." This allows the researcher to ask questions and probe issues which seem inappropriate for a supposed non-researcher participant.

Central to the choice of methods was the problem of dealing not only with the incoherence and paradox of the cultural meanings and symbolic significance of everyday consumption from the perspective of the informants involved, but also the distinctive nature of each informant's lived experience and the socially shared meanings of the consumption (Ozanne and Hudson 1989). Consequently triangulation across several methods was used to cope with the complexity and ambiguity of the issues studied. Observation and long interviews (McCracken 1988b) were two of the main data collection methods. Supplementary methods like auto-driving were also used; for example, informants were asked to make a collage to describe who they were.

The observation (both participative and non-participative) was conducted in the most natural setting possible. This allows a situated appreciation of the symbolic meanings of the informants' behavioural signification as well as understanding the group's interaction process, especially how the group's shared meanings influence its members' consumption choices. The informants were observed for 24 weeks, approximately 6 hours a week. Observational data, including the researcher's impressions, was recorded in the form of tape recordings, fieldnotes and photographs.

The long interviews were conducted individually when the informants began to be familiar with the researcher. A phenomenological approach (Thompson *et al* 1989) was adopted to study the individual's lived experience and constructed reality of symbolic meaning. It aimed to capture personal meanings, values and sense of identity that were embedded in their symbolic

consumption as well as their relationship to the culturally constituted world. Interview questions were phrased in a loosely-structured and non-directive manner (McCracken 1988b) that allowed emergent dialogue. They were formulated during the course of each interview as the informant described her/his experiences, thoughts and feelings. Each informant was interviewed for at least two sessions. Every interviewing session ranged from one to two hours. The first session began with the general question, "Could you please tell me about yourself?" For some informants, the later interview sessions were conducted at their homes, which allowed the researcher to explore their bedrooms and personal possessions. Pair interviews were also conducted with some informants. Interviews were audio-recorded and photographs were taken whenever possible.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

In the analytical process, identified categories were grouped into more general, conceptual classes or abstract constructs. Then, attributes or characteristics of each category and abstract construct were explored to identify its properties and dimensions. Later, the data was compared and integrated to build a coherent conceptual framework grounded in it. Iteration processes such as re-interviewing the informants, re-categorising the data and re-reading the texts were employed to grasp thematic similarities and meaning-based linkages among data (Thompson 1996) until a coherent interpretation was achieved.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The study illustrates the importance of the informants' everyday consumption of luxury brands in their symbolic project of the self. It provides some insights into the complex nature of their thoughts, feelings and behaviour, and highlights the use of symbolic meanings derived from mediated and lived experiences as valuable resources in the creation and maintenance of the self. Evidently, the research findings strongly suggest that these teenage informants consume luxury brands to assist their transition to adulthood. Belk (1988) remarks that consumption helps us to categorise ourselves in society, to ease our self-transitions and to achieve our sense of continuity. In our continuous process of *symbolic self-completion* (Wicklund and Gollwitzer 1982), we always acquire products to complete our self-definition of adulthood, gender, occupation and so on.

Completing the Grown-up Self: Transition to adulthood and the symbolic project of the self

As all informants are in the transition to adulthood, they actively search for a social idea of what it means to be an adult and what kind of adult they would like to become. The primary symbolic project of the self is to create the grown-up self. From a sociological perspective, adulthood is not only biologically but socially constructed. There is a common conception concerning the ingredients that constitute adult status, formed by the members of a culture. Evidently, the research findings suggest that the informants view luxury brands as an essential element that symbolises adulthood. Acquiring a certain set of luxury brands makes the informants feel that they have entered transition to their adulthood. This symbolic consumption becomes the informants' instrument to manipulate their possibilities (Belk 1988) and the core element in the rite of passage to adulthood (Gabriel and Lang 1995).

A: *We're university students now. It's ridiculous to keep on using a kiddy backpack. I want to be recognised as an adult, not a kid.*

B: *We're not kids any more. We can take care of expensive things. My mom bought me this handbag* [Louis Vuitton] *because she knew that I was grown up enough to take care of it.*

For these informants, being allowed by parents to purchase and use luxury brands makes them feel that their parents accept their grown-up selves. It symbolises the trust that their parents have in them as responsible adults.

Generally teenagers are highly self-conscious in making product choices. From this study, luxury brands not only symbolise adulthood but also the image of adulthood the informants want to attain. Gabriel and Lang (1995, p.89) support the findings that, "By early adolescence, virtually every choice becomes tainted by image-consciousness."

