ACR Presidential Address    Finding Legs: Generativity and the Everyday Language of the Consumer

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ACR PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS
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In their addresses, several past ACR presidents, have discussed how important it is for us to think conceptually. Gerry Zaltman, for example, noted that the quality of our ideas is reflected by the quality of our concepts. Alice Tybout described the importance of thinking theoretically, at the level of generalized constructs as opposed to variables and the operationalizations that involve their empirical assessment. Rich Lutz indicated that thinking in terms of concepts facilitates knowledge accumulation by focusing on ideas that unite researchers whose diverse paradigmatic or methodological perspectives might otherwise make them appear divided.

Personally, I have found many of their ideas to be quite profound. So much that that they have spurred me to think about some of the concepts that have been focal to our field—those that have moved our field forward by stimulating a plethora of research ideas. I call these concepts “generative” as they have the ability to generate interesting and novel insights into the internal and external world of the consumer. They “have legs” because they move our field forward and spur ideas formulated by other researchers. A non-exhaustive list of such generative domains is presented here.

They include, for example, concepts like motivation, attitudes, memory, and materialism. What struck me from this list was that many generative domains reflect words represented in our everyday language. For example, motivational research essentially deals with the domain of what “i need”. The phrase “i am” has generated work on the self-concept “i like”—research on attitudes; “i remember”—work on memory; and i have—materialism. This revelation convinced me that people like Craig Thompson and others in our field who examine consumer discourse may be on to something big!

This revelation also made me wonder whether we have exhausted our list of highly generative concepts and whether there are novel concepts that could further move us forward.

I believe there are, and I wish to illustrate this potential by describing the relevance of once such concept—hope. I do so to suggest that future research must or should focus on hope, but to suggest that generative research domains may be identified by listening to the everyday language of the consumer.

Before moving forward on this illustrative example, let me begin by defining hope. According to appraisal theory, hope is an emotion evoked in response to an outcome a consumer views as having two characteristics—first, the outcome is goal congruent. Goal congruent means that the outcome is good—in other words, that something positive could occur (as in “i hope i win the lottery”) or that something negative could be avoided (as in “i hope i don’t have cancer”). The second appraisal is that this goal congruent outcome is viewed as possible.

As it pertains to the everyday language of the consumer, hope is a common word in everyday language. To see how common, try going through the day or even just an hour without saying the word—it’s tough. In fact, Shimanoff observed that it is one of the most frequently used words in our emotion lexicon. As such, it is of no surprise to see it’s occurrence in websites, and on the titles of book, newspapers articles and magazines columns.

As it pertains to marketing, hope is pervasive to consumers’ acquisition and usage of products in a number of industries. The exercise, diet, and beauty industries are spurred by consumers’ hope for a better body and more attractive appearance. Dating services, among others, are based on consumers’ hopes for establishing new relationships; elaborate wedding rituals on hopes for their endurance; and therapy on hope to maintain good relationships or re-establish psychological balance following their demise. Use of medical services, pharmaceuticals, herbal supplements and diagnostic testing procedures are motivated by consumers’ hope for good health. Investments in education are spurred by parents hope for a good life for their children, while investments in the stock market, savings behavior, gambling, and playing the lottery are motivated by consumers’ hope for a safe and prosperous economic future. Consumers’ hope for social welfare—and such hope has implications for industries as well. Charities are sustained by consumer’s hope for a better world, while marketers that use inappropriate tactics are boycotted by consumers who hope for social justice. Hope is also relevant to the marketing of spirituality, as consumers hope for internal peace and enlightenment and life in the after-life.

In his ACR Presidential address Russ Belk encouraged us to think about consumer behavior as a part of life. I would surmise that hope has this characteristic; it is an emotion that applies to all people.

