Chapter 1
Digging Anthropology
Mine for Marketing Gold

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ABSTRACT
Marketing, born out of industrial organization economics, has borrowed myriad concepts and frameworks from neoclassical economics since its inception, as much as it has acquired theories and methods from psychology and sociology. The theories in marketing depend heavily on these disciplines and their relevance in decoding the “consumer” who occupies the center point of all marketing thoughts has only increased over the years. This paper contends that cultural anthropological theories and practices have more sincere and serious implications in the pursuit of unmasking consumer’s desires, wants, and needs that marketers ought to pay more attention. Distilling various motifs of twentieth-century anthropological thought, the author argues how culture is paramount in reflecting the realities of consumption.

DIGGING ANOTHER HOLE

This paper is an invitation to an odyssey which, in the author’s opinion, may give the reader at first glance a distinct impression that anthropological peregrinations into how and why consumers behave is often tortuously diverting, not concatenating directly with any of the regnant notions of consumption nor behavior. Perhaps at second glance too. This is noticeably because consumer behavior more often than not concerns with neglected matters of socio-cultural activity. The scientific czars of statistics have successfully abbreviated consumers to mere numbers and testable hypotheses to cull conceptional insights via cognate analyses of big data in the digitized world today; conjoint analytics in the early computerized world of the eighties; or even previously with fast and loose analyses of regression. If statistical correlation implied causation, the market researcher could prove that divorce rates correlated with per capita consumption of Viagra. Nailing marketers’ obsession with data, author Tyler Vigen spuriously correlates the US spending on space exploration with homicides by hanging, strangulation, and suffocation with a software tool he designed that scours vast data sets to find unlikely statistical correlations and cause-logical fallacies. Correlation between two variables does not necessarily mean that one causes the other.

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Two events, A and B could be consequences of a common cause; correlation could be coincidental, indirect, unconnected, caused due to extrapolation of trends, or simply an example of reverse causation.

On the other side of research spectrum, conventional psychologists, inspired by conditioned behavior of laboratory animals that excessively account for mechanistic patterns, have claimed ownership of human behavior. More mundanely, such research aggregates on an unfortunately narrow orbit of information processing and behavioral decision making, drawn from exiguous number of experiments by incentivizing college students to participate as subjects. The investigated mental mechanisms are conveniently projected as overarching theories on the general human population. Research findings from such social experiments challenge the supposed dignity of human freedom, freewill, and franchise. Furthermore, aforesaid insular methodologies assume researchers have automatic, direct, and free access to consumers reality, and that the bulk of the acknowledged research from questionnaire-based sampling to predetermined focus-group interview techniques secure authentic knowledge of consumer behavior. Consequently, a wide range of indefinite and inconsistent answers around the cognitive, affective, and conative phenomena prevail. Myriad behavioral antecedents from preference judgments to implicit attitudinal dispositions and a host of inherent mental associations to a product or a service continue to hide under a shroud of ignorance. It must be stated that the author does not wish to belittle the value of quantitative marketers and psychology-based consumer researchers, for their insights have given brand owners and custodians some determining insights into the way consumers behave or predict consumer behavior. In attempting to assay human behavior, it is foolhardy to vilipend the wealth of information that unwearied anthropologists have assembled about the fundamental biological nature and the cultural patterns of the human species by direct observation of their substratal and shared behavioral paradigms. When anthropology has taken the entire domain of human behavior as a domain of scientific inquiry, this paper implores to dig another hole for more effective insights on processual and discrete behavioral dispositions of human beings in the context of consumption.

For a century and a few scores more, anthropology, scientific study of humankind, which has been ambitiously striving to present a comprehensive view of human species within the dynamic evolution and organic socio-cultural development, was never assuredly convoked to discover the inexhaustible mystery of consumption practice nor reconstruct the unsuspected antiquity of consumer behavior. Scholars and students of anthropology found more delight to account for the social and cultural variations of denizens from the tropical rainforests of volcanic islands of Oceania to the frigid semi-deserts of the Arctic that fewer aided in the making of a more coherent image of the consumption world. Even though anthropologists have far-flung and distinctive interests, they customarily share a bromidic concern to inquire connections within societies and connections among societies. On the flip side, marketers found their task of coordinating myriad scientific disciplines too prodigious for their valor that they skedaddled like lightning from the battlefronts of consumer truth. Whether anthropology—obsessed in itself—failed to brand like how other disciplines did or marketers perceived anthropology as an intellectual black hole devoid of positivistic objectivity remains anyone’s sneaking guess. Finally, it could also be cursed that consumer behavior specialists put their blinders on to intensively research a dinky dollop of consumer behavior using experimental design and quantitative analysis methods in makeshift laboratory contexts. Owing to such fragmented ways of knowing or understanding behavior, marketers find themselves enfeebled to enunciate why people who live in Manhattan, a narrowly congested island, drive bulky SUVs where public transport seems more pertinent or convenient; why some zealots tattoo themselves with Nike or Harley Davidson logo in permanent ink to proudly claim membership of a footwear or a mo-
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