Across these countries and other contemporary films saw the Governing the Subjects and Spaces of Manufacturing Meaning along the Food Media Consumption and the Future Alternative Hedonism and the Theory (Berg, 2007).

The Design of New Consumers? children, fashion and 'The

Creating Citizen-Consumers: changing relationships and identifications Professor John Clark, Faculty of Social Sciences, The Open University.

Towards a Participatory Consumer Democracy: Britain, 1937–1987 Dr Lesley Whitworth, Design History Research Centre, University of Brighton.

Models of Consumption and Citizenship in the UK Welfare State Professor Martin Powell, Health Services Management Centre, University of Birmingham.

Cultures of Consumption and Consumer Involvement in Public Services Professor Johnson Birchall, Department of Applied Social Science, Stirling University.

The Housewife in Early Modern England: gender, markets and consumption Dr Jane Whittle, Department of History, University of Exeter.

Banking on Housing: Spending the Home Professor Susan Smith, Department of Geography, University of Durham.

Alternative Food Networks (AFN): connecting consumers, producers and food Dr Moja Kneafsey, Geography Subject Area, Coventry University.

Manufacturing Meaning along the Food Commodity Chain Professor Peter Jackson, Department of Geography, University of Sheffield.

Seed Money: the economics of horticulture www.bl.uk/research/Seed_Money: the economics of horticulture and food?

Creating Citizen-Consumers: changing relationships and identifications Professor John Clark, Faculty of Social Sciences, The Open University.

Towards a Participatory Consumer Democracy: Britain, 1937–1987 Dr Lesley Whitworth, Design History Research Centre, University of Brighton.

Models of Consumption and Citizenship in the UK Welfare State Professor Martin Powell, Health Services Management Centre, University of Birmingham.

Cultures of Consumption and Consumer Involvement in Public Services Professor Johnson Birchall, Department of Applied Social Science, Stirling University.

The Housewife in Early Modern England: gender, markets and consumption Dr Jane Whittle, Department of History, University of Exeter.

Banking on Housing: Spending the Home Professor Susan Smith, Department of Geography, University of Durham.

Alternative Food Networks (AFN): connecting consumers, producers and food Dr Moja Kneafsey, Geography Subject Area, Coventry University.

Manufacturing Meaning along the Food Commodity Chain Professor Peter Jackson, Department of Geography, University of Sheffield.

Books include:

John Brewer and Frank Trentmann (eds), Consuming Cultures, Global Perspectives (Berg, 2006).

Nick Coulbury, Sonia Livingstone and Tim Markham, Media Consumption and Public Engagement (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

John Clarke, Janet E. Newman, Nick Smith, Elizabeth Vidler and Louise Westmarland, Creating Citizen-Consumers (Sage, 2006).

Elizabeth Shaw, Matt Johnson, Martin Hand, and Jack Ingram, The Design of Everyday Life (Berg, In press).

David Anderson, Susan Beckerleg, Deagol Harlu and Alex Kim, The Khat Controversy (Berg, 2007).

Kate Soper and Frank Trentmann (eds), Citizenship and Consumption (Palgrave Macmillan, in press).

Michael R. Redclift, Chewing Gum (Routledge, 2006).

Christopher Bredow and David Gilbert (eds), Fashion’s World Cities (Berg, 2006).

Frank Trentmann (ed.), The Making of the Consumer (Berg, 2006).

Articles include:

Claudia Baldich and Jonathan Morris (eds), ‘Made in Italy: Consumere i identità collettivi in secondo dopoguerra’, Theme Issue of Memoria e Ricerca, XVII(1) (2010).


LESSON 1: DIVERSITY CONTINUES IN OUR WORLD

Globalisation does not mean global convergence. There is no evidence that we are moving towards a shared global consumer culture. A look at how people spent their time in Britain, the United States, France, Norway and the Netherlands over the last twenty-five years reveals diverging trends. Across these countries, people spend more time eating out, but the French still spend 36 minutes a day eating at home, while Australians take more than 2 hours as Americans (42 minutes, UK 54 minutes). Consequently, popular belief British families today spend as much time eating together as they did in the 1990s. Reading patterns, again, show the limits of Americanisation. Only in the United States is reading declining. In Britain and France people read more books now than thirty years ago. Local values and habits remain important. Multinational retailers entering the Chinese market have had to engage with demanding consumers with high expectations of customer service: ‘the customer is god’ as one supervisor put it. Nor has globalisation automatically led to ‘McJobs’ and de-skilling. In China, foreign investment has increased both management skills and job security in the retail sector.