1 There are nuances in the use of the term “hope”, such hope as an entity (a hope), as a possession (to have hope), as a process (to hope) or as a belief that accompanies an emotion (to be hopeful). These distinctions are discussed elsewhere (de Mello and MacInnis (2005), though all focus on the core appraisal dimensions of goal congruence and possibility. Briefly, “a hope” is an outcome appraised as goal congruent and possible. Having hope is possessing a feeling that occurs when a goal congruent outcome is appraised as possible. One either has or does not have hope. The opposite of having hope is having no hope or being hopeless. To hope deals with the notion of “how goal congruent is it”. A goal that is not only congruent but also important evokes yearning. When we say “i really hope kerry wins the election” we mean that we have an intense feeling of longing for the occurrence of this outcome appraised and goal congruent and possible. Finally, one feels varying degrees of hopefulness as a function of the extent to which a possible goal congruent outcome is appraised as probable. It is also possible to use the core appraisal dimensions of hope to differentiate it from concepts like expectations, involvement, wishing, desire, and values. While expectations focus on what is likely and are independent of what is good, hope focuses on what is possible and goal congruent. Wishing connotes not an emotion but rather a state that accompanies a desire for a goal congruent outcome that viewed as all but impossible. Desire is also a state—a state of passion for something in the present. Values are beliefs about what is right. Hope is an emotion about what is possible. Involvement is a state that describes the arousal level of the individual and their motivation to act. Involvement implies neither appraisals of goal congruency nor possibility. Hope may induce involvement in products or decisions, but it is an outcome, not a synonym for involvement. Hope is also different from the recent work on anticipated emotions—like anticipated satisfaction, regret and joy as studied by people include Shiv and Huber, Simonson and Bagozzi. Hope focuses on anticipatory emotions— that is, emotions that accompany anticipated acquisition, usage and disposition as opposed to those that are expected to arise from purchase, usage and disposition.
in all times and in all places. It reflects what we would like to see happen to ourselves, the people we care about, those we don’t, social groups, our country, and indeed the state of our world.

In the slides that follow, I “hope” to show that by focusing on the everyday language of the consumer, in this case as it applies to the concept of hope, we can move our field forward in several important ways. First, I will show that the concept of hope has considerable relevance to well-trod research domains that have already been highly generative to our field—domains like information processing, emotions, and so on. I will also show that hope has considerable generative capacity by its applicability to crises from some of our past Presidents to expand our field’s focus of inquiry. I will also suggest that hope is cultivated by the marketplace and imbued in our social system. In sum, I wish to illustrate that by listening to the everyday language of consumers we may be able to identify concepts—like hope—that “have legs”; those that move us deeper into well-trod areas but also move us forward to new and uncharted domains.

Let us first consider how hope may have generative capacity by its ability to move us deeper into research domains that have already been highly generative to our field—topics like the self-concept, motivation, information processing, emotions, satisfaction, and so on.

Psychologist Hazel Markus and her colleagues have deepened the self-concept literature by identifying different types of possible future selves. These selves are relevant as they drive decision making and chart life experiences. Interestingly, these “selves” can be arrayed on a set of continua that reflect the goal congruence and possibility dimensions of hope. An “expected self” is the self we think we will likely become. A fantasy self is one that we dream about but which is most likely beyond our reach. The hoped for self is the self that we believe is possible and goal congruent. The feared self is a self regarded as possible and goal incongruent.

Interesting questions can be asked about these various self-concepts and the relationships among them. To what extent does the gap between a hoped for self (say weighing 120 pounds post diet) and an expected self (say weighing 150 pounds) motivate or de-motivate consumer action (such as joining Weight Watchers). Is a false hope evident when a fantasy self and hoped for self cannot be distinguished? Does contrasting a hoped for self with a feared self in advertising induce greater consumer action than just the presentation of a hoped for self? And what is the relationship between other temporally focused self concepts and hope? Is hope induced by a discrepancy between an actual self (e.g., I now weigh 150 pounds) and past self (but at one time I did weigh 120 pounds)?