C: *I bought this handbag* [Celine] *when I was about to go to university. I just thought, would I be able to make new friends, if I didn't have anything* [luxury brands]*? At that time, I perceived that there were two main kinds of students in the university – the nerds and the chic. I knew that I couldn't mingle with those nerds. I was not one of them. So, another option was to join the chic bunch. But, how could I mingle with them if I didn't have what they had. I thought that my family could afford it... so I asked my mom to buy this handbag for me. However, once I got in to this university, I didn't really use this Celine handbag. It looked too formal. It didn't fit well with people here. So, I bought this Versace backpack...it looked more casual.*

Indeed, in such transition the informants visualise their ideal self according to the imagined possibilities of the self. Consequently, they consume different sorts of products to try out those possibilities. Markus and Nurius (1986, p. 954) suggest that, "an individual is free to create any variety of possible selves, yet the pool of possible selves derives from the categories made salient by the

individual's particular sociocultural and historical context and from the models, images, and symbols provided by the media and by the individual's immediate social experiences."

The concept of possible selves as components of the self-concept suggests that the self can be multifaceted. Also, the concept allows us to account for both spatial (situational) and temporal malleability of the self and its continuity and stability (Markus and Nurius 1986). Clearly, the findings support that the informants use consumption, especially on clothes and accessories, to portray the multifacets of the self.

E: *Yes, if I want to look respectable, for example, if I'm giving a presentation in class, I'll put on trousers and a white shirt. When I go clubbing, I'll wear something else... jeans maybe. If I want to look cool, second-hand Levi's and an Armani shirt will do.*

G: *No, I don't stick to one particular style. It depends on how I feel on the day. Sometimes I get up and feel like being a sexy woman. I'll put on make-up and a black Chanel dress. Sometimes I feel like being a Rave teenager; I'll put on DKNY T-shirt and Tommy jeans. I don't know. It depends on where and with whom I'll be too. It's fun that we can be anything we want to.*

H: *Of course, we feel different when we wear different clothes, don't we?*

Willis (1990, p. 89) comments that "Clothes can make people feel differently in different contexts. For some young people, and especially young women, the clothes they wear on any particular day will influence the way they talk, behave and present themselves."

Creating and expressing gender identity is a vital part in the process of constructing the informants' grown-up selves. Consumption of luxury brands becomes a crucial medium for grounded aesthetics in which the informants, especially female informants, use to express their glamorous femininity. They

feel that those sumptuous designer brands help to enhance their feminine appearance.

A: *I tend to go for dresses these days. No more unisex outfits. I want to look more feminine. I like Joose dresses. They look simple, but neatly cut. I bought designer clothes not because of their brands, but because of the designs, the materials and the cuts. You can see the difference. It's worth buying.*

H: *When I buy my clothes, shoes or handbags, I choose them carefully. I'm pretty concerned about how I look. We women don't want to look cheap, do we?*

Male informants also reckon that designer brands can enhance their masculine charisma. They believe that those famous brands help improve their personality.

F: *I'm a man. I want to look credible. These things* [e.g., clothes, shoes, watch] *help create good personality...a leadership look maybe. Dressing up is not only for women. It's not that we want to look sexy. We want to look good.*

As some informants are finishing their university education and preparing to enter into the workplace, they cautiously consume luxury products to construct the 'professional-look' self.

B: *We should prepare ourselves. We can't transform from sloppy students into working women in one day. How can we walk with confidence if we never wear them* [high heel shoes]*? A working woman should look self-confident, eh?*

F: *I want to be an investment banker. I have to look neat and mature. Neckties are very important. I like Gucci. It looks more subtle... more professional. A Versace tie is too much for me – its design is a bit over the top.*

I: *I have a job interview next week. I think this suit will make me look professional. My mom helped me choose this one. She's also a working woman.*

Mediated vs. Lived Experiences: Sources of Symbolic Meanings

The research findings support that mediated experience through advertising is a considerable source of symbolic meanings for the informants. They constantly look for new 'in' brands and products from advertisements in foreign fashion magazines in order to obtain updated information about those products. Knowing such information symbolises their leadership in the world of luxury brands. Obviously this knowledge of brands becomes symbolic resource to advance their self project.

G: *I love to read Elle. I'd like to keep up with what's new in the market. We always talk about trends in the market...what's in? What's out? I feel stupid if I don't know.*

H: *I regularly read foreign magazines. I feel so thrilled to see an advertisement of a new model* [Prada bag] *coming out. I'd like to have it before it becomes popular in Thailand.*

Interestingly, the informants do not derive only product-related meanings from advertisements. Some advertisements give them an idea about their self concepts. **B** talks about the advertisements she put in her collage,

B: *I like this Kenneth Cole advertisement. When I saw it, I thought "Yes". This light blue, cloth shoe is unconventional. It frees itself from those conventional colours of black, brown or white shoes. I feel that this shoe portrays my liberation from formality. ...This is a Cooler Club advertisement. I don't drink but I like the advertising concept. It's so simple but cool. Like this CK Be advertisement, it's very simple but again it looks really cool and classy. I think if we can stand out on the basis of simplicity, it shows that we're really cool. ...When I dress up, I want to wear something simple but chic.*

Although some literature (Fazio and Zanna 1978; Smith and Swinyard 1988) suggests that attitudes formed through lived experience are stronger, more accessible, held more confidently, and are more predictive of behaviour than those derived from mediated experience through advertising, this study shows that in postmodernity mediated experience of advertising is possibly as significant as lived experience in the symbolic project of the self. Evidently advertising provides symbolic meanings that the informants later rework and realise in the field of their lived experiences. The mediated ideals in advertising become the interpretive tools through which the informants negotiate their social and symbolic selves.