LESSON 2: CONSUMERS ARE CITIZENS, TOO

It is wrong to see consumers and citizens as adversarial poles, one private, the other public. In fact, it was battles over civic rights and duties that forged a stronger consumer identity in the first place. In Victorian Britain, citizens rallied as consumers to demand cheap and constant flowing water for their baths and WCs. Private comforts and public politics were intertwined. More recently, battles over water and privatization in Latin America and Africa have created a new arena of competition for water. Even in a single product, like Italian coffee, which has spread across the globe, drinking cultures remain diverse. In Italy, cappuccino is a morning drink, served lukewarm in a 6 oz cup to be taken slowly while chatting with a friend at any time of day, while in the United States, people walk off with a 12 oz take-away mug. The spread of Khat beyond East Africa reveals similar divergence. This lesson is about choice and voice in public services. It is about making a change and being part of the solution, not just the problem.

The above lesson is about the changing dynamics of consumption, past and present, and implications for the future. Our research has examined a range of major subjects, from consumer politics to the rise of London as a global fashion city, from the impact of new financial services on consumer behaviour to customer services in China, from how people spend their leisure time in affluent societies to how they feel about choice and voice in public services.

Frank Trentmann, Programme Director, Cultures of Consumption, ESRC and AHRC Professor of History, Birkbeck College, University of London.

Notes

Even in a single product, like Italian coffee, which has spread across the globe, drinking cultures remain diverse. In Italy, cappuccino is a morning drink, served lukewarm in a 6 oz cup to be taken slowly while chatting with a friend at any time of day, while in the United States, people walk off with a 12 oz take-away mug. The spread of Khat beyond East Africa reveals similar divergence. This lesson is about choice and voice in public services. It is about making a change and being part of the solution, not just the problem.

The above lesson is about the changing dynamics of consumption, past and present, and implications for the future. Our research has examined a range of major subjects, from consumer politics to the rise of London as a global fashion city, from the impact of new financial services on consumer behaviour to customer services in China, from how people spend their leisure time in affluent societies to how they feel about choice and voice in public services.
Lessons About Consumption: a short overview of the Cultures of Consumption research programme

East London Leger Defence Association poster, 1898
Source: The National Archive, PRO, copy 1, 14a 580 36

1/ Lessons About Consumption

Most people
It is a path that has a lot of mileage
Shopping Routes: networks of fashion
Chicken is a recently
Tailors made clothes,
Consumer
They think
People, too, are not just
Liquid Politics: the historic formation of
23
a sense of public connection.
people actually consume media. In the
Participation – such anxieties about the
blame them for the decline in political
research shows that Britons are increasingly
consumer are fraught with problems. Our
have no say in politics, and only one in five
assertive and less deferential in their
build an extension, and build up an asset for
their homes and spend more freely from
work. Britons today hold more wealth in
especially reveal the caring impulses at

A leaflet claims that people think
Buon per il popolari
consumers and producers have become less
age and power. Since then, the ties between
the latest fashion. Everyone recognised


LESSON 3: CONSUMERS CARE

In early modern societies, how and what
people consumed was closely connected to
local networks of employment and influence.
A gentry family like that of Alice le Strange
in early seventeenth-century England
employed a dozen servants to cook, clean
and carry goods. Tailors made clothes,
lent money, and provided information about
the latest fashion. Everyone recognised
consumption as a crucial source of patronage
and power. Since then, the ties between
consumers and producers have become less
direct and visible. Still, it would be a mistake
to presume that how people buy, use, and
discard things is any less social today, or that
consumers in affluent societies are self-
controlled individualists. Markets and
morals are not separate worlds or historical
era. The HOME and FOOD are two areas that
especially reveal the caring impulses used at
work. Britons today hold more wealth in
their homes and spend more freely from
their assets than ever before. Flexible
mortgages give people a chance to use
equity withdraw like a cash machine.
Is this encouraging reckless consumerism?
Some go on holiday or a shopping spree,
but most are careful and competent
consumers, not ‘duped debtors’. They
use flexible borrowing to modernise their
home, build an extension, and build up an asset for
their families. Public policy should recognise
time, the growing dependence on a single
investment raises a difficult challenge for
the state, financial services, and an
ageing population.
More and more people in Britain eat
their food from ‘alternative’ food networks
such as farm shops and organic box
schemes, or even adopt cash in shops in the
internet.

The nature of the “consumer” continues
to change and grow.

Today, regulatory measures and product
theories have made it hard to think about
consumer tastes and preferences in
western societies.

LESSON 4: PATTERNS OF EXPANSION TO DIVERSITY

Consumers are highly diverse and
stratified. Homogenous models of consumer
society have passed their sell-by date. Developed societies
are internally segmented in different ways –
the United States, for example, most people are
readily split into the few people who
like reading more of it; in Norway and
Netherlands, by contrast, leisure patterns
are more shared. Status remains important
in Britain, but it is wrong to presume that
the social elite just likes elite culture.
People with high levels of education and
status are more likely to participate in low-
bow as well as highbow cultural activities –
omnivores who like cinema as well as opera.
Low status groups participate more
likely to be cultural omnivores.