Hope and hoped for selves are relevant to not only to consumer motivation, but also to marketing. Following the means-end chain perspective advocated by Reynolds, Gutman, and Olson (among others), products are means to achieve not only our values but the outcomes we hope for. The outcomes achieved through product use, in turn, serve a broader purpose—that of achieving a hoped for self. Furthermore, since the outcomes we hope to achieve could relate to a number of consumption domains, products, advertisements, logos, and brand names from any of these consumption domains might feed into a hoped for self.

If consumers hope to achieve goal congruent outcomes through product use, hope should invariably be related to the notion of product category involvement. In fact, the more one hopes to achieve a goal congruent outcome the more likely one is to develop goal-derived categories that contain products relevant the achievement of that goal. Lottery tickets, real estate, and the stock market for example, can also be consistent with the goal derived category “things that will make me rich. Interestingly, hope may also be relevant to decision making involvement, inducing consistent and perhaps even intrusive thoughts and images that relate to the outcome we hope for. Such potential is reflected in the phrases of one being consumed by or a prisoner of hope.

The concept of hope could also be of interest to many of us who share an interest in micro-level topics as characterized by consumer information processing. Hope for a goal congruent outcome may induce pre-factual thinking and imagery about either the means to achieve a hoped for outcome or feelings that will accompany its actualization.

Furthermore hope may deepen our understanding of consumer information processing, leveraging on the fascinating research stream investigated by people like Meloy, Maheswaran, and Jain. Specifically, rather than processing information in an objective fashion, consumers who hope for a given outcome—say to look beautiful, may engage in “motivated reasoning”. That is, they may process information in a way that allows them to conclude that the outcome they hope for is indeed possible. They may selectively attend to and process information consistent with the conclusion that the outcome is possible and discount or ignore information that suggests that it isn’t. As it pertains to work on information search and information sources, hope may affect who we choose as an information source, as we are more likely to choose those sources that will confirm that the outcome we hope for is indeed possible.

That hope may induce such motivated reasoning is perhaps reflected by the notion of “false hope” and the well known phrases shown here that characterize the seductive and mind distorting influences of hope.

Speaking of information processing, researchers have long studied individual differences and their effects on information processing. As it pertains to hope, psychologist C. R. Snyder finds considerable differences among individuals in the extent to which they experience hope. Across contexts, some individuals are more likely to have hope. These high hope individuals show greater task persistence, and find ways to achieve their goals despite obstacles. High hope individuals are not necessarily optimists who have a blind faith that things will work out. Rather, such individuals use hope to ensure goal achievement. How do such individual differences relate to factors like decision making involvement and confidence in the potential benefits of innovations as solvers of consumption problems?

A long-standing body of research in consumer behavior and psychology shows that mood has relatively profound effects on consumer behavior—influencing memory, information encoding, information retrieval, creativity and product judgments. What is the relationship between hope and mood? Does hope induce a positive mood? Are some of the effects we have observed in the literature on mood driven in essence by hope?

Relatedly, how does hope relate to anticipated emotions like anticipated joy, regret and satisfaction? On the one hand, the more one hopes for a given outcome, the more likely one is to project intense feelings once the outcome actually occurs (or doesn’t occur). On the other hand, since hope is evoked in response to outcomes that are only possible, and not certain, the confidence with which affective forecasts are held may be lessened. What factors affect the extent to which we protect ourselves from hoping for things that might not occur—meaning, not getting our hopes up too high? Is there a hope regulatory system and when does it kick into gear?

And what is the relationship between hope and experienced emotions? Do consumers experience more joy, greater regret or greater sadness when they strongly hope for an outcome that occurs or does not occur?
How does hope relate to consumer satisfaction, if at all? Hope is predicated on what is possible, not like the expectancy disconfirmation model on what is likely or expected. A positive disconfirmation of what we expect enhances satisfaction. Are we even more satisfied when the outcome is better than what we had hoped for—because we didn’t expect it—only thought it was possible?

