Representing Consumer Research: a Novel Approach

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Representing Consumer Research: A Novel ApproachTwenty years ago, Belk contended that marketing and consumer research can learn more from a reasonably good novel than a common garden piece of contemporary social science. In the decades since this declaration, copious scholars have derived many significant insights from the literary canon. Consumer researchers’ pursuit of matters literary, however, has not extended to the next logical step – the novelization of their findings. Despite the advent of “experimental” modes of representation, such as poetry, performance and painting, the preeminent cultural form of the century just past remains beyond the professorial pale. This paper considers our reluctance to write the Great CB Novel and posits four possible reasons for researchers’ apparent reticence. It considers some of the problems encountered by would-be novelists, argues that the pleasures of novel writing far exceed the pains, which are indubitably acute, and maintains that marketing and consumer researchers must not only cull novels for academic insights but compose novels with academic insights.

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ABSTRACT

Twenty years ago, Belk contended that marketing and consumer research can learn more from a reasonably good novel than a garden variety piece of contemporary social science. In the decades since this declaration, copious scholars have derived many significant insights from the literary canon. Consumer researchers’ pursuit of matters literary, however, has not extended to the next logical step—the novelization of their findings. Despite the advent of “experimental” modes of representation, such as poetry, performance and painting, the preeminent cultural form of the century just past remains beyond the professorial pale. This paper considers our reluctance to write the Great CB Novel and posits four possible reasons for researchers’ apparent reticence. It examines some of the problems encountered by would-be novelists, argues that the pleasures of novel writing far exceed the pains, which are indubitably acute, and maintains that marketing and consumer researchers must not only cull novels for academic insights but compose novels with academic insights.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, consumer research has been enlivened by the rise of heterodox representational practices. The traditional academic article is being supplemented by videography (Belk 1998), poetry (Sherry and Schouoten 2002), performance art (Thompson 1999), stereoscopy (Holbrook 1997) and more besides (Stern 1998). The ACR Film Festival, to cite perhaps the most celebrated example, is now a firm fixture on the conference calendar and, although it may be some time before moving images replace the written word in the great scholarly scheme of things, the Association’s consecration of the event bears witness to the broadening of our field’s representational repertoire. The weird, as Russell Belk (1984) famously anticipated, have not only turned professional, they are auteurs to boot.

Admirable though the advent of Sherry’s (2003) “sixth moment” undoubtedly is (see also Denzin 1997), there remains one representational form that has yet to be wholeheartedly embraced. And that is the novel. There are, of course, many fine examples of creative writing in marketing and consumer research. Schau (2000), Sherry (1998), Holbrook (1998), Aherne (2003) and several others have published “novelistic” pieces. Jack Trout (2003), of “positioning” fame, has penned a novella on best marketing practice. John Schouten is known to be working on a full-length work of fiction and if, as legend has it, everyone has a novel in them, then many unpublished manuscripts are presumably gathering dust in academicians’ drawers and filing cabinets. Yet all things considered, it is disappointing that there are so few published novels by marketing and consumer researchers.

The causes of this scholarly lacuna are doubtless many and varied. However, four factors undeniably loom large. The first of these is payback. Few professional rewards accrue to novel writers. Novels do not secure tenure, or promotion, and if anything may inhibit the pursuit of professional preferment in a supposedly “scientific” discipline. The same, to be sure, is true of movie making, composing poems and stand-up comedy, but the sheer amount of time that novel writing requires invariably invites questions about the best use of B-school employees’ temporal resources and intellectual energies.1

The second issue is technical. Comparatively few marketing and consumer researchers are trained in creative writing and very few doctoral programs include courses on writing skills (even though, as Mick (2005) rightly notes, writing is a core academic competency). Experienced writers, what is more, are inadvertently hampered by their professional prowess, insofar as the skills necessary for fiction—plot, character, dialogue—are very different from those demanded by conventional academic articles. Every consumer researcher may well have a novel in them, but unless it’s written in a different register, the novel within is likely to be an abortion.

Competition is the third factor. The world is not short of novelist–quite the opposite, in fact (Zaid 2003)—nor is it short of novelists who write about marketing matters and consumer society generally. As Brown (2005) observes, one of the most striking latter-day literary trends is the rise of “mart-lit.” That is, novels written about branding, marketing and consumerist issues. Recent examples include Sophie Kinsella’s (2004, 2005) mega-selling Shopaholic series, William Gibson’s (2004) extravagant excursus on guerrilla marketing, and Don DeLillo’s (2004) protocological ruminations on the anti-globalization movement. Our discipline’s would-be novelists, in other words, are up against full-time professionals and are liable to suffer by comparison.

