The Entropy of Symbolic Consumption: Demand Side Market Failure and the Counterproposals

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ABSTRACT
Consumers have developed the ability to signify through forced withdrawal and the subsequent convalescence of identity. Nevertheless, consumers still have to manage their own intricate dilemmas in which they have to confront the exogenous and endogenous symbolic conditions, dictating their modes of being in late-modern society. The concept of entropy is employed in order to aid the meditative understanding of consumer cultures witnessed today. Dependent upon consumers’ ability to signify and urge for distinctiveness, four different modalities of entropy are conceived, and each mode of entropy tends to further form certain types of consumer cultures, which are prospective counterproposals devised for surmounting the consumers’ perception of market failure.

INTRODUCTION
Consumer culture has evolved such that symbols and images are ubiquitous and easily utilizable, therefore, symbolic (e.g., Baudrillard 1990; Firat and Venkatesh 1995; Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Holt 1997; Levy 1959; Schouten 1991). Often, the available images and symbols are the fuel for self-representation, expression, and identity-reconstruction (Belk 1988; Kleine, Kleine, and Allen 1995; Schouten 1991). Material goods and fashion items are widely employed resources for constructing self. Nonetheless, this energy for self-identification may be limited or possibly exhausted in current consumer culture. In order to examine this phenomenon of energy depletion in the market, we shall use the concept of entropy introduced by Rifkin (1981, p. 35) as “a measure of the amount of energy no longer capable of conversion into work…. an entropy increase, then, means a decrease in available energy.” Using this concept of entropy, this paper explores the different conditions that can lead to the depletion of energy in consumers’ efforts in constructing their identities. Market failures have been observed, such as the bubble economy in Japan caused by low interest rates, even when the market is expected to control and overcome any imbalance of and impediment to the mechanics of the market system, as Smith (1991) and Ricardo (1817) contended. Economists have been concerned with micro-economic market failure, where information and opportunity are not evenly distributed so that the market cannot sustain perfect competition leading to equilibrium. This study is particularly interested in a new type of market failure in which consumers have to struggle for their sources of identity—theory-sufficient in the market—in order to have distinct self-identity constituted through discernable artifacts (e.g., Thompson and Haytko 1997). This demand side market failure encountered by contemporary consumers may not be easily recoverable; thus, it is of interest.

Discourses on self and identity have been widely published in consumer studies (e.g., Schau and Gilly 2003; Tian and Belk 2005). Studies regarding the self and the individual efforts to be idiosyncratic may, however, have failed to fully recognize consumers’ uneasiness. Namely the burdens of self-signifying and/or self-valuing involved in consumer identity projects, which have been understudied, could constitute focal themes in the literature (e.g., Arnold and Thompson 2005). The self-concept, or identity, is explained and defined in various ways in the literature. The self-concept commonly denotes the holistic array of rational and emotional abstractions including signs, symbols, possessions, and relationships (Belk 1988; Schouten 1991), whereas definitions of identity tend to be oriented toward distinctions from others (Kleine et al. 1995; Schau and Gilly 2003). That is, self-concept inhabits the more cognitive and holistic realm than does identity, which distinguishes one from others, and therefore, is observable and symbolic. Accordingly, identity projects are geared toward consumption of various symbols and images in order to build discernible personas by signifying the seemingly ever-increasing means of identity construction. Here, signification refers to the cultural imbuement of meaning(s) upon consumer goods and/or experiences available in the market so that they can become constituents of one’s identity.

Corresponding to Foucault’s (1984) “free floating” identity and Baudrillard’s (1981) eye-opening explanation of symbol-dominant consumer culture, consumers began to execute metamorphoses and self-proliferation in order to adjust to rapidly changing present-day life. As consumers take the transformability of identity for granted, they may encounter more and more difficulties in securing resources and creatively and playfully generating novel identities. This is the argument developed in this essay. Adoption of the concept of entropy helps in further diagnosing the potential anguish of consumers.

Entropy, in this context, refers to a state where consumers are frustrated when there is a perceived necessity to continuously reconstruct and modify their identities, but available resources (signs and images) are already utilized by others, insufficient, or mismatched with the selves they wish to present. Entropy may also arise due to consumers’ inability to perform significations as they need. By adopting the concept of entropy, the drives of current consumer cultures can be successfully explained with respect to specific factors creating entropy and further theoretically categorized according to the different entropy situations, which is hard to accomplish otherwise.