A negative disconfirmation of what we expect leads to dissatisfaction with a product. But how does satisfaction relate to the disconfirmation of what we hope for? Is dissatisfaction with a product that didn’t create the outcome we had hoped for mitigated by the fact that we didn’t expect the outcome—only thought it was possible? Do consumers use motivated reasoning stimulated by hope to induce self-persuasion: to convince themselves that the outcome they had hoped to achieve from the product really did happen—For example, “yes, I think my skin is a bit clearer now”.

Hope is also relevant to those in our field who have studied more sociologically related phenomena such as gift giving. Fascinating work over the past 15 years has significantly advanced our understanding of gift giving and the transfer of meaning through the gift giving process. Research by John Sherry, Cele Otnes and others, shows us that gift giving can be instrumental to the cultivation and demise of relationships. Does hope weave its way into gift giving? Perhaps the hope to please the gift giver is woven into gift giving practices that help maintain good relationships. And, what is the role of hope in the intergenerational transfer of cherished possessions as studied by such scholars as Price, Arnould and Curasi? Such possessions may embody the unrealized or actualized hopes of the gift giver and their transfer may be accompanied by the hope of the appreciation of and maintenance of these meanings in the recipient.

On a more macro level, hope is also relevant to the “dark side” of consumer behavior as it pertains to spending and credit card abuse—as can happen when what we hope to have outstrips our abilities to pay for it. And what about hope and materialism. Does getting (or buying) what we hope for make us happy? The answer appears to be no—and for several reasons. First, consumption entails entropy costs that deplete life energy. But even more so, McCracken (1990) writes that once individuals take possession of objects they had previously hoped for, the impact of the object on happiness can be empirically tested. Invariably the consumer realizes that the product didn’t actually make them happier. Interestingly, rather than learning from this experience, hope springs eternal as consumers continue to buy more and different stuff since it is THAT which will make them happy. Paradoxically, happiness may reside not in acquiring what we hope for but in the process of having hope in the first place. As Chalmers writes, “The grand essentials of life are something to do, something to love, and something hope for’.

Finally, how does hope relate to even more macro-level issues that relate to cross cultural research on consumption? Very little research has examined cross-cultural differences in hope, though the question seems a natural one as some societies are centered on the here and now and what is as opposed to the future and what is possible. Moreover, we know that some societies adopt a fatalistic attitude, focusing not on possible goal congruent outcomes but rather the certainty of goal incongruent ones. In their book The Rules of Hope Averill, Caitlin and Chon (1991) provide some provocative results that lend insight into potential cross-cultural differences in hope. When studying individuals from 8 countries, they found that the concept of hope was frequent in the emotion lexicon of individuals from the US, Australia, Puerto Rico and Japan but infrequent among consumers from Indonesia, Malaysia and Sri Lanka.

Interesting differences were also found in what was seen as related to hope. Americans saw hope as similar to concepts like faith and prayer, which focus on uncontrollable forces outside the self. In contrast, Koreans saw hope as similar to concepts like ideal, goal, effort, and ambition, clearly relating hope to personal control. Differences were also found among cultures in what consumers hope for and what they believe they shouldn’t hope for.

Perhaps the study of hope can lend insight into differences in consumer behavior across cultures. For example, to what extent do different cultures link products and consumption with hoped for outcomes? Do appeals to consumer hopes work consistently across cultures? Does culture moderate the impact of advertising that appeals to consumer hope on advertising efficacy?

Now let’s think about the role of hope in expanding our thinking to novel or at least under-researched domains identified by some of ACR’s past presidents. In the more “micro” domain, I would like to show that hope has relevance to other emotional-relevant domains and to non-conscious processing and issues of evolutionary significance and survival, relevant domains suggested by Past President Joe Alba. I will briefly show its relevance to social marketing, self-regulation, the dark side of consumer behavior and marketing, happiness, consumption in third world and emergent economies, and in general life—as encouraged by past presidents like Alan Andreasen, Beth Hirschman, Marsha Richins, and Russ Belk.