C: *I like that U-Billy Jewellery advertisement on TV. I'd like to be like that woman in the advertisement ...working in a beautiful office where she can look outside. I want to work in a glass building where we can see outside. It doesn't look stuffy. I like the way she dresses too...that's how I want to dress when I work. I also like her personality ...a respectable working woman with a playful fringe.*

H: *Yes, advertising gives us ideas of what is 'in' or what will be 'in'...hairstyles, outfits, colours, etc. I usually look at how those models in advertising or magazines dress and combine it with how other people on the streets dress in order to create my own style.*

The relationship between mediated and lived experiences is dialectical. Symbolic meanings obtained from advertising become more powerful when the informants have applied them in their lived experience.

G: *I saw the advertisement of this Gucci handbag in Elle. I figured that it was for me, but I didn't buy it right away. Well, it was not available in Thailand at that time. Later I saw it again in Hong Kong and it reminded me of how I felt when I first saw it in the advertisement. I bought it without the second thought. I really love it. I'm so proud to own it.*

Although the study illustrates the importance of mediated ideals obtained

from advertising in the creation project of the self, it is noticeable that the more the informants are exposed to direct experiences with the world of luxury brands, the less they look for symbolic resources from advertising. As the informants have more opportunities to travel abroad, thus to visit retailers of various luxury brands and to behold how teenagers in those countries dress, they tend to be less active in searching for new resources in advertising.

E: *Yes, I enjoy looking at advertisements in the magazines. However, I learn about new popular models or brands from travelling. Our family often go abroad...Europe, America, Hong Kong, especially America and Hong Kong. We have a house in America, but it's a bit far. So, we only go once or twice a year. We often go shopping in Hong Kong though. It's near. We can go there just for the weekend. Most importantly, it's a place to find the latest fashion.*

H: *We are usually behind Japan and Hong Kong a few years. When I go to Japan or Hong Kong, I always observe what is chic there. Like this Chanel handbag, it's just started to become popular here. It's been popular much earlier among teenagers in Japan.*

Valorisation of Mediated and Lived Experiences: Self-Symbolism VS. Social-Symbolism

The informants' symbolic project of the self is a continuous process, in which their life history plays a significant role in making sense of who they are today and who they want to be in the future. Most informants are from the nouveaux-riche families where parents are into luxury brands and seem to reinforce their children with their lavish lifestyles. Since their childhood the informants have always been in a group of 'branded' kids. In their early years, they were into children's brands like Hello Kitty, Kero or Forever Friends. Unquestionably, one life event has led to another event and those events are interlaced into a coherent sequence of their narrative identity (Ricoeur 1984). The symbolic meanings they have drawn throughout their lives contribute to the develop-

ment of today's meanings. Once they have entered transition to adulthood, they have begun to consume more expensive and sophisticated adult brands.

A: *My parents want me to look good. They don't like me to put on sloppy clothes. Especially my dad, he said his daughters must look beautiful. He always buys dresses for us. I think I like to dress well too.*

D: *Since I was young, I've never been like most other girls. I'm not a lady-like kind of woman. I love cars, stereos and sports. I can't imagine myself using a Gucci handbag or wearing a Sisley dress. It isn't me. I still want to look cool though. I prefer sporty brands like K-Swiss, Nike or Reebok.*

E: *When I was young, there was time when my parents were very busy with their work. They didn't even have time to take care of our spending. They let somebody else took care of the matter and we could ask for as much money as we liked. Come to think of it, I have to admit that I was stupid in throwing money away. I'm getting better now; however, I still can't help buying those expensive brands. But I think I'm more rational in spending money now.*

H: *I know I have this bad habit. I've been hooked on expensive brands. This is because I went to school in Singapore. Singapore, like Hong Kong, is really a consumer society. Having lived there for a few years, I've become like other Singaporean kids. Up until now I can't break this habit. The more grown up I am, the more expensive is the stuff I buy.*

Along the continuous process of identity construction, the informants have explored their feelings, thoughts and experiences towards their luxury-brand consumption to create their distinctive selves. However, to create a sense of identity is not only to distinguish the individual from the masses but perhaps also to lose a sense of difference and become like the others. Clearly the study shows that the informants' consumption of the luxury brands becomes more symbolically meaningful when it is approved by significant others. Apart from

their families and relatives, the informants are immensely influenced by their peers. The research findings illuminate the process of the *internal-external dialectic of identification* (Jenkin 1996) between self-symbolism and social-symbolism in the informants' symbolic project of the self. The informants constantly and actively validate the symbolic meanings from both mediated and lived experiences through the process of *discursive elaboration* in their social interactions.

