ASSOCIATION FOR CONSUMER RESEARCH

Gentrification and Consumption: an Exploratory Study

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INTRODUCTION

Consumption collectivities received considerable research attention (e.g., Kates, 2002; Kozinets, 1997, 2001; Muniz and O'Guinn, 1995, 2001; Schouten and McAlexander, 1995; Thompson and Troester, 2002). These studies explored the nature, composition and dynamics of various forms of consumption communities. We aim to contribute to this literature by examining gentrifiers as a consumption community. While gentrification has been extensively researched outside the marketing discipline, it has not been adequately discussed from a consumption theory perspective. Gentrification is typically viewed as a consumption practice through which new middle classes seek to distinguish themselves from the old middle class. However, these accounts of gentrification depend too much upon implicit assumptions about the nature of consumption practices and lack an emic understanding of the actual practices of gentrifiers. In this study, we aim to contribute to both gentrification and consumer behavior literatures by examining gentrification as a spatial manifestation of a wider ideology of consumption, and gentrifiers as a critical consumption community. We also hope to contribute to these literatures by offering a study of gentrification in a non-Western context, Istanbul, Turkey, and add new insights to our understanding of gentrification.

Given the lack of interest within the marketing discipline, we first offer a review of gentrification literature, and discuss the implications of gentrification for marketing. Next, we explain the study we conducted by briefly outlining the gentrified neighborhood and our research methodology. In the findings section, we discuss two main results, gentrifiers as a consumption community and the transformation of the retailscape in the gentrified neighborhood. We conclude by a discussion of why gentrifiers constitute a critical consumption community and future research areas.

GENTRIFICATION

The term "gentrification" was first introduced by Ruth Glass in 1964 (Ley, 1986; Schaffer and Smith, 1986; Smith and Defilippis, 1999; Smith, 2002) to refer to the process whereby a new urban "gentry" transformed working-class quarters in London. Gentrification is defined as a process "by which poor and working-class neighborhoods in the inner city are refurbished by an influx of private capital and middle-class homebuyers and renters" (Smith, 1996, p.7). Since the introduction of the term gentrification, a voluminous literature on the topic developed. As Zukin (198, p.29) points out, the early research on gentrification focused on documenting its extent as a process of neighborhood change, and "speculating on its consequences for reversing trends of suburbanization and inner-city decline." Most of the existing literature on gentrification focuses on the cases that took place in cities in advanced capitalist countries such as Melbourne (Cole, 1985), Sydney (Bridge, 2001) and Adelaide (Badcock, 2001) in Australia; Toronto (Caulfield, 1994; Ley, 1986) and Montreal (Cole, 1985) in Canada; New York (Schaffer and Smith, 1986; Mele, 1994), New Orleans (O'Loughlin and Munski, 1979), San Fransisco (Robinson, 1995), and Washington D.C. (Lee *et al.,* 1985) in the U.S.; Paris (Brun and Fagnani, 1994) in France; Glasgow in Scotland (Bailey and Robertson, 1997) and London (Butler and Robson, 2001) in the U.K.

The difference between earlier experiences of rehabilitation and contemporary gentrification is that the latter is far more systematic and widespread. Gentrification became an international process synchronized with larger economic, political, and social changes (Zukin, 1987). According to Hackworth (quoted in Smith, 2002) the first wave of gentrification was what Ruth Glass observed as a sporadic and quaint process of urban renewal in the 1950s. The second wave–*the anchoring* phase as Hackworth labels it–became evident in 1970s and 1980s as gentrification became entangled with wider processes of urban and economic restructuring. Gentrification did not remain as a process, which is exclusive to the largest cities such as New York and London, it also took place in other cities, such as previously industrial cities (e.g., Cleveland and Glasgow) or smaller cities (e.g., Malmö or Grenada), and even small market towns (e.g., Lancaster, Pennsylvania, Ceske Krumlov in the Czech Republic). At the same time, gentrification became a global phenomenon, evident in many cities around the world, "from Tokyo to Tenerife, Sao Paulo to Pueblo, Mexico, Cape Town, to the Caribbean, Shangai to Seoul" (Smith, 2002, p.439). Hackworth identifies the final wave of gentrification, which has been occurring since 1990s, as "generalized gentrification"–a component of the liberal urban strategy. Today gentrification is a global phenomena and "is densely connected into the circuits of global capital and cultural circulation" (Smith, 2002, p.427).