As it relates to emotions, hope is relevant to the emergent domain of consumer coping. In a consumer domain hope is nowhere more evident than in consumers’ coping with the loss of possessions as might be experienced through war, imprisonment, intimidation, poverty, homelessness, institutionalization, and natural disasters. What keeps consumers going in these times of strife and in the absence of material possessions that make for a comfortable existence? Psychologists argue that it is hope. Hope sustains people in the worst of times as often it is all that we have to hang on to.

Insight into how hope facilitates coping is revealed in a number of places including Dr. Jerome Groopman’s book The Anatomy of Hope. Groopman, the chair of the Harvard School of Medicine, identifies case after case where hope has prolonged life and enhanced the quality of life of consumers beset by disease and trauma. Groopman points to fascinating research at the interface between biochemistry and emotion—research that dovetails with the interests of others in our field who value the linkage of brain, emotion, non-conscious and evolutionary processes. That research suggests that hope facilitates coping because the internalization of the possibility of a goal congruent outcome (such as recovery) is associated with the release of endorphins and enkephalins, neurotransmitters that mimic the effects of morphine. Groopman argues that the biology of hope is a very real one having significant effects on coping with extremely adverse situations.

If hope reminds us about what is possible, does it also affect task persistence by keeping the outcome that we hope to have happen in the foreground? When does hope fade and turn into defeat? What predicts when consumers lose hope and believe they can no longer go on with consumption practices designed to make for a better life? Does hope encourage delay of gratification? Perhaps the more one hopes to achieve a goal congruent outcome the more one can keep the image of the hoped for outcome and the good feelings that surround its achievement salient, and hence the longer one can delay gratification.

If hope affects task persistence and delay of gratification, what are its implications for self-regulation? Hundreds of thousands of consumers are beset by problems of over-consumption and sometimes enact actions that break patterns of over-consumption. What
is the relationship between hope and self-regulation? What do consumers do to keep their hope alive in self-regulation practices?

How can marketers induce and encourage hope? Consider, for example, Weight Watchers’ practice of acknowledging other members for their weight loss success. The effect of this practice goes beyond a public reward to the successful individual. It also sustains hope of consumers who have not yet achieve this goal congruent outcome by reminding them that weight loss can happen to them too.

Self-regulation relates to outcomes that are controllable. But how do individuals maintain hope when things are outside of their control? This too has interesting consumer behavior implications as illustrated in Clotfelter and Cook’s book “Selling Hope: State Lotteries in America” (among other places).

Consumers often engage in superstitious behaviors to feel that they have more control over making hoped for outcomes happen. For example, some consumers play the lottery on “lucky days”; others research which numbers haven’t won in a while, and hence are “due”. Blowing on dice when we gamble or standing next to a “lucky lady” is designed to bring on a hoped for win. An entire industry associated with talisman, good luck charms, crystals and the like are designed to enhance the perceived probability of a hoped for outcome. In other contexts, consumers appeal to benign gods, as children do when they make trips to the mall to sit on Santa’s lap and relate what they hope they will find under the Christmas tree. Others pray to god for the outcomes they hope will happen. Perhaps, for example, a few people have found themselves saying “please God, let this pregnancy test be negative and I promise I’ll never have sex again”.

While hope may be associated with coping with bad outcomes, it may also be an experience that is held and savor ed. Research by psychologists Chew and Ho suggest that in some cases hope may be associated with the timing of uncertainty resolution. When we hope that something may occur, we may delay knowing how it turns out because we want to savor the possibility that what we hope for has come true. As a case in point, consider why some consumers fail to scratch the numbers off of a lottery ticket immediately. Why wait? The reason is that waiting allows one to savor the hope that the ticket is a winner.