A: *With my high school friends, I can wear whatever I feel like. We dress quite unconventionally...sometimes crazily. For instance, the other day we dressed like old aunties...carrying a basket, wearing a hat and a knitted blouse. But with my friends here, I'm a bit cautious. I feel that there're eyes judging how I dress. If I don't feel confident* [in a particular dress], *I won't wear it.*

B: *Of course, my friends have some influence on my buying decisions. Sometimes I want to buy something because I think it's beautiful. I like it. But if my friends think it doesn't look good, I may not feel confident enough to buy it. If we want to look good, we should listen to our friends' opinions, shouldn't we? If my friends say "okay...pass", I believe them. But if they think it's unacceptable, I reckon that " hey, maybe I didn't look at the thing carefully." So I tend not to buy it. ...However, if my friends didn't like a thing that I've already bought, I would hesitate to use it at first, then I would try to use it again. Well, I didn't want to throw it away. I've spent money on it already. If my friends don't say anything, I would use it. If they still made comments, I wouldn't use it again.*

C: *I have to admit that I bought this Louis* [Vuitton] *handbag because other people in our group have got some.*

D: *Yes, I've just bought these Underground shoes because of friends. We went shopping at Ma Boonkrong the other day. My friends encouraged me to buy them. They suggested that this brand be cool. It's an alternative to Dr. Marten. I like blue, so I took the blue ones. At first my friends kind of*

disagreed on the colour. But I went for it anyway. Now my friends reckon that it's cool.

F: *I'm not good at choosing things. Sometimes I just follow my friends' opinion.*

H: *We* [her group] *have similar tastes. We love dressing up. We regularly talk about what's 'in' and what's 'out'. We may have different styles though, but we all are quite glamorous in our own way. That's why we are friends. Anyway, even though I don't think my friends would judge my style, I'm still quite sensitive about how I dress. I sometimes ask my friends for their advice. Well, I don't want to be out of place.*

I: *I've improved a lot. When I was a fresher, I dressed plainly... quite out of date. My friends called me "A-ma."*[1] *They still do. Well, they didn't mean to look down on me. They just teased me lovingly. Most of my friends are heavily into brands. You may reckon that they're chic. I've learned how to dress from friends. I've observed how they dress and see what would fit me. I go shopping with them quite often. I don't really shop myself, but it's fun to watch them shop...see how they choose things. I like to listen to their discussions about fashion as well. They always suggest "this is good...this is gorgeous." Now I read fashion magazines more, so I can participate in the discussion.*

Interestingly, in this information age, some informants not only discuss their views and experiences towards various brands with their friends, but also discuss the matter with their cyber-friends via the Internet chat room.

A: *I'm now hooked on the Internet. I discuss things with other teenagers, mostly Thai though, around the world. Sometimes we talk about new products or new 'in' brands. It's good to know what's going on in Europe or America. We share our views towards them such as "why does ...* [a particular brand] *really suck these days?" or "Try this, it's cool."*

---

[1] A Chinese word for "grandma".

Dynamics of Luxury-brand Consumption

The symbolic meanings of luxury-brand consumption are dynamic. This study suggests that the informants do not consume those brands just to create and express the glamorous image of their selves, but also use them for various meanings. Symbolically the informants employ luxury brands as emblems of liberation from authoritative or over-protective parents; as talismans to provide security for them in the unruly world of grown-ups; as sources of excitement and fantasy; and as cultural capital in the age of globalisation.

Luxury brands as Emblems of Liberation

All informants claim that they come from loving and warm families. Even though the findings suggest that most of their parents are either authoritative or over-protective, the informants affirm that they are close to their parents. The informants feel that their parents have given them the best any parents can. Like many Thai, to re-pay their parents and express gratitude, they have tried to follow the values of being good children. Simply put, they feel obliged to fulfil their parents' needs and to avoid upsetting them. In such efforts, they seem to be trapped in their parents' realms – they have not yet been adults in their own right. Although all informants are adults in the eyes of law[2], they are still 'babies' in the eyes of their parents. They still need to ask their parents for permissions to do things. The informants always listen to their parents' opinions and are inevitably obedient to them.

A: I'm the first child in the family. I know that I'm my parents' favourite. I don't like the idea though. Especially my father, I feel that he loves me more than my sisters. Maybe because I always live up to his expectations. He's so proud of me. He loves to talk about me with relatives and friends. He hopes that I will inherit our family businesses after I graduate. I want to do a master's degree and possibly work in an advertising agency though. ...