The fourth and in certain respects most important factor is good old-fashioned business. The book trade, by and large, is chary of novelized scholarship. Such works are difficult to categorize, as a rule, and appropriate in-store placement isn’t easily determined (fiction section? non-fiction shelves? business and management boondocks?). Given the avalanche of incoming titles and inevitably limited display space, chain bookstore buyers tend to be skeptical and, unless substantial promotional support is forthcoming from the publisher, it’s difficult to get decent distribution. Granted, aspiring authors can embrace the self-publishing option—low-cost websites like Xlibris, Lulu et al make this an attractive alternative—but this invites institutional opprobrium, as per point one above.

Institutional opprobrium, however, hasn’t stopped economists (Brunker 1993), psychoanalysts (Kristeva 2006), cultural theorists (Berger 1997), computer scientists (Papadimitriou 2003) and consciousness researchers (Lloyd 2004) writing novels about their specialty. The management literature too is studded with fairy tales (Denning 2004), leadership fables (Rovira and Trias de Bes 2004), corporate satires (Barry 2006) and organizational parables (Goldratt 2004). Precedents exist, in short, and perhaps it is time for marketing and consumer researchers to step up to the literary plate. The present author has done so and, in an attempt to encourage others to do likewise, the remainder of this article will consist of the first chapter of The Marketing Code, followed by a brief discussion of some salient scholarly issues.

THE MARKETING CODE

The room buzzed with anticipation as the speaker strode toward the imposing podium. Conservatively dressed and carefully coiffed, she looked much like any other middle-aged marketing professor. Only the smart Paul Costello suit betrayed her country of origin, as did a tiny twist of emerald ribbon on her Irish linen lapel.

1Three years appears to be the norm for first-time novelists (see Doughty 2006).

2If, as John Fowles (1990) avers, “creative writing” is a euphemism for “imitative writing,” then most marketing and consumer researchers are indeed trained in creative writing.

3I speak from personal experience, sadly.
To all intents and purposes, she was indistinguishable from the three previous presenters, Professor Bland, Professor Boring, Professor Blowhard.

Professor Emer Aherne was different in one important respect. Unlike the earlier presenters, she had rehearsed and polished and buffed up her speech. She didn’t believe in inarticulacy, considering it a sign of professional weakness. She was an educator, someone who earned her living from standing and delivering. She regarded ums, ah’s, ers, and analogous stuttering utterances as an affront, an indicator of the presenter’s scholarly laxity, of their failure to appreciate that conference papers are professors’ moments of truth, the instant when the intellectual sale is made.

Nor did Emer Aherne believe in beginning with banal bromides of the nice-to-be-here, thank-you-for-coming, you’re-a-wunnerful-wunnerful-audience variety. She subscribed to the showbiz notion of starting with a bang and building things up from there. This was true of all her presentations, but it was especially true of the one she had rehearsed so assiduously. Not only did it deal with an important aspect of the Entertainment Economy, but it was being delivered in the quintessence of showbusiness, Las Vegas.

She stood silently behind the podium, waited for the room to settle and, fixing the audience with an imperious stare, proceeded to give them rhetorical hell.

“Tahiti. The beach. A lone figure strolls disconsolately along the shoreline. It is Dan Brown, a jobbing musician whose career is going nowhere. Several years in and he’s sold next to nothing, apart from a theme song for the Atlanta Olympics. It’s time to try something new, possibly related to his passion for art history. Turning back to his hotel, he stumbles over a tattered blockbuster novel, devoured and discarded by a departed holidaymaker. It’s The Doomsday Conspiracy by Sidney Sheldon. Brown starts reading. Engrossed, he can’t put it down. He swallows it whole and, in a moment of inspiration, Dan decides, ‘I can do that’. And do that he does.

“His first conspiracy-propelled thriller, Digital Fortress, is published in 1998. No one notices. His second and third novels, Angels & Demons and Deception Point, follow Digital Fortress to paperback Palukaville. The music business pattern is starting to repeat itself.