Consumers who are frustrated and intimidated by the paucity of identity resources and the ever-continuing nature of identity project may start looking for means to lessen their difficulties in securing resources and even substitute novel consumer cultures for their identity projects. Once consumers find their own mechanisms—newly evolved consumer cultures accommodating to different types of entropy consumers encounter—instead of the market where consumers exchange money for signs and symbols for their identity, they may proclaim them as counterproposals for the market, which seems to have lost its ability to suffice consumers’ demand for identity resources.

HISTORY, THEORY, AND CONSEQUENCES
Dispossession of Identity
As individuals sold their labor and skills for their own living in the modern era, they had to specialize in one occupation that had a value in the market, which, in turn, meant one’s labor was commodified (Jennings 1993). Commodified labor pertains to the monetarization, quantification, and depersonalization of one’s labor as well as the relative dissolution of intimate interpersonal relationships, as Tonnies’ (1957) observed the conversion from Gemeinschaft into Gesellschaft. Deeper meanings and commitment to cultural interpersonal relationships had to be ignored in order to construct the market system, cultivating discrete monetary exchanges...
that made individuals individual. Modernized market system tended to subjugate individuals to the goals of rational conquest of nature and socially organized production, which was the most valued aspect of modern life (Slater and Tonkiss 2001). This production-orientation has ultimately led to a high entropy culture where material resources become scarce due to destructive and ruthless creation of culture, as opposed to nature, through demolition of nature and intact surroundings (Rifkin 1981). At the same time, resources for individual imagination and creativeness for superstructure—a structure based on interpersonal relationships and cultural meanings—development might have been ignored and buried with the debris from material advancement.

It has been argued that as a result of calculation, monetarization, and objectification of the individual for a smooth navigation toward the promised future, individuals were widely disenchanted; they lost meanings, values, trust, and even the freedom to control themselves (Giddens 1991). Individuals, who acted in a mechanized marketplace where cultural, emotional, and psychic resources were largely limited, found it difficult to quench their desire to verify their beings in society. At the same time, their ontological insecurity from the loss of trust, as well as personal meaninglessness in society amplified and intensified the need and/or desire to project an identity (Beck, Giddens, and Lash 1994; Giddens 1991).

Recuperation of Identity

Modernity fostered the focus on individuals who were freed from their destiny, which had been fixed and imposed in pre-modern times (Baumeister 1986); however, this resulted in paradox because cultural aspect of individuality was not encouraged and even banned for modernization. Diverse and liberal individuality could only be legitimized, inasmuch as it is supported by rationality. Individuality in terms of production-oriented perspective was buoyant; on the contrary, that of cultural side was dejected. Economic drive confined the merit of cultural diversity and uniqueness, but the longing for self-identity was still valued (Giddens 1991).

Once goods started being consumed publicly and conspicuously for the societal classification of individual (Bataille 1991; Veblen 1899), culturally valued goods (i.e., luxuries) started being welcomed and appreciated. Culture resurrected as a *sine qua non* for everyday economic life that had been constituted with only reason and logic. With the re-recognition of diverse cultural and human meanings and values and its aid for signification essential in late modernity, individuals have been enabled to seek self-images that differ from the constant, homogenized, transparent, and ultimately mechanical identity stressed in modern era for the achievement of stable productivity (Firat, Dholakia, and Venkatesh 1995).

Consumers’ quest for hunting images and signs is to arbitrarily (culturally) signify goods, spectacles, and even experiences in order to respond to the myriad panoramic social contexts (home, work, street, shopping mall, and so on) with ever newly defined, reformulated, and multiplied identities (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: Firat and Venkatesh 1993). Consumers eventually become slaves of signs and symbols, which are culturally concretized through the materials in the market; a considerable portion of consumption is associated with the consumers’ engagement in signification (e.g., Levy 1959).