[2] All informants are over twenty years old. Legally, Thai citizens are eligible to vote if they are over eighteen years old

Sometimes I still act like their little daughter. I love to cuddle my mom. But I want my parents to see me as a person who can be responsible for myself, a trustworthy person. My parents are quite concerned about us [A and her sisters], *they would like us to be home before dusk. Every evening once I get back home, I have to call them to let them know that I've been home safely* [A's parents live in another province where their main businesses are based.]. *If I haven't called them yet, they will be very worried and frustrated. They won't have dinner until I call them. So, usually I try to be home by half past six. ...My parents are very strict – they don't want me to stay the night anywhere else. I can't stay the night at my friends' houses. I can't go anywhere alone with my male friends. But if I want to go with only female friends, they won't allow me either because they think it's too dangerous for us.*

B: *My parents are very protective of me. My mom still drives me to university and picks me up in the evening everyday. My mom bought me this mobile phone so that she could reach me. They hardly let me go anywhere by myself. For example, I wanted to go to a* [English] *Summer course abroad. My dad didn't let me go. I wanted to go to the 'rub nong.'*[3] *Again, my dad didn't let me go.*

E: *We have a warm family. I'm close to my parents. We always do things together. ...No, no, I'm still their son, not their friend. I still need to be obedient to them. ...I don't like to study business, but my parents want me to so. I can do it, but I don't enjoy it much. I'm thinking of taking a course in interior design after I finish this degree. I haven't told my parents yet. I don't want to upset them. I think I'll wait until I graduate, then I'll tell them. Well, at least I will get the degree that they want me to have.*

H: *Our family is very warm. We are intimate, deeply loving and caring for*

[3] The party organised to welcome the fresher usually being held in a resort/camping place outside Bangkok.

each other. We always do things together. ...Yes, there have been a few incidences that my parents, my mom, read my letters. ...I wasn't so angry because I thought that it wasn't appropriate [to be angry at parents]. *I've never have any secret with my mom any way. We have to understand that our parents are just concerned about us and just curious about what's in the letters. They didn't mean to read them. I asked my mom not to read my letters and told her that I'd tell her about the contents in the letters if she wanted to know.*

Although the informants' parents are strict with the informants in many aspects, they paradoxically indulge their children in buying luxury brands. The informants are allowed to buy what they like. Seemingly choosing the brands or the models is one of a few decisions that the informants can exercise more freely. It is also suggested that luxury brands can be used to form an autonomous adult ego since their meanings can be used to forge a sense of affiliation with other social groups outside their own families; thus, mark a sense of distance from the parents' realms (Thompson and Haytko 1997). Symbolically, the informants' luxury-brand consumption has become emblematic of liberation from their parents. However, for the parents, to allow their children to use luxury brands can be seen as a strategy to control their children. Ironically, these teenagers seem to become more and more financially dependent on their parents and possibly more obliged to comply to their demands.

Luxury brands as Talismans

In their transition to adulthood, the informants symbolically use luxury brands as talismans to provide security for them in the unruly world of grown-ups. Gergen (1991, p. 15) describes the unruly world under postmodernity: "Yet we are now bombarded with ever-increasing intensity by the images and actions of others; our range of social participation is expanding exponentially. As we absorb the views, values, and visions of others, and live out the multiple plots in which we are enmeshed, we enter a postmodern consciousness. It is a world

in which we no longer experience a secure sense of self, and in which doubt is increasingly placed on the very assumption of a bounded identity with palpable attributes."

Challenged by the fragmented and uncertain nature of postmodernity, the informants try to pursue a sense of security in their lives, especially when they are in the world outside their homes. Mulder (1996) comments that, to the Thai, the reliable and trustworthy world is centred around their mothers; thus, the further away from the mothers, the less secured the world. Indeed they need different kinds of talismans – amulets, such as, images of Buddha, to protect them in the untrustworthy world. Symbolically luxury brands have become present day talismans to safeguard the informants in the social interactions outside homes. They believe that those celebrated brands can aid them to avoid unwise buying decisions, hence social embarrassment. Presumably, luxury brands offer consistency in an ever-changing world and this reassurance is a vital element in their added value (Feldwick 1991).