In the United Kingdom, the baby boomer
generations have led lives marked by
the Second World War and have carried the new
experiences of the “free”, such as popular
music and greater travel abroad, with them
as they age. Omnivores – cosmopolitanism
is a central part of their identity. They
think

fewer. In most cases, they have
more, and less people have

The significance of trust and the active
contribution of consumers in transforming
the geographies of consumption, however,
are not new. In nineteenth-century America,
consumers played a central role in the
commercialisation and industrial
standardisation of horticulture. Consumer
taste, consumer knowledge and built trust
and brand loyalty.
New tastes had important implications
for the environment, too. Before the rise
of synthetic, cheap oil, people chewed
chicle. Chicle extraction led to the clearing
of vast forest areas in Mexico’s Yucatan.
Today, regulatory measures and product
certification remain obstacles to more
sustainable production of natural gum.
Ethical consumption is sometimes seen
as a retreat from “real” politics, a soft politics
in the lower key of individualist lifestyle.
This fear may be unwarranted. One case
study in Bristol finds that ethical consumption
functions as a pathway into broader political
engagement. The potential of ethical
campaigns to change individual life-style,
however, must not be overrated.
These campaigns are more effective at
the collective level, such as the creation of
Fairtrade foods. As individuals, people feel
easily overwhelmed by appeals to change
their own lifestyle to save the planet.
Consumers cannot make significant
backfires if they assume consumers are
manipulated and have “false needs” or if
they imagine a return to some mythical
“natural” way of life. It might be more
effective to place a positive emphasis on
the sensual and spiritual pleasures of a different
lifestyle rather than to create conflict
on cars, noise, and traffic jams.

LESSON 4: FOLLOW PRACTICES, NOT
INDIVIDUAL CHOICES

A focus on individual choice is of
limited value to understand the dynamics
mentioned above. Some economists and
psychologists have revised the conventional
model, stressing that rationality can be
“bounded” that choice can be “irrational”
and that people can feel more intensely about
losses than about gains. These are steps
in the right direction but do not go far
enough. A lot of consumption is habitual.
Taking a shower or a bath, having a certain
breakfast routine, watching television or
pottering about in the garden – these are
all forms of consumption but hardly activities
that people choose each time they
be. It is not a rational or myopic facet. They
are routines that have histories that emerge,
endure, evolve, mutate, and die. And they are not
just individual. They are practices where
human skill and anism come together with
materials and technologies – and

...some come apart. New technologies
like digital cameras or speedy plumbing
sets do not just respond to a prior demand
but give rise to new practices and needs.

4/ Lessons About Consumption: a short overview of the Cultures of Consumption research programme

Banking on housing; spending the home
Source: Susan Smith project

and utilise this existing pool of financial
knowledge and prudence. At the same
time, the growing dependence on a single
investment raises a difficult challenge for
the state, financial services, and an
ageing population.
More and more people in Britain eat
their food from ‘alternative’ food networks
such as farm shops and organic box
schemes, or even adopt cash in shops in the
internet.

4/ Lessons About Consumption: a short overview of the Cultures of Consumption research programme

Banking on housing; spending the home
Source: Susan Smith project

Modern day chicks in a hatchery
Source: Peter Jackson

The significance of trust and the active
contribution of consumers in transforming
the geographies of consumption, however,
are not new. In nineteenth-century America,
Lessons About Consumption: a short overview of the Cultures of Consumption research programme

CONSUMERS CARE
In early modern societies, how and what people consumed was closely connected to local networks of employment and influence. A gentry family like that of Alice de Strange in early seventeenth-century England employed a dozen servants to cook, clean and carry goods. Tailors made clothes, lent money, and provided information about the latest fashions. Everyone recognised consumption as a crucial source of patronage and power. Since then, the ties between consumers and producers have become less direct and visible. Still, it would be a mistake to presume that how people buy, use, and discard things is any less social today, or that consumers in affluent societies are self-centred individualists. Market forces and morals are not separate worlds or historical eras.

The HOME and FOOD are two areas that especially reveal the caring impulses at work. Britons today hold more wealth in their homes and spend more freely from their assets than ever before. Flexible mortgages give people a chance to use equity withdrawal like a cash machine. Is this encouraging reckless consumerism? Some go on holiday or a shopping spree, but most are careful and competent consumers, not ‘lopped debtors’.

