23E28000 Consumer Culture (6 credits) - COURSE PLAN

1. Instructor's contact information	Course information
Course Instructor - Prof. Eric Arnould (eric.arnould@aalto.fi) Course Assistant – Hunter Jones, hunter.jones@aalto.fi Office Location – Ekonominaukio 1, T102 Office Hours - Before or after class or by appointment.	Dates: Term IV– 1 March -7 April, 2021 Mon & Wed 16.15-18.00 Location: On-line Language of Instruction: English Course Website: MyCourses

The course covers key concepts from consumer culture theory. These draw from fields including sociology, social psychology, and cultural anthropology.

2. PREREQUISITES

Enrolment in Master's program.

3. LEARNING OUTCOMES

On completion of this course, students will be familiar with the key concepts, theories, and frameworks of consumer culture theory and interpretive consumer research. Students will learn how to apply these concepts, theories, and frameworks in critically examining and analyzing consumers, consumerism and consumer society.

4. PERFORMANCE EXPECTATIONS

We expect students to attend all lectures, to engage in group fieldwork, to participate actively in class discussions, to read all assigned readings prior to the corresponding class period, to complete all written assignments on time, and to be present for the poster session, which occurs on the last day of class.

Group-work: You will be part of a group (to be assigned by the research assistant). Each group will carry out three tasks –prepare readings for discussion, prepare and present the findings from your fieldwork in poster format, and submit a final research report.

5. ASSESSMENT AND GRADING

We will assess student performance according to the following:

1. Attendance (**more than 2 absences will result in a grade reduction**)
    a. This is a normal expectation in the workplace. University is also a workplace
2. Individual Participation and Attendance (20%), i.e., prepare readings especially for Wednesday discussions.
3. Take Home Exam (40%)
4. Final group research project report (40%)
    a. Most work in the business world is group work; teams tend to be diverse in composition. Learning to work in a team is an important business skill.

b. Succinct, hard-hitting visual presentation of data is absolutely a priority in the business world. It is a rhetorical skill that makes an impression and can influence decision-making.

6. COURSE MATERIALS

Please obtain a copy of the book from Amazon or equivalent. (OBS! The editors do not earn income from this book!)

2018, *Consumer Culture Theory*, Eric Arnould and Craig J. Thompson, ed. London and New York: Sage Publications.

Readings are drawn from this text as well as from articles. Our aims in choosing readings are two-fold. First, is to provide students with an introduction to the scope and diversity of consumer culture research. Second, is to provide students with intellectual tools that can help them address the research challenge we have set for the term.

PDF files of assigned readings will be posted to the course website.

7. ETHICAL GUIDELINES

Aalto University Code of Academic Integrity and handling thereof:
https://into.aalto.fi/pages/viewpage.action?pageId=3772443

SCHEDULE

Session	Topic	Readings
1.3	Introduction, Consumer culture theory overview Course overview, discussion of term assignment	**Read prior to first class period:** Arnould and Thompson, pp. 1-17 Introduction Recommended: Arnould, E.J., and C.J. resear (2005) Consumer Culture Theory: 20 Years of Research, Journal of Consumer Research.
3.3	Course overview: Directions for reflection notes and research project assignments	Guest Lecture: Grant Gooding, PROOF, Industry expert Discussion of assignment
8.3	Consumer identity projects	Arnould and Thompson, pp. 40-84 Arnould & Thompson, Chapters 2 & 3
10.3	Consumer identity projects Online discussion with student groups	Guest Lecture: Douglas B. Holt, Industry expert. Cultural Strategy Group Required:

		Belk, Russell W. (1988), Possession and the extended self, *Journal of Consumer Research*, 15 (Sept), 139-168. Fournier, Susan (1998), Consumers and Their Brands: Developing Relationship Theory in Consumer Research, Journal of Consumer Research, 24 (March), 343-373. Further recommended readings: Epp, Amber M. & Velagaleti, Sunaina R (2014), "Outsourcing parenthood? how families manage care assemblages using paid commercial services," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 41 (December), 911-935. Belk, Russell W. (2013), Extended Self in a Digital World, Journal of Consumer Research, 40 (Oct), 477-500 Schau, Hope Jensen and Mary C. Gilly (2003), "We Are What We Post? The Presentation of Self in Personal Webspace," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 30(4): 385-404.
15.3	Marketplace cultures	Arnould and Thompson, pp. 87-125 Chapters 4 & 5
17.3	Community and marketplace cultures Online discussion with student groups	Guest Lecture: Rita Denny, Industry Expert, Practica Group and Ethnographic Praxis in Industry Conference Required: Fournier, Susan and Lara Lee (2009, Getting Brand Communities Right, *Harvard Business Review*, 87 (April), 105-111. Cova, B., Pace, S., & Skålén, P. (2015). Marketing with working consumers: The case of a carmaker and its brand community. *Organization*, 22(5), 682-701. Further recommended readings: Goulding, C., Shankar, A., & Elliott, R. (2002). Working weeks, rave weekends:

		identity fragmentation and the emergence of new communities. Consumption, Markets and Culture, 5(4), 261-284.
		Schouten, John W., and James H. McAlexander (1995), "Subcultures of Consumption: An Ethnography of the New Bikers." *Journal of Consumer Research* 22.1: 43-61.
		Muniz, Albert M., and Hope Jensen Schau (2005), "Religiosity in the Abandoned Apple Newton Brand Community," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 31 (March), 737–47.
22.3	Sociohistoric patterning of consumption	Arnould and Thompson, pp. 180-205 and 225-252.
		Chapters 8 & 9
24.3	Sociohistoric patterning of consumption: Online discussion with student groups	Required: Bardhi, Fleura and Giana M. Eckhardt (2017), Liquid Consumption, *Journal of Consumer Research*, 44 (October), 582-597. Warning! Quite difficult: Üstüner, T., and C. J. Thompson (2015), "Women Skating on the Edge: Marketplace Performances as Ideological Edgework." *Journal of Consumer Research* 42 (2): 235–265. Karababa, Eminegül and Guliz Ger, (2011), Early Modern Ottoman Coffeehouse Culture and the Formation of the Consumer Subject, *Journal of Consumer Research*, 37 (February), 737-760. Further recommended readings: Cayla, Julien and Giana M. Eckhardt (2008), "Asian Brands and the Shaping of a Transnational Imagined Community," Journal of Consumer Research, 35 (August), 216-230. Warning! Exotic for Nordic Sensibilities: Crockett, David (2008), "Marketing Blackness: How Advertisers Use Race to

		Sell Products," Journal of Consumer Culture, 8 (2), 245-68.
		Wooten, David B (1995), "One-of-a-Kind in a Full House: Some Consequences of Ethnic and Gender Distinctiveness," Journal of Consumer Psychology, 4 (3), 205-24.
29.3	Mass-mediated marketplace ideologies	Arnould and Thompson, pp.276-317 Chapters 12 & 13
313	Mass-mediated marketplace ideologies: Online discussion with student groups	Required: Gabriel, Yiannis (2015), Identity, choice and consumer freedom – the new opiates? A psychoanalytic interrogation, Marketing Theory, 15(1), 25–30. Giesler, Markus and Ela Veresiu (2014), Creating the responsible consumer: moralistic governance regimes and consumer subjectivity, Journal of Consumer Research, 41 (Oct), 840-857. Further recommended readings: Humphreys, Ashlee and Craig J. Thompson, (2014), Branding disaster: reestablishing trust through the ideological containment of systemic risk anxieties, Journal of Consumer Research, 41 (December), 877-910. Izberk-Bilgin, Elif (2012), "Infidel Brands: Unveiling Alternative Meanings of Global Brands at the Nexus of Globalization, Consumer Culture, and Islamism," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 39 (4): 663-87. O'Guinn, Thomas and Russell W. Belk (1989), "Heaven on Earth: Consumption at Heritage Village, USA," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 15 (3, September), 227-238. Varman, Rohit and Russel W. Belk (2009), Nationalism and ideology in an

		anti-consumption movement, *Journal of Consumer Research*, 36 (4), 686–700. Zwick, Detlev; Samuel K.; Bonsu & Aron. Darmody (2008), Putting Consumers to Work, *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 8 (July), 163-196.
5.4	Independent group work	Research project work
7.4	Presentation of final research project	

Assignments

Individual Participation and Attendance

1) Individual Participation and Attendance (**20%**): 20% of your grade will come in the form of in class participation and attendance. This means each class you are expected to have done any readings assigned in preparation for class discussions and activities. Monday classes are organized around a lecture. Wednesday classes will be organized such that the first part of the class period will be devoted to discussion of the term project. The second part of the class period will be devoted to group discussion of assigned readings. We want you to try to explain and or ask questions about the authors' theoretical approach, methodological choices, results and the practical implications. It will be particularly useful for students to reflect about the applicability of the findings to their own professional experience or to consumption phenomena with which they are familiar. Each class, the Teaching Assistant (TA) will keep a record of participation and note students who consistently avoid discussion/participation. You do not necessarily need to contribute a monologue every class period; however, consistent lack of participation will result in a grade reduction. Students may miss no more than 2 classes without prior approval from the professor if they wish to pass the course.