C: *These are famous brands. They are widely recognised for their qualities and designs. They give us peace of mind. It's a sure thing.*

F: *We usually drink Black* [Johnny Walker Black Label]. *Maybe because everybody does. ÖNo, I've never drink Red* [Johnny Walker Red Label]. *I don't know why. I started* [my drinking] *with Black and stick to it. Red is something I never think of drinking. ...When we're broke, we go for Spay* [Spay Royal], *not Red. If we can't afford Black, we wouldn't want to remind ourselves* [by going for Red], *eh? Spray is to be a good alternative. It seems to be an 'in' cool brand.*

G: *I don't want to look 'cheoy.'*[4] *I want to be chic. I'll never go wrong with these brands.*

---

[4] Out of date

To obtain a sense of security in the unruly world of the grown-ups,the informants need to feel a firm sense of social acceptance. "The Thai person is socially defined and subject to the acceptance of others. As a consequence, he must find and cultivate his resources in the social world, the commonly accepted validation of the person being defined in term of his capacity to present himself (Mulder 1996, p. 111). Obviously, the informants believe that these luxury brands are talismans that can magically bring them a sense of affiliation with other sophisticated grown-ups with minimal effort and time. Indeed, participation in such mutual consumption and lifestyle symbolises a form of relatedness in the society (Elliott 1997; Thompson and Haytko 1997)".

Luxury brands as Sources of Excitement and Fantasy

Since most informants feel bound to behave in accordance with their parents' expectations, they tend to avoid doing anything 'naughty.' The extravagance of luxury-brand consumption seems to become their primary source of excitement and fantasy. It is like playing a challenging game: who is the first one to know of the latest popular model or brand? When and where is it available? Who is the first one to get it? Although the informants consume common luxury brands to relate themselves to their friends, they also endeavour to create their own sense of differentiation. It is exciting for them to mix various brands or styles in order to create new meanings to achieve their personalised lavish style. Thompson and Haytko (1997) mark that a mixture of brands is a decommodification strategy that allows consumers to experience a sense of uniqueness and self-guidance in their personalised style.

A: *I feel thrilled to find a rare model or colour. I don't like to shop in the same places as my friends. I prefer to shop in a little-known store. I don't like to tell my friends where I buy things either. ...I'm always among the first few people to use something* [a particular brand or model]. *When everyone in the group uses it, I switch to something else.*

E: *I love shopping; it makes me feel good. Recently we* [E's family] *went to Hong Kong. It was a fun shopping trip. We shopped...shopped...shopped from one store to another.*

G: *I don't like to wear a particular brand from head to toes. Okay, we all are brand crazy, but I always try to differentiate myself. For example, I may use this 'Khun Nai'*[5] *Gucci handbag with second-hand Levi's.*

H: *I love Prada. It's 'my' brand at the moment. I knew about the brand before it became popular in Thailand. I'm always excited when a new Prada model comes out. I'm looking forward to its new gimmick. Unlike Louis* [Vuitton], *Prada doesn't stick to the same material; it's more dynamic and exciting.*

Sometimes luxury brands are also used as sources of fantasy.

B: *I like this pair of shoes. I like the design. It doesn't cover the entire foot. I feel sexy when I put them on.*

Luxury brands as Cultural Capital

Coming mostly from nouveaux-riche families, the informants consume luxury brands to illustrate not only their economic wealth but also their sophisticated tastes. The informants' knowledge of luxury brands becomes symbolic resource (Elliott 1994) to be accumulated into the cultural capital employed to create distinction in society (Bourdieu 1994). As a hierarchical society, Thailand is a place where most social relationships are characterised by relative superiority versus inferiority (Mulder 1996). Such cultural capital promises to assist the location of the informants in a desirably superior social class. To maintain their status quo, it is essential for the informants to keep up with the knowledge regarding the world of luxury products. Apart from basic

[5] A female boss or a boss' wife. When referred as style, it usually associates with 'formal', 'sophisticated' and 'prestigious'.

information such as the latest models or brands in the market, the informants also acquire sophisticated knowledge such as a brand history, its designers and customers or the brand's special materials. Some even claim that they are able to detect the counterfeits.

A: *Of course, I can spot the fake ones. People may think that there's no difference between the bogus and the real. Yes, they may look similar, but if you know the product well enough, you'll be able to tell. There're some people in my class who use fake Versace* [backpacks]. *I can spot them right away.*

B: *Do you know that this Prada backpack is expensive because of its special material? It's the same material they use to make an astronaut's outfit. It isn't flammable.*

Additionally, the informants' luxury-brand consumption also characterises their cultural capital in the age of globalisation. To become globally refined citizens, the informants judge that they need to acquire certain knowledge of global culture. To them, global culture means Western culture, more specifically the consumer culture of the West. Without a doubt, they merely know the material aspects of Western culture via media and shopping centres. In this capitalist world, it is essential for the informants to learn about world-class brands; never mind Socrates, Shakespeare or Mozart. Knowledge and use of those renowned brands helps them achieve a sense of global belonging. Interestingly, the informants also hold that their luxury-brand consumption can elevate the image of Thai people as a whole.