“Dan moves to Doubleday. He writes The Da Vinci Code. Expectations are low, since its irrereligious stance is deemed inappropriate in the post-9/11 climate. But his editor, Jason Kaufman, can’t put Brown’s manuscript down. Nor can Kaufman’s editorial colleagues. Nor can Barnes & Noble’s chief fiction buyer, Sesalae Hensley. Collectively, they take a chance on the risky property, even though the market signals are discouraging. A record number of Advance Reader Copies is produced in order to build some much-needed buzz. Barnes & Noble, facing fierce price competition from supermarket chains, especially on brand name blockbusterers by Grisham and King, backs the no-name author to the hilt. The Da Vinci Code is released on 18th March 2003 and, thanks to the pre-publication marketing campaign, shoots straight to the top of the New York Times bestseller list.

“Beginning as it means to go on, the book barnstorms bestseller lists worldwide. Brown’s back catalogue follows suit. Special editions are issued. Books about the book sell like hot cakes, even though the market signals are discouraging. A record number of Advance Reader Copies is produced in order to build some much-needed buzz. Barnes & Noble, facing fierce price competition from supermarket chains, especially on brand name blockbusterers by Grisham and King, backs the no-name author to the hilt. The Da Vinci Code is released on 18th March 2003 and, thanks to the pre-publication marketing campaign, shoots straight to the top of the New York Times bestseller list.

“In the bowels of the auditorium, a member of the hitherto somnolent audience sat up, intrigued by what he was hearing. Barton Brady II glanced at his associate, Yasmin Buonarroti, and raised an inquiring eyebrow. Yasmin replied with a slight frown. It was difficult to make out what the presenter was saying, due to her impenetrable Irish accent and quickfire delivery. But the slick slides more than compensated.

“Images of Dan Brown, interspersed with video clips of his TV appearances scrolled impressively across the screen. And just when the sight of Dan’s doe-like stare was becoming unbearable, the slide show segued into shots of Leonardo’s Mona Lisa, the Louvre’s glass pyramid, Saint Sulpice Church, Chateau Vilette, Westminster Abbey, and Rosslyn Chapel, the key locations in Brown’s better than best-selling thriller. These were followed by video inserts of Dan’s fans taking the tie-in tours of Paris, vox-pop interviews with exasperated church officials, who daily deal with hordes of loud-mouthed, Coke-chugging, plaid-clad Langdon-lovers, whose enthusiasm is surpassed only by their ignorance.

PowerPoint this wasn’t.

It was a shame there were so few people in the audience. A lot of time and effort had obviously gone into Professor Aherne’s presentation. But it was the final day of the American Marketing Association conference and the majority of delegates were making their weary way to McCarran. Having delivered their own words of wisdom and paid sycophantic obeisance to those in power—principally Professor Kate Phillips, the guru of gurus, who had deigned to attend the bacchanal—most conference-goers didn’t feel the need to listen to yet another yawn-inducing speech. Only Barton Brady, Yasmin Buonarroti and a smattering of die-hard delegates, all with later planes to catch, were in the Bordeaux Room of the Paris Hotel & Casino for the turbo-charged presentation. You’d have thought a title like “The Marketing Code: How Brown’s Bestseller Holds the Key to Business Success” would have packed them in. However, the dead zone scheduling, plus the raging hangovers of hard-partying marketing professors, militated against it. The Las Vegas Strip has a lot to answer for, as indeed the delegates would, once they got home to their unforgiving partners.

Brady glanced again at his associate, who sat across the aisle of the unspeakably ostentatious conference room, where vast paintings of Versailles Palace and the Tuileries Gardens dominated the side walls and where the chandelier was bigger—and brighter—than most of the audience. He raised both eyebrows querulously. Yasmin mouthed, Coke-chugging, plaid-clad Langdon-lovers, whose enthusiasm is surpassed only by their ignorance.

The audience, such as it was, looked up expectantly.

“Well, it seems to me that there are four crucial factors. The first of these is entertainment. Entertainment is the key ingredient here. For all its alleged literary faults, The Da Vinci Code is a rattling good read, a veritable roller coaster-ride. It is a wonderful, unforgettable, page-turning, thrills-and-spills filled story. It epitomizes today’s Entertainment Economy, our fast-moving, hit-driven, fad-fuelled world of show-stopping, knock-em-dead, next big things.