The debates over the causes of gentrification focus on "the shifts in the urban structure versus shifts in the value preferences of the baby boom generation" (Cordova, 1991, p.27). The production-based explanation focuses on the supply side of the process and stresses the role of state and capital in producing both the potential and reality of gentrification (Schaffer and Smith, 1986). According to Cordova (1991) gentrification is a creation of real estate agents, property developers, and banks who control the "who" and "where" of urban property shifts. Similarly, Smith argues that gentrification takes place in neighborhoods where there is a significant "rent gap"- the disparity between "the actual capitalized ground rent (land value) of a plot of land given its present use and the potential ground rent that might be gleaned under a 'higher and better' use" (Smith, 1987, p.462, also see Smith, 1996). When the gap is significant enough, land developers, landlords and "occupier developers" make profit by reinvesting in abandoned inner-city properties and preparing them for new inhabitants. Furthermore, changes in the economic structure may trigger gentrification. Gentrification becomes a manifestation of "a white-collar residential style" (Zukin, 1987, p.135) indicating the agglomeration of large companies and their professional, managerial, and technical staffs and related business services in the urban core.

Demand-side (consumption-based) explanations of gentrification, on the other hand, stress consumer preference for the buildings and neighborhoods that become gentrified. Several fac-

tors underlie consumer preference: the taste for the inner city neighborhoods characterized by social and cultural diversity; the allure of distinctive architecture of the housing stock; attractiveness of the proximity of gentrified neighborhoods to central city; and changes in household structure-higher number of single adults living together, higher female labor participation rate, higher divorce rate, etc. (Ley, 1986; O'Loughlin and Munski, 1979; Schaffer and Smith, 1986; Zukin, 1987). Demand-side analyses perceive gentrification as a spatial manifestation of the values of the "new middle class." The new middle class, an offspring of post-Fordism, urges to stay away from tastes and values associated with old middle and working classes (Featherstone, 1991; Lury, 1996). One of the hallmarks of this new middle class has been its ability to exploit the emancipatory potential of the inner city, and indeed to create a new culturally sophisticated, urban class fraction, less conservative than the old middle class (Ley, 1996). As Zukin argues the new middle classes' "generally high educational and occupational status were structured by–and in turn expressed–a distinctive *habitus*, a class culture and milieu in Bourdieu's sense. Thus, gentrification may be described as a process of spatial and social differentiation" (1987, p.131).

IMPLICATIONS FOR MARKETING

Gentrification has long been viewed as a consumption practice through which a certain fraction of the new middle class seeks to create distinction from the old middle class, especially suburban middle class (Jager, 1986; Warde, 1991; Ley, 1996). However, as Warde (1991: 224) argues accounts of gentrification depend too much upon *implicit* assumptions about the nature of consumption practices due to "the absence of an acceptable, articulated theory of consumption." It appears that despite the existence of a voluminous literature on gentrification, a consumption-oriented understanding of gentrification, which is attentive to the community-place-consumption dynamics and actual practices of the gentrifiers, is absent. We argue that rather than studying gentrification only as a consumption practice we need to conceptualize gentrification as a spatial manifestation of a wider strategy of consumption in which place-community interaction helps individuals not only to create distinction from mainstream consumption practices but also to criticize these practices. It is this reversed relationship between gentrification and consumption–that is studying consumption through gentrification rather than the other way around–renders gentrification a topic worth for studying by consumer behavior researchers.

Gentrification involves consumption of buildings/homes and neighborhoods, which are potent sources of identity (Belk, 1988). As Jager (1986) argues the most visible tool for distinctiveness is the residential environment of gentrifiers, especially their historical houses and neighborhoods. Gentrification related consumption, however, also includes practices such as shopping and attendance in cultural and social amenities, which are expressive of lifestyles. As gentrifiers seek distinctiveness through consumption, "gentrification's consumption markers are explicitly identified with a specific type and use of space" (Zukin, 1995, p.40). The retailscapes of gentrified neighborhoods provide clues about the consumption practices and lifestyles of gentrifiers. Accordingly, we can conceptualize gentrifiers as a consumption community gathered around a lifestyle embedded in a particular space and time composition, rather than narrowly as a geographical community.

The term "consumption community" was first introduced by Daniel Boorstin (1973) to refer to informal groups expressing shared needs, values, or lifestyles through distinctive consumption patterns. In the following years, several studies addressing con-sumption and community linkages appeared in the marketing journals. Researchers examined subcultures of consumption (Kates, 2002; Kozinets, 1997; Schouten and McAlexander, 1995); cultures of consumption (Kozinets, 2001); brand communities (Muniz and O'Guinn, 1995; 2002); and, consumption micro-cultures (Thompson and Troester, 2002). These collectivities can be concentrated in a particular location or scattered throughout the country; they may occasionally meet or continue their existence on virtual space. The social context may be rich in terms of personal interaction among members or there may be few personal interactions other than those required by the activity. While some collectivities are stable and enduring, others are temporary or periodic. The basis of identification may range from leisure pursuits to particular brands or commonalities that are prevailing in the members' live, such as homosexuality. In some cases, the consumption object becomes the catalyst of the collectivity; in others, the activity becomes the locus.