Take home exam

2) Take home exam (**40%**): the final 40% of the grade will come from a take home, written exam. 1-2 weeks prior to the exam, students will be given a list of 5-10 possible exam questions that focus on the assigned readings to begin preparation. On the date of the exam, the professor will choose 2 questions and announce them on MyCourses. Students are expected to write roughly 1000 words total, responding to each prompt within 24 hours and submit their original written work to the TurnitIn submission box on the course website.

Group Project: Exploring Contemporary Consumer Culture

3) Group Project (**40%**): 40% of the final grade will come from a group project in which students are expected to take key concepts and ideas from the course's textbook and readings and apply them to a 'real world' marketing problem a local company, NGO, or government agency is facing, in 2021 this will be a real-world marketing problem facing a local company, www.bodyrest.fi.

In general, we choose organizations that at least one group member or our faculty are affiliated or connected with; however, when that is not possible, students address a hypothetical problem facing a real Nordic firm they are not personally connected with, so long as sufficient information and data is publicly available to identify a relevant challenge/problem facing the firm.

Groups will consist of 3-4 students. See below for data collection suggestions. We will want to do group work check-ins during the Wednesday class sessions to make sure groups are progressing in time to get the project completed. Students are welcome to schedule a meeting with the professor or teaching assistant outside of class time to discuss the project.

The central idea of this assignment is for you to apply the knowledge and understanding accrued during the course by researching an empirical (i.e. actual) marketing / consumer culture phenomenon and creating a convincing exposition of your recommendations (report + poster).

This assignment will be done in groups, and will basically involve the following: (a) selecting a consumer culture approach to a marketing challenge; (b) doing some fieldwork, i.e. collecting suitable materials related to this challenge; (c) analysing these materials; (d) writing up a final report in your assigned group; and, (e) creating a 'poster' based on this report with recommendations for the company.

Important note: This research report exercise serves as preliminary training for your coming completion of a 'research plan' and MSc thesis work. A simple way to adapt what you have learned during this course is to think of the MSc thesis as an expanded research report. Ultimately, and when applied correctly, the research report template serves as a dynamic heuristic for thinking about and conducting the process of qualitative research

Selecting a consumption culture phenomenon /marketing challenge

We would like you to work on a consumer opportunity / problem confronting a company, www.bodyrest.fi. Our perspective is that bodyrest.fi is facing a combined market segmentation, product positioning, branding & marketing communications challenge. Your group will work on the opportunity / problem together. We recommend you choose one of the four research programs presented in Arnould and Thompson's article and book (2005; 2018): Consumer identity projects, Marketplace cultures, The sociohistoric patterning of consumption or Mass-mediated marketplace ideologies and consumers' interpretive strategies as the overall orienting framework for your project. For example, acquisition, use, and eventually disposition of the company's products or services may involve individual or group consumption practices or activities. Acquisition, use, and eventually disposition of the

company's products or services may be linked to individual identity projects. Acquisition, use, and eventually disposition of the company's products or services may also involve a brand or consumption community or taste subculture. Acquisition, use, and eventually disposition of the company's products or services may be linked with specific times and places. Finally, acquisition, use, and eventually disposition of the company's products or services is likely linked to beliefs and values about morality, prestige, sustainability, hardwork, innovativeness, and so on. The specific choice of approach is ultimately down to you. However, the aim of the project is to use knowledge of these aspects of consumer culture to improve the company's relationships with its customers.

Research Question

You want to start with a research question. To some extent this is dictated by the company's strategic concern to introduce what they see is a technologically innovative product into the market for seating which has been redefined by the COVID crisis. Some background resources on how to write a research question (with greater or lesser relevance):

https://masscommtheory.com/2011/05/.../writing-good-qualitative-research-questions/
https://cirt.gcu.edu/research/developmentresources/tutorials/question
https://writingcenter.gmu.edu/guides/how-to-write-a-research-question
www.yorku.ca/act/CBR/ResearchQuestionInfoSheet.doc
https://www.esc.edu/online-writing-center/resources/research/research-paper-steps/developing-questions/

Empirical Fieldwork

By fieldwork, we mean that you should try to find suitable and interesting materials to support your report analysis and recommendations. For this study, we propose conduct at least four (4) **depth interviews.**

For guidance, see Arsel, Zeynep (2017), Asking Questions with Reflexive Focus: A Tutorial on Designing and Conducting Interviews, Journal of Consumer Research. 44 (December), 939-948. and PowerPoint presentation.