The nature of the identity project in late-modern epoch is consumptive and possessive (Belk 1988; Featherstone 1995; Kleine et al. 1995; Thomson and Hirschman 1995). Self-concept and social relationships are recouped and revitalized through the consumption or possession of material goods (Wallendorf and Arnould 1988). Things are merely means instead of ends; thus, exchange and use value have been eroded due to the rise of sign value (Baudrillard 1981). Bestowing symbolic meanings upon things in the market is one of the dominant modes to distinguish oneself from another and eventually establish identity (Beck 1992; Belk 1988; Giddens 1991; Kleine et al. 1995). Consumption becomes the prevailing theme in the marketplace because of the possibility that everything, including culture, can be consumed (e.g., Firat 1995) and exploited for individuals’ identity projects. Experiences of Thai food and Japanese style Karaoke are the examples of the consumable cultures employed by consumers who endeavor to accomplish their identity projects. In sum, identity is retrieved by repositioning of substantive human values and utilization and consumption of them through symbolic encryption in order to construct self-images for constantly changing surroundings.

Kaleidoscopic Identity

Identity today is neither inflexible nor authentic; rather, it is inconsistent and possibly contradictory to the stable selfhood encouraged in modernity (Firat et al. 1995). With the fluid images ubiquitously available, consumers entitle themselves by reorganizing and even distorting the meanings of commodities (Bouchet 1993; Warde 1994). The identity constructed is always subject to alteration, mending, upgrade, and tuning. Reflexivity of identity is described as the continuous revision of self and the temporariness of each identity to be amended and further disposed to accommodate environmental changes through information and knowledge (Giddens 1991). All of these are possible partially because of the individual capability of transforming and mostly because of the unprecedented range of symbols and images cultivated by cultural surplus, which denotes the variety of cultural manifestations and the following appreciation (Willis 1990).

Clinging to a single identity may be undesirable and practically impossible; frequent transfer from one to another identity is now a viable management of one’s identity in the postmodern world (Gergen 1991). “Multiphrenia” may be the only solution to keep relating one to the world. It is hard to pinpoint which identity is the quintessence of self. Indeed, all identities embraced and expressed are neither focal nor peripheral; rather, each identity can bear abundant meanings and practicality when one actually immerses in the identity. Multi-layered or multifaceted identity is actualized by owning multiple possessions (Markus and Nurius 1986) or with the assistance of technology (Schau and Gilly 2003). Fragmenting and populating self with multiple identities are the imperatives for individuals today (Gergen 1991). Living in a world of a multitude of contexts has become inconceivable without practicing identity production and reproduction.

Reflexive identity and the notion of multiphrenia are clearly idiosyncratic from each other, but they also share a substantial commonality. Both demand much energy in order for consumers to revise or create a new or another identity. Accordingly, entropy is present in consumer culture. Current consumer culture, in which material items, texts, images, and spectacles to be transmuted (most importantly) into identities, demands a virtually infinite amount of “raw materials” to blend with (Kozinets 2001), just as modernity had to consume too many material resources, which ultimately leads us to destitution of physical energy, entropy.

**DETERMINANTS OF ENTROPY**

**Urges for Distinctiveness**

Identity projects are individual efforts to create distinction through cultural signification. Creating a distinction is the only way to define self; constant “othering” needs to be conducted for identity construction (Hetada 1998). It should be noted that legitimization...
processes that validate one’s being in a society are still necessary (Bauman 1991; Elliott 1998). It is always the case that two aspects of identity—self and the social—dictate the allocation of symbolic resources and the identity to be created (e.g., Grubb and Grathwohl 1967). In their discourse on fashion as an identity project, Thompson and Haytko (1997) have addressed the dual-meaning of identity construction: conformity and counter-conformity, which may be the eternal paradox of postmodernity. Nevertheless, conformity does not always mean absolute compliance with the public; instead, counter-conformity may become conformity when most consumers choose to digress from the standard (Bouchet 1993). Therefore, it is not the nature of conformity but rejection by others that creates consumer apprehension.

In line with the notion of conformity/counter-conformity, the synchronized adaptation to and withdrawal from dominant cultural representations may characterize the present consumer culture (Roosens 1989); however, consumers may choose signification when they build their identities instead of a mere purchase of planned symbols for the affirmation of belongingness to society. Being distinctive is the reason to buy, and differentiating oneself from the other may be the only perceived method to define self (Gabriel and Lang 1995; Thomson and Haytko 1997).