G: *I think it is essential that we dress well, especially when we travel abroad. If we wear sloppy clothes, those foreigners will not only look down on us, but all Thai people. I wear these brands because I want them to realise that we, the Thai, also have good taste. We are not savages; we are as civilised as they are.*

The above statements clearly reflect Sivaraksa's criticism (1991, p. 46) regarding 'the crisis of Siamese identity': "We just grope and strive to be like a developed country. We try to be one of the Newly Industrialised Country (NIC), to look East [Japan] as we used to look West, as if these countries were so perfect or ideal, a hallucination of the elites who are mostly half-educated or only educated in the material aspects of the West without understanding our own spiritual and cultural identity." Obviously, in the age of globalisation, we even strive harder to become like the West.

CONCLUSION

This study strongly supports the postmodern perspective on consumption as a central activity in which the informants actively consume symbolic meanings from advertising, luxury brands and products to create and communicate their self-identities in the transition to adulthood as well as to locate themselves in the culturally constituted world. Although the mediated experience of advertising is less potent than lived experience, it still plays a significant role in supplying symbolic meanings for the project of the self. Obviously adult imagery in advertising is adopted as an ideal definition of adulthood. In the process of identity construction, the symbolic meanings from both mediated and lived experience will constantly be validated through the process of discursive elaboration in social settings.

Ethnographic fieldwork has yielded an in-depth understanding of the symbolic phenomena of the informant's everyday luxury-brand consumption. While observation provides evidence of the informants' actual behaviour and their social interaction, especially the process of discursive elaboration within the group, the long interviews allowes us to delve phenomenologically into the informants' thoughts, feelings and behaviour. Both methods help us triangulate on the complexity of the issues studied.

The study clearly illustrates that the lived meaning of luxury-brand consumption among these teenage informants is more dynamic than just being

a symbolic resource to construct their glamorous selves. More importantly, it helps them to ease the transition to adulthood. Symbolically the informants employ luxury brands as emblems of liberation from authoritative or over-protective parents; as talismans to provide security for them in the unruly world of grown-ups; as sources of excitement and fantasy; and as cultural capital in the age of globalisation. Thus, attempts to lessen luxury-brand consumption among teenagers will inevitably need to go beyond economic mitigation such as taxation, or public relation campaigns. This problematic consumption is more socially and culturally associated. Indeed some primary questions need to be answered. How can we let our children grow up in their own right, yet maintain our family values? How can we develop appropriate social and educational systems that promote us to grow intellectually, emotionally and spiritually so that we do not need commercially branded talismans to provide us with a sense of security? How can we encourage our teenagers to go for more constructive sources of excitement and fantasy? How can we restore our national identity[6] to actualise ourselves in the age of globalisation?

Since this study concentrates on groups of wealthy teenagers, we can only understand the in-depth account of symbolic meanings to a certain extent. To comprehend the issue more widely, further studies should be conducted, if possible, among less wealthy teenagers who crave luxury brands beyond their affordability; that is those who rent the products or prostitute themselves or commit crimes to earn money to buy them.

6 By this, I do not mean 'how to wai' or 'how to crawl' which i think are only forms or rituals of Thainess, not the quintessence of being Thai.

References

Anderson, James A. and Timothy P. Meyer (1988), *Mediated Communication: A Social Action Perspective,* London: Sage.

Belk, Russell W. (1988), "Possessions and the Extended Self," *Journal of Consumer Research,* 15 (September), 139-168.

Biel, A. (1993), "Converting brand image into equity," in *Brand Equity and Advertising*, D. Aaker and A. Biel (eds.) Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Bourdieu, Pierre (1994), *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste,* London: Routledge.

Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly and Eugene Rochberg-Halton (1981), *The Meaning of Things: Domestic symbols and the self,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Dittmar, Helga (1992), *The Social Psychology of Material Possessions: To have is to be,* Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatheaf.

Douglas, Mary (1982), *In the active voice*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Douglas, Mary and Baron Isherwood (1978), *The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption*, London: Allen Lane.

Eco, Umberto (1979), *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts,* London: Hutchinson.

Elliott, Richard (1994), "Exploring the Symbolic Meaning of Brands," *British Journal of Management,* 5 (Special Issue), S13-S19.

Elliott, Richard (1997), "Existential Consumption and Irrational Desire," *European Journal of Marketing*, 34, 4, 285-296.

Elliott, Richard and Kritsadarat Wattanasuwan (1998a), "Consumption and the Symbolic Project of the Self," in *European Advances in Consumer Research,* Vol. 3, Basil G. Englis and Anna Olofsson, eds., Elliott, Richard and Kritsadarat Wattanasuwan (1998b), "Brands as Symbolic Resources for the Construction of Identity," *International Journal of Advertising: The Quarterly Review of Marketing Communications,* 17 (2), 131-144.

Erikson, Erik (1968), *Identity: Youth and Crisis*, London: Faber & Faber.