Fieldwork materials may also include any kind of marketing materials (print ads, digital ads, TV commercials, digital media etc.) and other materials related to the phenomenon studied (documents, paraphernalia etc.). These materials may be subjected to **content analysis** to extract themes of theoretical interest.

For guidance see: https://www.youtube.com/watch/Y0__d1QsR04 on content analysis https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sHv3RzKWNcQ on coding documents. For a more detailed hands on guide see: file:///C:/Users/earno/AppData/Local/Temp/1-s2.0-S2211419X17300423-main.pdf

Additionally, you may also collect research material using **ethnographic methods**. For example, you could interact directly with the studied phenomenon and individuals associated with the selected phenomenon. You may do so through direct observations, casual talks or material collections. Such, observations, casual talks, collections or secondary data should be documented and /or recorded via **fieldnotes**.

For an example, see: Arnould, Eric J. and Price, Linda L. (2006), Market-Oriented Ethnography Revisited, Journal of Advertising Research, 46 (September), 251-262.and PowerPoint presentation.

For excellent extended guidance in data collection and analysis please consult Belk, Fischer, and Kozinets (2013), *Qualitative Consumer and Marketing Research*, Sage Publications. Excerpts from this book will be posted. This is excellent guidance for your Master's thesis research as well.

Essentially, it is up to you how you conduct your fieldwork, what materials you select to support your work, and whether you will include an ethnographic element. COVID limits this option dramatically to on-line observation. Your group's work will be graded on the basis of how your research is put together overall – and assuming that your aim is to create a convincing exposition of your chosen topic – how your chosen fieldwork elements work together to enable such an exposition.

Analysing the Findings

Please also try to draw inspiration from the discussions and readings from this course. We encourage you to be critical in your analysis, and to organize your argumentations in a clear fashion.

Research Report Structure:

The report should be a minimum of 12 and maximum of 15 pages in length (1.5 line spacing /font 12), excluding images, figures and diagrams, and reference lists.

Please include the following headings:

1. **"Abstract" (50 words)** (Crystalizing very succinctly all the main aspects of your work)

2. **"Introduction" (1 page)**

The purpose of this research report section is to report the purpose of the study and provide a summary statement of the main points of the entire work (i.e. research idea and how this is positioned, that is, related to prior work you have read in class or outside of class).

3. **"Research Problem" (what is this research about?)**

The statement "what is this research about" should crystallize succinctly the idea of the research. This involves identifying the phenomenon the researcher seeks to describe, understand or explain.

It is important to note that this statement commonly derives its *final* form relatively late in the research process - usually once the data-analysis stage has been completed

Nevertheless, this should not stop you from writing up a tentative statement to start with. Think of the approach you wish to take as the scientific literature in this area discusses it, and write-up a first attempt. Alternatively, if you do not have a specific approach in mind, read around a preferred scientific discussion (usually found in journal articles) and work towards a

research angle from there (i.e. start the process through a positioning of the research idea: see below)

Positioning (gap; context; problem) x A *research gap* refers to the absence of (important) knowledge in a given research domain. A research gap may be theoretical, contextual or methodological. In the case of bodyrest.fi, we may say the gap is contextual as it refers to positioning an innovation in an existing marketspace.

To address and 'fill' a research gap through systematic inquiry is to make a research contribution (a contribution may involve extending, re-embedding, revising or even supplanting existing knowledge)

While the research gap refers to a given understudied or wholly overlooked angle on a phenomenon of interest, in this case segmenting, targeting, positioning with a market context. The *research context* refers to the setting in which this phenomenon/challenge can be studied in the most favourable terms (i.e. making the phenomenon visible and understandable).

To be able to address the identified research gap coherently, you need to formulate a *research problem.* The research problem is to be viewed and presented as **a research question or 'riddle'** to be answered by the research (it is synonymous with the notion of 'primary research question', and may be followed by sub-questions).

4.   "Theoretical Background" (3 pages)

The purpose of this research report section is to give a succinct review of relevant existing theory regarding the chosen topic. There are two primary uses for existing theory: (a) it enables informed positioning of the research. That is, it enables you to identify the research gap. And (b) it is a resource for providing an analytic framework or model for analysing your empirical data, and then, embedding your data-analysis into broader discussion (i.e. 'Discussion Section').

The developing of theoretical understanding and the use of theory in writing up the research is emergent and iterative by nature:

- On the one hand, the construction of all stages of the research process (especially statement of the research problem, i.e., section 3) is informed by the researcher's (pre)understanding of theory.
- On the other hand, emergent themes in the data will dictate if and what further existing theory is required to analyse and interpret (make sense of) these themes (this new theory then being added to the literature review).