Distinction is to make cultural errands and chores as Bourdieu (1984) contends with his notion of “habitus.” Although the meaning of social class has perished because of the standardized material goods and “widely-possessed” brands we own, the need for social class still remains with different lifestyle choices. The material and quantitative differences become less relevant to the present day of life whereas the cultural and qualitative differences have risen to be critical. Again, Bourdieu (1984) underlines the criticalness of symbolic capital—which originally means the possession of prestige that ultimately entails a distinctive identity—essential for making differences. Hence, symbolization and distinction go hand in hand.

The urge to be distinctive is, to a certain extent, hereditary and instinctive. The space between an infant and his/her mother is the first imprinting source of distinction, and the space between individuals may have to be more distanced with regard to culture and symbols (e.g., Giddens 1991). Similarity to others gives much tension to late-modern individuals to think supposedly sole and authentic identities are menaced; therefore, more efforts are made to be distinctive, often with different possessions (Snyder and Fromkin 1977). Consumers concerned with their identities opt to stop wearing or displaying their possession once too many others have the same items (Thompson and Haytko 1997). The point at which consumers begin thinking about their threatened identities tends to be sooner than before due to technology and media. Therefore, the need for distinctiveness disperses faster and more intensively.

The urge for distinctiveness is the individual endeavor to be a differently (culturally, arbitrarily, and symbolically) defined entity in diverse contexts inhabited by potentially similarly identifiable others. Signification is the preponderant mode amongst the modes adopted for the discerning mission of individuals as Derrida (1977) noted. The only question the contention bears is if all individuals are fully capable of engaging in signification for their own identity projects. In turn, the urge for distinctiveness is not a sufficient condition for the entropy of symbolic consumption (dearth of symbolic resources), but a necessary condition.

**Ability to Signify**

Consumers can express and claim themselves so long as their behaviors and activities can be justified with a variety of rationales. There are, however, individuals who still cannot blissfully partake in the process of enriching consumer culture for their own sake due to their lack of experiences, skills, and even the audacity to translate goods, fashion items, texts, images, and spectacles into their own monopolistic signs, representing their identities. The lack of ability to signify can be either inherited or deprived, but the consequence may be the same, refusal from society when the signification is poorly implemented and delivered to others, or a sense of shame from the failure to be identified (O’Donohoe 1994).

The complexity and equivocalness of symbols suppress and discourage the trial and error of a novice as a “signifier” who would have, otherwise, been able to originate new signs (e.g., Deleuze and Guattari 1983). As such, there are certainly individual differences in ability to signify, which enunciatively refer to the self-efficacy to choose to value symbolic and cultural meanings more than practical and instrumental ones and subsequently create idiosyncratic identity through signification with the mundane; it is also counterbalance to capitalist control over individual identities. Along with the urge for distinctiveness, ability to signify contributes to the potential demand-side market failure situation named entropy in symbolic consumption.

**MODALITIES OF ENTROPY**

Different levels of urge for distinctiveness and ability to signify create distinguishable entropy states that influence the formulation of a range of consumer cultures accommodating to the conditions perceived by the individual signifiers seeking identities. Complexity and multiplicity in consumers’ predispositions and aptitudes yield a relative position of being in diverse consumer cultures rather than a position demanding absoluteness. Each consumer culture—formed by the significations performed by individuals and the succeeding recognition of other individuals—tends to adapt to the cultural and economic environment in which the cultural signifiers reside; thus, the appearances of the cultures formed by distinct conditions of entropy may vary from each other, yet the motivation is the same for all, frustrations of symbolic consumers.

**Equilibrium**

This is the condition in which there is the least or no frustration perceived by consumers because they have neither competence in symbolizing nor strong drives to be distinctive. These consumers may have a tendency not to deviate from what others think, express, and wear; consequently, it becomes illogical for them to identify themselves with arbitrary signification that may generate repudiation from others.

Consumers with this condition live in the panopticon where the market enforces consumers to obey what is offered and not to be imaginative for their own identity project (c.f., Foucault 1977). By taming consumers’ cultural and artistic capabilities and further regulating emancipatory self-expression, the market was able to homogenize consumers successfully (Kozinets 2002). Marketing messages exposed or purposefully delivered to consumers through various media were the most representative and influential means intended to control consumers’ departure from the planned market offers. Consumers started being compelled to desire certain cars, eat certain foods on specific occasions, and go certain places for vacations. The fact that many consumers fall into this category evinces that the market’s control over consumers succeeded to the extent to which consumers listen to the market. Deprived consumers in terms of cultural and symbolic supplies have surrendered to the market and have conformed to what the market orders and offers. This is a paradox in modernity by which the market had to offer variations for individuals, and at the same time, it also had to limit
consumers’ imagination in order for mass-production of limited number of products, which may not be enough sources for individual identities.