Fazio, R. and M. Zanna (1978), "On the Predictive Validity of Attitudes: The Role of Direct Experience and Confidence," *Journal of Personality,* 46, 228-243.

Feldwick, P. (1991), "Defining a brand," in *Understanding Brands: By 10 People Who Do*, D. Cowley (ed.), London: Kogan Page.

Gabriel, Yiannis and Tim Lang (1995), *The Unmanageable Consumer: Contemporary Consumption and its Fragmentations*, London: SAGE Publications.

Gergen, Kenneth J. (1991), *The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life*, USA: BasicBooks.

Giddens, Anthony (1991), *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Goffman, Erving (1959), *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

Heath, Shirley B. (1983), *Ways with words*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hirschman, Elizabeth C. and Morris B. Book (1992), *Postmodern Consumer Research*, Newbury Park: SAGE Publications.

Jenkins, Richard (1996), *Social Identity*, London: Routledge.

Kleine, Susan S., Robert E. Kleine III and Chris T.Allen (1995), "How Is a Possession 'Me' or 'Not Me'?: Characterizing Types and an Antecedent of Material Possession Attachment," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 22, 327-343.

Lannon, Judith (1992), "Asking the right questions - what do people do with advertising?," *Admap*, (March), 11-16.

Lannon, Judith and Peter Cooper (1983), "Humanistic Advertising: A Holistic Cultural Perspective," *International Journal of Advertising*, 2, 195-213.

Livingstone, Sonia M. (1995), *Making Sense of Television: The psychology of audience interpretation*, Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann.

Markus, Hazel and Paula Nurius (1986), "Possible Selves," *American Psychologist*, 41 (9), 954-969.

McCracken, Grant (1987), "Advertising: Meaning or Information?," in *Advances in Consumer Research*, XIV., M. Wallendorf and P. E. Anderson, eds., Provo UT: Association for Consumer Research.

McCracken, Grant (1988a), *Culture and Consumption: New Approaches to The Symbolic Character of Consumer Goods and Activities*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

McCracken, Grant (1988b), *The Long Interview*, London: SAGE Publications.

McCracken, Grant (1993), "The value of the brand: an anthropological perspective," in *Brand Equity and Advertising,* D. Aaker and A. Biel (eds.) Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Mick, David G. and Claus Buhl (1992), "A Meaning-base Model of Advertising Experiences," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 19 (December), 317-338.

Mulder, Niels (1996), *Inside Thai Society: Interpretations of Everyday Life,* The Pepin Press: Amsterdam.

O'Donohoe, Stephanie (1994), "Advertising Uses and Gratifications," *European Journal of Marketing,* 28 (8/9), 52-75.

Ozanne, Julie L. and Laurel A. Hudson (1989), "Exploring Diversity in Consumer Research," in *Interpretive Consumer Research,* Elizabeth Sherry, John F. (1987), " Advertising as a cultural system," in *Marketing and Semiotics: New Directions in the Study of Signs for Sales,* J. Umiker-Sebeok, ed., Mouton de Gruyter, 441-462.

Sivaraksa, Sulak (1991), "The Crisis of Siamese Identity," in *National Identity and Its Defenders: Thailand, 1939-1989,* Craig J. Reynolds, ed., Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 41-58.

Slater, Don (1997), *Consumer Culture & Modernity,* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Smith, Robert E. and William Swinyard (1988), "Cognitive Response to Advertising and Trial: Belief strength, Belief Confidence and Product Curiosity," *Journal of Advertising,* 17, 3, 3-14.

Thompson, Craig J. (1996), "Caring Consumers: Gendered Consumption Meanings and Juggling Lifestyle," *Journal of Consumer Research,* 22 (March), 388-407.

Thompson, Craig J. and Diana L. Haytko (1997), "Speaking of Fashion: Consumers' Uses of Fashion Discourses and the Appropriation of Countervailing Cultural Meanings," *Journal of Consumer Research,* 24 (June), 15-42.

Thompson, Craig J., William B. Locander and Howard R. Pollio (1989), "Putting Consumer Experience Back into Consumer Research: The Philosophy and Method of Existential-Phenomenology," *Journal of Consumer Research,* 16 (September), 133-147.

Thompson, John B. (1990), *Ideology and Modern Culture,* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Thompson, John B. (1995), *The Media and Modernity: A Social Theory of the Media,* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Wallendorf, Melanie and Russell W. Belk (1989), "Assessing Trustworthiness in Naturalistic Consumer Research," in *Interpretive Consumer Research,* E. C. Hirschman, ed., Provo UT: Association for Consumer Research, 69-84.

Wicklund, Robert A. and Peter M. Gollwitzer (1982), *Symbolic Self-Completion*, Hillsdale: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Willis, Paul (1990), *Common Culture: Symbolic work at play in the everyday cultures of the young,* Milton Keynes: Open University Press.