5.   "Methodology" (1 page)

This purpose of this research report section is to justify briefly your methodological choices (research philosophy) and to describe your data-collection methods (actual tools used). In this case, that is, an applied report, the distinction is of lesser importance than it would be in a basic, scientific study. Still it is useful to bear these points in mind.

Methodology refers to your chosen research approach and the philosophical tradition(s) that underpins it. Implicitly in this project we may be using either existential phenomenology if

we are focusing on issues of consumer identity; cultural sociology is we are focusing on social structural issues like gender or age; cultural theory proper if we are focusing on community, sub-culture, ritual, or cultural "values"; or, classical sociology and/or political economy if we are focusing on ideological issues.

Method refers to practices, theory, and concepts used in data-collection and data-analysis. Method also refers to such practical issues as choice of research site and research sample (i.e. who to research and to what scope). In this case, we are primarily using depth interviews, a method of data collection that can be used across the methodological choices mentioned above.

Methodology and method will be dictated by the goals and conventions implied in your choice of research problem and existing theory as it pertains to the marketing challenge.

6. "Findings" (approx. 3 pages)

The purpose of this research report section is to present a succinct summary of the main themes found through data-analysis and interpretation. Thematic analysis is one of the most common forms of analysis in qualitative research. It emphasizes pinpointing, examining, and recording patterns (or "themes") within data. Themes are patterns across data sets that are important to the description of a phenomenon and are associated to a specific research question. A theme is a label for major and sometimes recurring ideas, patterns of action, symbols, emotion, or metaphors.

These themes are written up (i.e. given meaning) using relevant existing theory. So-called 'abstraction' level at this stage is moderate:

 Give a theoretically minimal account of the data

Rule of thumb: Do not abstract too 'highly'. Your aim is to represent the data – not to offer new theorization (if this is done, it is done in the 'Discussion').

In other words, the Findings section sets the scene for the Discussion section.

7. "Discussion" (3 pages)

The purpose of this research report section is briefly to discuss the themes found through the data analysis by embedding them in a broader theoretical context.

If the 'Findings' section is where you give a minimal account of the (reorganized) data – the 'Discussion' section is where you interpret this account further in light of existing knowledge.

Thus, it is in the discussion that you can develop your own insights and theory – while also setting the scene for the potential contribution(s) of the research i.e. the relevance and importance of arguments made (the contributions may then be explicitly stated in the 'Conclusion').

There is no single, straightforward or systematic way to engage in the further interpretation and embedding of the data themes. It will largely rest on the applied style of writing and 'representational strategy':

'Further interpretation' is about taking your research findings, taking it to the next (i.e. 'higher' or 'deeper') level of abstraction, e.g., relating the themes to key concepts, frameworks, or models.

'Embedding' is about integrating this further interpretation into relevant broader discussion, i.e. existing theory and debates regarding the topic. This means showing how your 'further interpretation' enriches the theoretical or practical conversations around the phenomenon.

'Representational strategy' refers to philosophically and ethically based conventions and rules of writing (i.e. voice; authorship; reflexivity; power etc.). Employing a disembodied, "objective," third person voice is a representational strategy. Use of detailed case studies is a representational strategy. Developing fictionalized composite accounts from data is a representational strategy. Embedding oneself autobiographically in the phenomenon is a representational strategy. Codifying quantitatively is a representational strategy. And so on.

8. Conclusion(s) (1-2 page)

The purpose of this research report section is to summarize the main (anticipated) aspects of the study. These *may* include:

Recapping the initial foundations ('gap') and objectives of the study ('research problem')

Key findings and discussion (how the research gap has been addressed)

Key contributions (theorizations and applicable insights)

Limitations of the study (limits to the scope of the results)

Future research avenues (how insight into the challenge could be deepened)

The final group research project comprises 40% of your grade.

Creating a 'Poster' and 'Pitching' It

Your poster should be crystallize the key aspects of your research report. The poster is a 5-10 minute PowerPoint (or similar software) presentation. You present the problem, methods, findings, solution/ recommendations.

Your poster may comprise anything you consider as an interesting and effective means of communication (text, images, sketches, models, frameworks etc.). Succinct, hard-hitting visual presentation of data is absolutely a priority in the business world. It is a rhetorical skill that makes an impression and can influence decision-making.

A very important aspect of communicating your poster to the audience is your personal presentation performance. You should see it as 'pitching' your analysis and recommendations to a potential managerial client. Remember the idea of the two minute "elevator speech." Please be prepared to 'sell' your project to us in the poster session venue.

(The poster session will take place during the last class, 7th of April, 2021)

Submission of final research report

The submission deadline for the final report is one week after the course has ended: **Wednesday 14.4.2021 16:00h – via MyCourses.**