In the equilibrium state of symbolic consumption, the conventional functions and requisites of the market are still in place; thus, consumers are contented because they bear no opposition to the market as a modern institution. The market is still hegemonic and provides the sources, not for signification for identity, but for consumers living in a prosaic and flavorless world in which their identities are controlled by the market system. Perhaps, the consumers who live in this condition may well be able to corroborate the notion of impossibility to escape the market (see Kozinets 2002).

Negative Entropy (Negentropy)
When consumers have substantial ability to signify without or considerably less urge for distinctiveness, the energy for symbolic consumption tends to increase, or at least not to decrease because the resources are not used for monopolized identity projects. Many resources remain intact because this type of consumers may not object to being identified in similar ways that others use to identify themselves; instead, their ability to signify continuously generates ideas for others to utilize and signify the ideas for their identities. Consumers with high ability to signify with relatively less urge for distinctiveness enjoy the generation of signs without the apprehension of exploitation. Accordingly, consumers may form communities in which they share their ability to signify with people who might have different talents in terms of signification. They focus on a commonly signifiable code among the cryptographies they have created individually. Consumption of the code together may become the fulfillment of their identity projects.

The contradictory endeavor of consumers to find individual identity in a collective milieu produces a shared, yet considerably meaningful affiliation to each partaker. Brand community, as Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) witnessed, is the playground of consumers who want to create their own identities by interactively and critically conversing with others. The dialogue may be utilized in order to corroborate their authentic existences by the corroborated identity they share, or to upgrade their current identity with the aid of others’ ability to signify, producing resources by consuming the same brand in various ways. The synergy from the accumulated individual ability to signify in communities is possibly tremendous, and it would be the rationale for them to share.

Technology facilitates the dialogue to be prompt and widespread, and therefore fruitful. Online communities, including online brand communities, emerge as the perception of cross-shared or “pay-per-view” type of identity spreads among consumers. The disclosure, establishment, modification, and transmutation of one’s identity in online communities become a new agenda for current consumers (e.g., Moon 2000; Schau and Gilly 2003). By being commodified and consuming others who have also been commodified in the online communities, consumers produce their identities. This type of consumption has also become a culture where the identity project is neither entirely individual nor necessarily communal.

Another “neo-cyber-community” is observed more often than ever before. The blogosphere is a “metacommunity” in which consumers invest their ability to signify in the community with the pursuit of obtaining an exponential return on the investment, and consequently, they can obtain countless resources for their identity projects in the community. This metacommunity has observable and extensive potential to transform into a prevailing consumer culture that embraces the ideas of brand community and hedonic consumption. The Korean blogosphere has already become “multi-purpose” by being brand communities, knowledge distributors, personal relationship managers, and recreational areas. The seeming reasons to partake in the metacommunity may also be to identify oneself intellectually and/or hedonically with the infinite contact with anything and everything.

Qualitative Entropy
Although consumers can demonstrate their ability to signify, it may not be vigorous enough to unload the yoke of constantly distinguishing oneself from others. Put more simply, the urge for distinctiveness (for the consumers with high ability to signify and strong urge for distinctiveness) exceeds the ability to signify. The gap between the two different conditions generating entropy may have become more substantial as late-capitalists’ exertion to direct consumers’ meaning creation process is intensified. This condition
is called qualitative entropy, in which consumers feel frustration because they cannot produce or secure quality signs or symbols for a better distinction from others.

The capitalists’ and modernists’ control over the individual was almost actualized—although not for long and not for every individual—through a phenomenal and strongly influential mechanism, advertising. Williamson (1986) recognized the fact that advertising is too hegemonic for consumers to digress from the imposed meanings; simultaneously, it is also improbable for marketers to control all the potential deviations perfectly. Notwithstanding the ongoing friction between consumers and marketers, the loser in this dynamic would be consumers because they have lost their ability to signify while they negotiate with themselves whether they have to kowtow to the meanings provided or not. Living in late-modern society is living in a culture where consumers have to keep switching gears from obeying to diverging or vice versa; in other words, it is dual-core interlaced meaning generation methods with which consumers of today have to juggle (Langman 1992; Martin-Barbero 1988).