“This very venue,” she went on, opening her arms to embrace the thinly populated auditorium, “is testament to entertainment’s central place in the contemporary marketing cosmos. The thrill we get lasting up at the Paris Hotel’s imitation Louvre façade, or scaled down Arc de Triomphe, or its half-size replica of the Eiffel Tower, is similar to the thrill we get reading about Robert Langdon’s adventures in the ‘real’ Louvre Museum, the real Arc de Triomphe, the real Eiffel Tower, all of which feature in Brown’s book.”
At this precise point, a shiny-suited slick of self-importance, the conference session chairperson, leapt to his feet and, with more than a hint of East Coast condescension, announced that the presenter had five minutes remaining.

Aherne ignored the interruption.

“The second factor is Determination. Dan didn’t give up, even though his first three books were failures, near enough. He kept plugging away, as did his support team at Doubleday. Business history shows that it’s those who persevere despite repeated failure, abject failure, heart-wrenching failure are those who win through in the end. Thomas Edison, Henry Ford, Walt Disney, Ted Turner, Steve Jobs, James Dyson, Oprah Winfrey, Martha Stewart, Mary K. Ash and so on exemplify this never-say-die attitude. Dan Brown, indeed, is an embodiment of the personal philosophy of Samuel Beckett, the Nobel-Prize winning Irish playwright, who urges us to ‘fail better’. That is, to accept failure, to learn from failure and, eventually, to overcome failure. Brown failed better!”

Yasmin Buonarroti nodded enthusiastically. Brady was too preoccupied with the creases in his Armani pants to notice her advantage.

The third factor is Obscurity. People like puzzles, mysteries, enigmas, secrets, the more head-scratchingly cryptic the better. And The Da Vinci Code, with its arcane amalgam of esoteric symbology and cranky conspiracy theory, attractively wrapped up in a thrill-a-minute detective story, pressed all the right buttons.

Better yet was Brown’s post-publication withdrawal from public life. His refusal to give interviews, except in exceptional circumstances, and his strictly-no-comment stance only served to ramp up interest in the increasingly intriguing author. As J.D. Salinger, Thomas Pynchon and Don DeLillo remind us, there is feminine, is it not? Doesn’t he talk about the ‘eternal feminine’ in The Da Vinci Code? Isn’t his marketing premised on this, too?”

“Fourthly and finally,” the presenter said forcefully, “Controversy proved vital. There’s nothing like a little controversy to attract attention, especially in today’s world of superabundant similitude. There are so many brands out there, all functionally indistinguishable, all ably marketed, all vying for consumers’ attention, that it’s very difficult to stand out from the crowd. The commercial clamor is deafening these days and controversy helps cut through the cacophony. The Vatican’s official disapproval was the best thing that ever happened to Brown. The wrath of Opus Dei, the harrumpling of hidebound historians, and the legal action brought by outraged authors, who claimed that Dan had stolen their ideas, also helped move the merchandise. Madonna’s been doing it for years. Eminem’s no slouch either.”

Glaring at the session chair, with a don’t-dare-interrupt expression, Emer Aherne continued, “In conclusion, Brown’s success is down to Controversy, Obscurity, Determination and Entertainment. Or CODE for short. CODE is the key to the Code!”

As the audience chuckled appreciatively, the presenter pressed home her advantage. “However, a code without a well-trained operator is useless and Dan Brown is a very well-trained, very astute operator. He is what I call an ‘authorpreneur’, a writer with an exceptionally strong sense of what the market wants. Charles Dickens, Mark Twain, L. Frank Baum, Edgar Rice Burroughs, Norman Mailer and, of late, J.K. Rowling all qualify as authorpreneurs. Dan Brown is an authorpreneur and a half. He has discovered, dare I say it, the Holy Grail of modern marketing. He…”

Slick had had enough, even if the audience hadn’t. “Thank you, Professor Aherne, thank you very much. Perfect timing! Are there any questions?” he went on quickly, hoping that his disapproving tone would discourage the curious and he’d be on his way as expeditiously as possible. Inevitably, this attitude had the opposite effect. An arm shot up to slick’s obvious annoyance. It was an eager doctoral student, attending her first academic conference and determined to savor every moment. “Is Brown’s CODE applicable outside the bookselling business?”

“Oh very much so. As I said in my presentation, we live in an Entertainment Economy, where there’s no business without show business—even the business-to-business business—and CODE applies there too. Marketers often treat the cultural industries as if they are a benighted backwater, where the principles of modern marketing have yet to penetrate. I believe that the opposite holds true. The entertainment industry is the toughest, most competitive business around, and while their marketing ideas are incompatible with mainstream Kate Phillips-style marketing, it seems to me that the 4Ps brigade have much to learn from Brown’s marketing code.”