They use flexible borrowing to modernise their home, build an extension, and build up an asset for their families. Public policy should recognise the land and to growers, for others it is about health and about the pleasures of cooking previously unheard of vegetables like kallaloo. We tend to associate choice with full-stacked shelves in supermarkets, but for many of these alternative consumers it is the farm that stands for choice. How people think and feel about food and animals has major repercussions for the commercial sector. Chicken is a recently acquired popular taste in Britain, dating from the 1960s. And yet, consumers express nostalgia about chicken ‘the way it used to be’ – free-range and organic production is spreading. In response to concerns about the pace of industrial farming, retailers have slowed down the chicken chain. Emotions, memory, and identity are assuming growing importance in the food sector.

A staff at Bristol Farmers’ Market
Source: Laura Nemi

LESSON 5: CONSUMERS’ RIGHTS

People want better services, but choice also creates anxiety, especially about new technologies. The government’s focus on ‘confident consumers’ has historical precursors, such as the Design Council originally founded in 1949 to educate a more informed and discriminating consuming public. Choice is not entirely new – public service workers always had some choice. In spite of the growing types of consumer choice, many users still prefer to be clients, referring to professionals. Many users want providers to take the lead, but only after they have been listened to. Voice is as important as choice, and the two may pull people in different directions.

LESSON 3: CONSUMERS’ INTERVENTION TO DIVERSITY
Consumers are highly diverse and straddled Homologous models of consumer society and consumption have passed their sell-by date. Developed societies are internally segmented in different ways – in the United States, for example, most people are relatively closely connected to the few people who like reading more of it; in Norway and Netherlands, by contrast, leisure patterns are more divided. Status remains important in Britain, but it is wrong to presume that the social elite just likes elite culture. People with high levels of education and status are more likely to participate in low-brow as well as highbrow cultural activities – omnivores who like cinema as well as opera. Low status groups are more likely to be cultural univores.

In the United Kingdom, the baby boomer generation is already after it. The Second World War had carried the new experiences of the 1920s, such as popular music and greater travel abroad, with them as aging consumers. Cosmopolitanism is closely linked to level of education. Similarly, children’s consumer culture is not all of one piece. Fashion is a vital marker of identity; already six-year olds know what is ‘cool’. Generational boundaries are blurring. But evidence also points to regional and social differences: some children resist fashion, and rural children care less about fashionability than whether what they wear is suitable for a particular purpose.

Britain’s ageing population: actively pursuing increased years of consumer culture
Source: Martin Parr / Magnum

LESSON 6: FOLLOWING PRACTICES, NOT INDIVIDUAL CHOICES
A focus on individual choice is of limited value to understand the dynamics mentioned above. Some economists and psychologists have revisited the conventional model, stressing that rationality can be ‘bounded’; choice can be ‘myopic’, and that people can feel more intensely about losses than about gains. These are steps in the right direction but do not go far enough. A lot of consumption is habitual. Taking a shower or a bath, having a certain hairstyle, watching television or pottering about in the garden – these are all activities that have histories that emerge, mutate, and die. And they are not just individual. They are practices where human skill and anistion come together with materials and technologies – and sometimes come apart. New technologies like digital cameras or speedy plumbing sets do not just respond to a prior demand but give rise to new practices and needs.

Lessons from the Cultures of Consumption research programme

Several projects in the Cultures of Consumption programme have begun to explore the practices of habitual consumption, consumption as a retreat from ‘real’ politics, a soft politics. It is a path that has a lot of mileage for future research.

RESEARCH PROJECTS
Cultures of Consumption consisted of 26 research projects in the social sciences, arts and humanities:
1. The Diffusion of Cultures of Consumption: a comparative analysis. Professor Alan Mann, School of Social Sciences, University of Manchester.
2. Multinational Retailers in the Asia Pacific: Professor Christopher Brookes, School of Management, Royal Holloway University of London.
4. The Khat Nexus: transnational consumption in a global economy. Professor Runo Laanen; St Antony’s College, University of Oxford.
5. Shopping Routes: networks of fashion consumption in London’s West End. Professor Christopher Brookes; Professor Thomas Power; Head of Geography, Royal Holloway, University of London.
6. Liquid Politics: the historic transformation of the water consumer. Professor Frank Trentmann, School of History Classics and Archaeology, Birkbeck College.
LESSON 1: DIVERSITY CONTINUES IN OUR GLOBALIZED CONSUMPTION WORLD

Globalization does not mean global convergence. There is no evidence that we are moving towards a shared global consumer culture. A look at how people spend their leisure time in affluent societies to the impact of new financial services on consumer behaviour to customer services in China, from how people spend their leisure time in affluent societies to how they feel about choice and voice in public services.

LESSON 2: CONSUMERS ARE CITIZENS, TOO

It is wrong to see consumers and citizens as oppositional, one private, the other public. In fact, it was battles over civic rights and liberties that forged a stronger consumer identity in the first place. In Victorian Britain, citizens rallied as consumers to demand cheap and constant water and privatisation in Latin America and Africa have created a new arena of consumer politics to the rise of London as a global fashion city.