The marketers’ imprint of meaning on consumers and the consumers’ perceived quandary between compliance and dissatisfaction with the offer from the market have eventually atrophied consumers’ imagination, and hence the ability to signify. Signs had to be created in order to sell the goods to the masses who sold themselves to buy the goods they produced, and advertising is the sign system that handled the task well and generated homogenous answers for everybody. The system allows consumers to be creative, provided the imagination is confined to the market. Consumers had to start taking the fact for granted that they have no choice for identity but the offers, goods, materials, and objects suggested—actually enforced—by the market. In order to be harmonized with the market system, consumers had to submit tamely to the systematic manipulation of their self-expression (Baudrillard 1975), which ultimately depreciates the ability to signify. This “semiological determinism” (Kellner 1989, p. 51) is the very reason consumers have lost their competency.

“The body is less and less an extrinsic ‘given’, functioning outside the internally referential systems of modernity, but becomes itself reflexively mobilized” (Giddens 1991, p. 7). The last resort for consumers perturbed by the fact that their ability to signify cannot support the quality requirements of urge for distinctiveness may be manipulation of the body. Reflexive modernization expands itself to the divine territory, fixed and inborn body. “The body itself—as mobilized in praxis—becomes more immediately relevant to the identity the individual promotes” (Giddens 1991, p. 218). The body becomes a subject to play with in association with one’s reflexive identity. It becomes necessary to shape, upgrade, change, and even distort the body for the sake of identity. Nonetheless, the body needs to be worked upon to the point where others can easily observe, and the owner can claim the one and only identity with the body when it becomes each one’s identity symbol. “Flamboyance complex” is the symptom often observed among consumers in the qualitative entropy. In order for them to be identified, making their bodies salient and vivid is the most persuasive and promising attempt.

The flamboyance complex of consumers in qualitative entropy state may be the rapprochement of body and mind isolated from each other in modernity (see Firtat and Venkatesh 1995 for body/mind dichotomy). The identity project became an arena where body and mind cooperate with each other for originality and/or uniqueness. Tattooing is the most prominent flamboyance complex among its kind. While it connotes the self-segregation from mainstream society and transgression, it converges upon the identity project in the end (Bengtsson, Ostberg, and Kjeldgaard 2005; Kjeldgaard and Bengtsson 2005). Although tattooing itself may be overly universal for “identity seekers,” it still provides discriminating power. That is, a tattooee’s idiosyncrasy will be vividly recognized by other tattooees, and the opposite is also true (Kjeldgaard and Bengtsson 2005). It is counter-conformity through conformity. It is also sacralization of the profane and coincident secularization of the sacred. As mundane images permanently printed on the body, the images become mystified; mind—the sacred—shakes hands with the body, the secular (Bengtsson, Ostberg, and Kjeldgaard 2005). In this paradoxical context, tattooees constantly pursue their social identity in a limited sense and individual identity in an extended sense.

Consumers’ reflexive re-construction of the body as identity project is not confined only to tattooing, or decorations on the body; rather, the re-definition is expanded to the distortion of the body, a denial of the “given.” The body is consumed reflexively in order to produce a new and distinct identity (Askegaard, Gertsen, and Langer 2002); the market facilitates consumable bodies through which consumption/production dichotomy is again contested. The body is an ever available source to be worked on; thus, the plastic surgery industry prospers.

Cosmetic surgery has been practiced by those who want to manipulate seriously their bodies as venues for self-representation and the ultimate reservoir of identity. These consumers treat the symptoms of identity obsoleteness or overlap with others by creatively or radically implementing fluid bodily images on their bodies. The fluid becomes permanent; however, the permanent is also to be worked on later. The constant reconstruction of body images presages the never-ending mission of these consumers. The reflexivity imposed upon consumers’ bodies culminates when the bodily images start overlapping again with those of others. Being flamboyant through bodily images begins meaning the possession of a cultivated and fetishized body upon which consumers can draw whatever and whenever they want to express (c.f., Belk 1988).