“But it’s not very scientific, is it” interjected slick, assuming that the ultimate academic put-down would close the discussion.

“No, it’s not,” conceded Professor Aherne. “But then, I don’t believe marketing is a science. Never has been, never will be.”

“If it’s not a science, what is it?”

“It’s a belief system, just like religion, or magic, or indeed science for that matter. If you believe in marketing, it works. And if you don’t believe, no amount of fancy analysis or hypothesis testing or marketing metric measurement will help you.”

Slick rolled his eyes. Another hand flew up, an older hand this time, the hand of an ageing tenured professor, with ponytail.

“Are we talking about two different marketing approaches here,” he inquired, “the left brain and the right brain, the artistic and the scientific, the feminine and the masculine? Brown’s basic approach is feminine, is it not? Doesn’t he talk about the ‘eternal feminine’ in The Da Vinci Code? Isn’t his marketing premised on this, too?”

“That’s an interesting one,” Aherne answered, choosing her words carefully. “Brown has been criticized by many feminists. The ‘eternal feminine’ stuff is regarded as a veneer, a thin cover for what some regard as antediluvian sexism. His books, especially Angels & Demons, the prequel to Da Vinci, are full of references to rape, sado-masochism, and the brutal degradation of women generally. The comedic books Brown wrote before he tried his hand at thrillers are equally misogynistic. One of the songs on his debut album was a ballad about the dubious pleasures of telephone sex. Even his hero, Robert Langdon, is a love-em-and-leave-em kinda guy, an unconstructed chauvinist. So, I think the jury is out on the feminine angle.”

“What you’re really saying, Professor Aherne, is that the acronym CODE is inappropriate. The keywords surely are Chauvinist, Reactionary, Androcentric and Patriarchal. Or CRAP for short!”

“An awful lot of people have swallowed it, though,” the quick-witted presenter retorted.

Slick seized the day. His moment of glory had arrived. “If anyone wants to continue talking CRAP, Professor Aherne will be around after the session. Unfortunately, we’ve run out of time. Thank you all for attending. Have a safe journey home.”

Barton Brady II stood up. He straightened his Hermes tie, shot the cuffs of his Brooks Brothers button-down, checked the time on his Vintage Rolex Oyster and sauntered across the aisle. He leaned over his Prada-clad colleague, who was busy pulling a Moleskine notebook and Mont Blanc pen from her Miu Miu purse. “Get her,” he whispered. “Take Aherne out! Make her an offer she can’t refuse.”

DISCUSSION

As is evident from the above excerpt, The Marketing Code is predicated on Dan Brown’s megaselling blockbuster, The Da Vinci Code. It is simultaneously an analysis of the DVC phenomenon,
which is fascinating from a marketing/consumer research perspective, and an attempt to communicate the findings in an imitation of Dan Brown’s distinctive style. TMC, in fact, is a deliberate and systematic inversion of DVC. Where DVC is set in the world of high culture (art, aesthetics), TMC is set in the world of base commerce (marketing, consumption); where DVC unfolds in delightfully picturesque cities (Rome, Paris, London), TMC transpires in purportedly dangerous places (Las Vegas, Belfast, Chicago); where DVC is based on a Cathar/Opus Dei/Priory of Sion conspiracy, TMC relies on a Freemasons/Knights Templar/P2 admixture; where DVC is Roman Catholic and makes much of the “sacred feminine,” TMC is inherently Protestant and gets in touch with the “sacred masculine”; where DVC is a thriller with a pedagogic subtext, TMC is pure pedagogy with thrills on top; and, last but not least, where DVC was humorless at heart, TMC is humorous at bottom.

The Marketing Code is an admittedly derivative thriller. It contends that there is a marketing cabal at the heart of contemporary consumer society, a conspiratorial organization which seeks to exploit innocent consumers for its unconscionably nasty ends. Publicly, its affiliates adhere to the clichéd catalogue of customer-first, customer-focused, customer-facing corporate strategies. But privately, they cleave to a primal marketing code, a mysterious way of doing business, which keeps them on top and consumers in hock.

The cabal, however, is under threat. Its secret is rumbled by Barton Brady II, the main chance-minded CEO of Serendipity Associates, a Las Vegas-based branding consultancy. Something must be done to protect the cabal’s ancient code of marketing practice. The word goes out. Stop Brady. Get Buonarroti.