If hope facilitates coping, what happens when consumers lose hope? Consistent with Martin Seligman’s work on depression and hopelessness, sociologist Marian Brewer Smith proposes that the loss of hope is associated with drug abuse, addition, theft, and other factors that represent the dark side of consumer behavior.

ACR President Marsha Richins asked us to consider big or macro-level issues associated with consumer behavior. Along these lines, one might ask how does the increasing globalization of communication between industrialized and third world countries alter the nature of what consumers hope for? Does the realization of what is goal congruent and possible raise hope? Or does the discrepancy between what is now and what is possible induce a state of hopelessness by suggesting that what is possible for some could never be possible for you.

Beyond the just described, hope is also relevant to important public policy issues. If hope induces motivated reasoning, making consumers less discerning processors of information, consumers may be less able to recognize or acknowledge blatantly false advertising claims. As such, they may be more likely to fall victim to scams and fraudulent activities.

Furthermore, the lure of outcomes one hopes for, coupled with motivated reasoning may induce consumers to use extreme and often risky practices so as to achieve the outcome hope for. A long literature attests to this potential, including research by our own Jonathan Schouten. In her book Hope in a Jar—a chronicle of the cosmetics industry, Kathy Peiss notes that consumers have historically engaged in many seemingly outlandish practices to look more beautiful—such as taking poison to promote “bedroom eyes. To Hope for beauty undoubtedly underlies these painful and risky practices.

The motivational impact of hope may also make consumers engage in marketplace practices that raise ethical implications. There is, for example, a growing marketplace designed to match couples who desperately hope to have children with the human eggs of beautiful and intelligent women. Aside from the obvious ethical implications of creating a marketplace where babies can be bought and sold and a society which deems certain traits “desirable” and others “undesirable”, one wonders about the ethical implications of preying on the hopes of consumers who are so desperate to have children that they will do anything—even turn to an underground marketplace- to make it happen.

The concept of hope also finds relevance in the realm of social marketing, an area that ACR President Alan Andreassen has considered potential to contribute to social welfare. Hope is closely aligned with a well-known bias examined by people like Lauren Block, Punam Keller and Geeta Menon—the positivity bias. Interestingly, we tend to believe that the outcomes we hope for are more likely to happen to us than to other people, and that the outcomes we fear are more like to happen to other people than to us.

Clearly this bias has implications for social marketers who want to warn consumers about the possibility of having cancer or contracting AIDS. Yet, the very existence of this bias makes consumers feel they are less vulnerable to these negative outcomes. As such, they are less likely to engage in preventative actions that may involve their detection. Interesting questions can be asked about hope and the positivity bias. How can marketing communications be calibrated such that they reduce the positivity bias yet also sustain hope that a given illness—if detected—can be remedied?

Those of us who are interested social influence might ask where hope comes from, how it is created, how it is dashed, and what factors moderate its derivation. I’d like to spend a minute here thinking about these issues, considering how hope is induced by our social system and the marketplace and whether consumers are increasingly turning to the marketplace as opposed to religion as source of hope.

Grant McCracken’s classic 1986 JCR paper indicated that the meaning of products derives from the culturally constituted world and from market-relevant anointers of meaning—like ad agencies, producers and marketers, as well as social groups, evaluators and commentators. To what extent is the meaning of products and consumers’ hope for the outcome they produce driven by the marketplace? And to what extent are social evaluators and the media—people like Simon Cowell of American Idol—important to the cultivation of as well as the demise of hope.

As far as social commentators go, consider as an example commentators like Michael Moore and speakers at the Democratic Convention (whose slogan is “Hope is on the way”), complement this year’s political marketing campaigns in shaping consumers’ hope for a better America. Consider too movie stars and celebrities as forces that shape consumers’ hopes for athletic greatness, beauty, achievement, and esteem. Even everyday people cultivate hope through the media. Consider, for example, the impact of American Idol contestants like Diana DeGarmo, Latoya London, and Fantasia Barrino in shaping average consumers’ hopes for fame. Groupies and fans hope for proximity and the opportunity to touch the greatness of their favorite bands—as illustrated not only in the
movie Almost Famous but also in a wonderful paper by Tom O’Guinn on the Barry Manilow fan club. Hope for achievement in the bodily domain are encouraged by Mr. Universe, Olympians and the celebrated others who are positioned as the icons of athletic prowess.

