Roundtable    Researching Visual Consumption

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This roundtable discussed methodological and theoretical issues of aesthetics, images, and vision as it pertains to consumer behavior via interdisciplinary research examples and exemplars. We surveyed recent efforts in studying visual issues in consumer behavior, including Web browsing and design, advertising interpretation, digital photography and visual tools in research. This session presented research methods for studying visual consumption, with an emphasis on interpretation, representation, and interdisciplinary methods. We introduced key literature sources, and draw upon participant’s own research to generate new insights into visual methods and topics in consumer research.

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Visual issues are being recognized as important issues in consumer behavior and consumer research. Visual images constitute much corporate communication about products, economic performance, and social responsibility, and also inform governmental efforts to create positive attitudes for citizens, consumers, and organizations. Brand image, corporate image, advertising images, and images of identity all depend upon compelling visual imagery. Various referred to as the attention economy, the aesthetic economy, and the experience economy, this visual turn in marketing may call for new perspectives and research approaches. What does the production and consumption of images mean for marketing and society? How does the handling of images in the allied fields of visual studies, art history, film theory, design management, and corporate identity shed light on the relationships between visual processes and consumption? Visual consumer research cuts across methodological and topical boundary lines—the possibilities and problems of visual approaches encompass experimental and interpretive realms, and include such varied topics as information processing, image interpretation, and research techniques.

Key References