Living happily ever after isn’t an option…

To be sure, there’s more to The Marketing Code than the usual mix of thrills, spills, destruction and death—“Sometimes You Have to Kill to Make a Killing,” as the book’s byline puts it—as much as it is a novel about marketing and consumer research. It is not an out-and-out thriller but a novelization of academic issues. Thus the challenge for the author, or any author of scholarly fiction, is to ensure that the academic issues are introduced without impeding the action and, conversely, to make sure that the academic message is communicated in sufficient detail. This is a very difficult balance to maintain, especially in thrillers, which demand a page-turning momentum.4 Many novels, it is true, contain “messages,” be they political (Uncle Tom’s Cabin), philosophical (Atlas Shrugged), sociological (Lord of the Flies) satiric (Animal Farm), or whatever. Indeed, Dan Brown’s (2006) literary high concept, believe it or not, is “thriller as academic lecture.” Nevertheless, there’s no doubt that authors whose intent is predominantly pedagogic are prone to fail when facing the foremost challenge for would-be writers of page-turning fiction—namely, keeping readers reading and wondering what happens next. Failure to do so means failure to communicate, means failure to inform and, as often as not, means failure to sell.

Regardless of its success or failure in the marketplace, The Marketing Code contains lessons for consumer researchers considering “alternative” (Sherry 1991) modes of representation. The actual writing process is undeniably challenging—as is making a movie, performing a play, composing a poem, etc.—but these fiction-forging challenges bring their own rewards. Being forced to think about plot, dialogue, character, pacing and so forth, the bread and butter of professional writers, is a very useful training exercise. Writing, after all, is a craft and being required to write outside the comfort zone of the standard academic article helps enhance the skills that our craft calls for (Booth, Colomb and Williams 1995). We can all improve as writers and the field as a whole can only benefit thereby.

The downside of fictionalizing one’s research is that it is very difficult to revert to more familiar forms of expression. Just as Belk and Costa (1998) discovered in their study of modern mountain men, it isn’t easy to return to “real life” after immersion in the rites of rendezvous (see also Kozinets 2002). Analogously, the fiction writer’s god-like ability to create living breathing characters—and controlling their ultimate fate—is dangerously intoxicating for researchers more used to testing hypotheses, mining data sets and writing articles in a conventional scholarly manner. The lesson, then, is that those who pursue unorthodox modes of representation must be prepared for a the part-paurtum sense of scholarly estrangement.5

Despite this caveat, the pleasures of writing academic fiction greatly exceed the accompanying pains and it is hoped that just as videography has been embraced by marketing and consumer researchers, so too novelizations of our research will become the norm. Perhaps, in due course, creative writing workshops will run alongside the ACR Film Festival. Screenwriting workshops as well. Time will no doubt tell.

CONCLUSION

Twenty years ago, Russell Belk (1986, p.24) contended that “one can learn more from a reasonably good novel than from a ‘solid’ piece of social science research.” It is equally arguable that one can learn more from writing a novel than publishing yet another solid piece of social science research. The novel, according to its innumerable boosters (e.g. Bradbury 1990), is the pre-eminent form of cultural expression in the western world. Poets, painters, musicians, movie-makers, television-producers, video-games developers may beg to differ, but there’s no doubt that novels are blessed with considerable cultural cachet. Although it is unlikely that marketing and consumer researchers will turn to writing novels en masse—highly unlikely—the recent rise of heterodox forms of representation demands that we make an attempt. As a cultural form and representational practice, the novel is just too important to ignore. Call me Phishmael.

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5Would-be CB novelists must also be prepared for the ultimate professional question: “Why bother?” In a world teeming with wannabe novelists writing books on contemporary consumerism and equally replete with consumer researchers weeded to established modes of representation, why bother bringing both together? The principal reason, as Belk (2002) rightly points out, is that conventional modes of representation are becoming less and less effective. Managers and policy makers increasingly look elsewhere for inspiration. The preeminent commentators on consumer issues are journalists, not academicians. If no one is reading our stuff, perhaps consumer researchers should reconsider how they communicate their findings.

4In TMC’s case, this is compartmentalized to some extent by the academic setting, which affords numerous opportunities for incorporating instructional material in the guise of lectures, seminars, conversations between colleagues and, as the excerpt indicates, descriptions of conference presentations.
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