Living (Apart But) Together With the Extended Family in Economically Challenging Times; the Case of Greek Consumers’ Experiences

Katerina Karanika, University of Exeter, UK
Margaret Hogg, Lancaster University, UK

Research has overlooked how the changing family forms/living arrangements influence low-income consumers’ experiences. This phenomenological study examined Greek consumers’ transition into lower consumption levels. Support within the extended family coloured consumption experiences. Living (apart but) together with their extended family, respondents experienced possessions/products/activities as agents that help or hinder coping.

[to cite]:
Katerina Karanika and Margaret Hogg (2013), "Living (Apart But) Together With the Extended Family in Economically Challenging Times; the Case of Greek Consumers’ Experiences", in E - European Advances in Consumer Research Volume 10, eds. Gert Cornelissen, Elena Reutskaja, and Ana Valenzuela, Duluth, MN : Association for Consumer Research, Pages: 142-143.

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/1013973/volumes/v10e/E-10

[copyright notice]:
This work is copyrighted by The Association for Consumer Research. For permission to copy or use this work in whole or in part, please contact the Copyright Clearance Center at http://www.copyright.com/.
Living (apart but) Together with the Extended Family in Economically Challenging Times: The Case of Greek Consumers’ Experiences

Katerina Karanika, University of Exeter, UK *
Margaret Hogg, Lancaster University, UK

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

This paper examines consumers’ experiences in regards to the changing family forms and living arrangements in economically challenging times. Recent work discusses the role of family in consumer behaviour (Cotte and Wood 2004; Ekstrom 2004; Moisio et al 2004; O’Malley and Prothero 2006; 2007; Kozinetz et al 2006; Epp 2008; Gutierrez et al 2008; Epp and Price 2008; 2010) and in coping with poverty and restricted consumption (e.g. Hibbert and Picentini 2003; Kochuyt 2004; Evans and Chandler 2006; Ruth and Hsuing 2007; Hamilton and Catterall 2008; Hamilton 2009; 2012). Reflecting the importance of social support in coping (Duhachek 2005), the family is made into a back-up institution to fill the gaps created by the market failures and the insufficient safety nets of the welfare state (Kochuyt 2004). Socioeconomic factors such as increasing number of adult children returning/remaining to parental home, ageing population and limited capacity for aged-care in some countries increase the prevalence of extended family households (Wyn and Woodman 2006; Cobb-Clark 2008; Keene and Batson 2010). Although the recession is influencing the rise in familial-intergenerational living and support (Eurostat 2010), consumer research by concentrating mainly on the nuclear family has neglected to explore the changing family forms and living arrangements and their influence on consumption experiences in economically challenging times representing a gap in our understanding of low-income consumers’ experiences.

This phenomenological study explored Greek consumers’ experiences of lower levels of consumption. Sampling included 35 participants, aged 22-69. Participants were experiencing significant income reductions and often had problems making ends meet. Interviews were transcribed and a phenomenological analysis (Thompson et al 1989; 1990) was conducted.

Our findings reveal that the economic crisis changing the contemporary Greek society, challenges families in their structure and relationships between members. Even though the nuclear family is considered as the unit of consumption, the extended family emerged in our data as a significant unit of analysis in consumer research. Our findings reveal strong (financial, practical and emotional) support within the extended family coping with financial difficulties. In line with previous research (e.g. Ruth and Hsuing 2007) our respondents tried to satisfy family level needs rather than individual levels needs and wants, however, the family level needs prioritised regarded not only the nuclear family but also the extended family. Therefore, our respondents tried to minimise the negative consequences of poverty not only for children (e.g. Hamilton and Catterall 2008), but also for adult children, siblings, elderly parents and (grand-) grandchildren.

Klocker et al (2012) examining extended family households referred to two modes of extended family living that they named ‘living together but apart’ and ‘living together’. Members of extended families characterised by the first mode lived in the same house but, in a practical sense, were living apart, quite independently and separately. Members of extended families characterised by the second mode lived together in a more complete sense, sharing more communal household spaces. Our data reflect an additional mode of relating within the extended family that we name ‘living apart but together’ as even when living apart from members of the extended family, respondents were not living independently nor taking decisions independently; providing support to or receiving support from their extended family. For example, even when members of the extended family were not living in the same house, they were eating together on a daily basis, especially when living in close proximity to provide and receive practical and emotional support, while members of the extended family living in rural areas were sending food products they produce to their relatives living at urban areas to help them cope with the financial difficulties.

This support within the extended family coloured respondents’ consumption experiences. Respondents valued as ‘agents that help coping’, possessions, products and activities that they felt enabled them to regulate the stressful emotional situations of providing or receiving extended family’s support or enabled solutions to handle financial difficulties and better support the extended family or release the extended family from providing support. More specifically, possessions, products and activities were valued as problem-solvers for improving job prospects (e.g. foreign language lessons) and/or for being associated with developing new skills to cope well with the financial difficulties (e.g. DIY items); or as emotionally supportive for enabling transformation of negative thoughts/moods and distraction from present difficulties (e.g. music, walks, contact with other people, psychotherapy), sense of freedom and independence (e.g. bicycle). And respondents experienced as ‘pitfalls or agents that hinder coping’ needed, wanted or valued possessions, products or activities that they felt impeded providing support to the extended family or required receiving support from the extended family. More specifically, experiencing financial difficulties and providing or receiving extended family’s support, our respondents often expressed negative feelings such as guilt and/or shame along with their positive feelings for their valued possessions, products and activities. And respondents were often forced to abandon favourite activities or to sell loved possessions that were part of their extended self in order to raise resources for themselves and their (extended) family and they expressed their feelings of disappointment and sadness while encouraging themselves to consider the ‘pitfall’ of having loved material objects and the merits of a life of ‘voluntary simplicity’. Moreover, respondents expressed negative feelings for needed and wanted possessions often acquired with credit and creating financial pressures and anxieties within the context of providing or receiving familial support.

In conclusion, our study extends previous work on low-income consumers that had concentrated on the nuclear family by revealing that the extended family was often the lenses through which these consumers experienced restricted consumption. Our findings reveal that a severe recession is influencing such a significant rise in familial-intergenerational support that the family is undergoing a metamorphosis from the nuclear family to a new form of extended family coping with the recession. And the study extends theory by identifying different modes of relating within the extended family (i.e. ‘living apart but together’ and ‘living together’) that coloured consumption experiences, changing the meaning of possessions, products and consumption activities into agents that help or hinder coping.

REFERENCES


Eurostat (2010) 51 million young EU adults lived with their parent(s) in 2008


Kochuyt T (2004), “Giving away one’s poverty. On the consumption of scarce resources within the family”, *The Sociological Review*, 52(2), 139–161