Quantitative Entropy

Consumers with a strong urge for distinctiveness but with low ability to signify face a situation in which they begin to seek ready-made offers in the market with which they can easily work on signification for their identity projects. The eye-catching offers are readily available in the places such as retail spectacles (Kozinets et al. 2004), amusement parks, and other tourist attractions featured with visuals and virtual experiences claimed to be hyper-reality (Firtat and Venkatesh 1995).

Consumers of this kind may be more vulnerable to the seduction of the market system as they realize their relatively low ability to signify and thus strive to gain as many sources as possible for their identity. The stimuli—which become consumers’ sources for identity projects—that can be observed and experienced in those places more directly and vividly inspire consumers with low ability to signify to engage in pseudo-signification (signification that requires minimal efforts from consumer), which might not be possible otherwise. Thematized and suggestive market offers in those places differ from the offers from other resources in that the offers from the traditional and modern market outlets are discrete from each other and less suggestive. Consequently, consumers with low ability to signify may have to fumble around each offer in order to examine the usability of them and comprehend the indicated meanings of the market items or experiences.

Those luring places may be a blessing for the consumers who live with quantitative entropy due to the fact that the places also provide consumers with so much fun, which entails fantasy and escape from reality where they are apprehensive about their low
competency in signifying (e.g., Kozinets et al. 2004). Consumers who visit such places may be able to obtain distinctiveness without having to substantially signify. This “free-ride” can be accomplished through automatic acquiescence of a decoration that separates people with it from the without. An IKEA fanatic may claim him/herself to be distinctive as do people who have been to Universal Studios. Consumers with little better ability to signify may attempt to take a bolder move. Since the experiences in those places need to be spoken in order to become a valid means of differentiating oneself from others, consumers try to visually display their experiences. Souvenir shops are the beneficiaries. Wearing SeaWorld San Diego or Hard Rock Café Paris t-shirts or caps replaces their lack of ability to signify.

Consumers who perceive the quantitative entropy employ the available measures in those places to develop their identities and ultimately make distinctions because they admit their incompetence in signifying. This realization of the consumers, however, does not assist them to propose a valid alternative for the market where they have difficulty to signify the sources available for their identities. Rather, they regress to the market system without full consciousness. The regression to the market could be a result of well-devised retaliation or counterattack of the market to the consumers susceptible to marketing attractions represented by thematization, playfulness, spectacle, and virtual reality. Quantitative entropy leads consumers of this kind to welcome enclaves (i.e., places aforementioned) inside the panopticon (the market) vis-à-vis that of Foucault (1977) and declare each of them to be an exodus from the market.

CONCLUSIONS
Consumers cultures have been acclimatizing to an unconventional and transient milieu in which consumers feel peril from the drought of resources for identity construction and the succeeding management. The concept of entropy adopted in this essay facilitates the understanding and explanation of the nature of new consumer cultures as alternative identity projects. Dependent upon four peculiar types of entropy, consumers have developed their own methods of identity creation and maintenance, which may seem to be “dodging-away” from the market. The market still exists with its established influence on consumers; however, frustrated consumers disobey or play (unnecessarily escape) with the market system in order to reach their own goals as to identity projects. Consumers still live and act upon the market as a penitentiary in which they constantly reform themselves, and they modestly, or sometimes innovatively, suggest and practice their own lifestyles in their own culture.

The new forms of consumer cultures dispersed and emulated today seem to be dependent upon the place through which the new consumer cultures permeate. The forms might have been bound to the metaculture, which encompasses and compartmentalizes all kinds of cultures that have been in the place for long time. The potentially same counterproposals by consumers could be initially embraced in different manners by the metacultures to which each consumer belongs. Nevertheless, a convergence of consumer cultures in remote metacultures upon a specific type of alternative consumer culture is witnessed more often and more widely than ever. It results from the fact that the only culture that globalizes and is being globalized is the different types of consumers’ anxiety by entropy and the following management of the anxiety. The dealing mechanisms in different time and space may not be isomorphic at the beginning, but the acclimation to the innate cultural environment will eventually congregate in a new overarching cultural amphitheater. Pursuit of identity bodes entropy, and entropy escorts consumer cultures to enjoyable multiplicity of cultural manifestations. Newly introduced consumer cultures are separable from each other in forms, but the momentum, entropy, is becoming globalized, and therefore, foremost and omnipresent.

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