The heroes and heroines who occupy our childhood fantasies are reflective of hope. How many of us, for example, did not hope to grow up being as brave and adventurous as Amelia Earhart, as intelligent and as perspective altering as Albert Einstein, as dedicated and as devoted to the state of our planet as Jane Goodall, and as good looking and sexy as C.W. Park?

Of course the cultivation of hope by the culturally constituted world begs the question of the socialization of hope in children— a topic ACR President Debbie Roedder John discussed in her presidential address. At what age do children have the cognitive capacity to be future oriented and to hope? How does the manifestation of hope or the things we hope for change as function of age? At what age do children learn to turn to the marketplace as a means for fulfilling hope through consumption and to what extent are children’s hopes unfulfilled by what they feel that don’t have in the way of consumer goods?

Those in the audience who adopt a marketing perspective might ask what marketing tactics stimulate hope? Clearly, if hope relates to appraisals of goal congruency and possibility, tactics that make it seem that a goal congruent outcome is actually possible should induce hope.

One might do this by suggesting that this possibility exists because of something new about the product. Innovations are seductive because they imply that there is something new about the product that can deliver what wasn’t possible before. Alternatively, hope may be encouraged by promises of customization. Customization, after all, takes into account the specific goal congruent outcomes a consumer hopes to achieve and ensures that it happens. Alternatively, one may provide demonstrations that show, if not imply that goal congruent outcomes are possible.

Rather than suggesting possibilities in the product, marketers may also stimulate hope by suggesting that possibilities for the goal congruent outcome exist in the person. Appeals that tell the consumer that they “can to it” or that they can “change their fate”, are designed to alter the belief that what consumers thought was impossible can be actualized through their own efforts.

Marketers also cultivate hope by suggesting possibilities in the process. The idea here is that consumers can get what hope for if they get the inside scoop on how to make it happen. Many magazines, books, product packages and websites promise this knowledge and hence the possibility of achieving what one hopes for through the provision of tricks, tips, steps, tools, and best of all, “secrets”.

A final issue I’d like to consider regarding hope as stimulated by marketing is whether they marketplace is increasingly serving as a source of hope—potential outstripping the influence of other sources. Throughout time, hope has been linked with religion. To the religiously faithful, fulfilling hope for today seems less important than hope for the everlasting joys experienced in the afterlife. However, the secular world of consumption affords many opportunities for hope beyond the sacred and spiritual hope offered through religion. Indeed, Russ Belk (1996) argues that our society has witnessed a transformation of the locus of hope—from religion and redemption to the marketplace and consumption. Rather than spending the day set apart for worship, Sundays are just as often spent on trips to the mall where hopes of new lives, and better things are indulged. The religious experience of Christmas has moved from a spiritual practice focusing on hope for a new world following the birth of a savior to a commercial enterprise focused on consumption and Santa Claus. And stores are called “meccas” offering hope and salvation to consumption woes.

I have tried to suggest that the concept of hope is one that may “have legs”. That is, it may have considerable generative capacity, allowing us to deepen our knowledge of topics that remain tried and true but also allowing us to delve into areas that are also vital, and while pioneered by some are not yet prototypic of our field. This includes questions that link hope with consumption and life, coping, public policy, social marketing, the dark side of marketing and consumer behavior, and other relevant domains.

However, hope is certainly not the only concept that has this characteristic. I believe that by looking at the everyday language of the consumer we can identify other relatively powerful yet under-researched domains that might have similarly long legs—topics like emotional attachment, self-efficacy, self-determination, and so on.

SELECTED REFERENCES