Consumption can create communities and these new communities can disintegrate and replace traditional communities (Boorstin, 1973). However, neighborhoods still operate as a source of identity (Cole, 1985). As other communities, neighborhoods are defined in terms of what it is as well as what it is not. The neighborhoods are socially constructed in relation to other neighborhoods and their residents. This construction creates a sense of belonging, which is composed of others with perceived similarities. These perceptions create norms and rules with which the relationships within the community are shaped and mediated. Moreover, similar to the sense of community emerged in the traditional neighborhood, the contemporary neighborhood still has a "linking value" (Cova, 1996) that gathers people around a perceived common identity.

As any other neighborhood, gentrified neighborhoods are socially constructed. We argue that, apart from a common residential choice and a shared geographical area, a sense of community is created and reinforced as the neighborhood is gentrified. This gentrified community resembles brands in the sense that they become commodified by both residents and non-residents. Often, this construction is facilitated by mass media through the stories and images articulated about the neighborhood. As the imagery of the gentrified community circulates in the public discourse, the area attracts more people and a particular sense of community intensifies. This sense of community involves markers of traditional communities, such as consciousness of kind, shared ethos and beliefs, and traditions. Increasingly this shared consciousness becomes reflected in consumption practices of gentrifiers, creating a sense of what are appropriate consumption practices and what are not.

THE STUDY

Guided by our conceptualization of gentrification as a reflection of a wider consumption strategy of creating distinction from various other social collectivities, we explore the relationship between consumption and gentrification through a study of a recently gentrified neighborhood in Istanbul, Turkey. Gentrification is a relatively new phenomenon in Turkey and is observed uniquely in a district called Cihangir, which is located in what is historically known as the Pera district of Istanbul. It is a dense residential neighborhood where the settlement dates back to 17th century. During the Ottoman period, the area was inhabited mostly by non-Muslim members of the empire and foreigners who dealt with trade. After the establishment of the Turkish Republic, the district went through an intense Turkification process and lost much of its cosmopolitan nature. Once an upscale residential area, Cihangir gradually lost its flair, and beginning in the 1960s became a target of internal migration. The area was increasingly populated by rural

immigrants from Eastern Turkey, and became associated with poverty, crime and prostitution. The fate of the neighborhood, however, began to change in the 1990s, during which the municipality of Istanbul executed a project to rehabilitate the greater area of Pera. Since the beginning of the 1990s, both the physical and social composition of Cihangir changed drastically. The district gradually turned into a popular inner-city neighborhood with increasing rents and renovated building and streets.

Given the exploratory nature of the study, we employed qualitative research methods. The data were collected by the first author through a forty-two days field study between April and June 2003. In-depth interviews and participant observation were the main data collection methods. Observations were made in public places, such as cafés, restaurants, parks, and streets, as well as in meetings, such as protests and regular meetings of the neighborhood association. Extensive field notes and visual data supported in-depth interviews.

Sample selection for the interviews is based on the statistical data provided by the neighborhood principal. The data included age, education, gender, marital status, occupation, religion, and address of 4,662 Cihangir residents. Four different groups of individuals were interviewed during the research: gentrifiers; old residents; shopkeepers and retailers; and professionals, such as architects and real estate agents. To identify gentrifiers, we followed Ley's (1996) classification, which categorizes gentrifiers into two groups: pioneers and followers. The pioneers choose the inner-city locations because of their cultural amenities, lifestyle and historical value. They are viewed as the risk-oblivious segment. The second group, followers are risk-averse, and they move to the newly upgrading neighborhoods not only because they appreciate urban core lifestyle but also they perceive these areas as investment opportunities. Our sample includes both pioneers and followers. In order to differentiate between these categories, we used date of moving to neighborhood as a key determinant. In order to understand the production side dynamics and to trace the temporal dimension of the gentrification process, interviews with real estate agents and other professionals interested in the neighborhood, such as architects, were conducted. The analysis suggested that gentrification of Cihangir begun in the beginning of 1990s, and reached its zenith between 1997 and 1999. Based on this observation, those who moved between 1990 and 1997 were categorized as pioneers, and those who moved later as followers. In both groups, we sought to interview informants with diverse backgrounds in terms of occupation, education, gender and age. The informants' ages range from 26 to 67. We interviewed gentrifiers who have been living in the area for more than ten years as well as those who have moved less than a year. The interviews with gentrifiers lasted 60 minutes on average, ranging from 30 to 100 minutes. Almost all of the interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. On the other hand, old residents were interviewed to elucidate their reactions toward gentrification and newcomers. Interviews with retailers and shopkeepers were conducted to acquire further insights about the gentrification process, to which many of them were close witnesses.

In analyzing our data, we followed the general procedures of grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). First, each interview is coded and analyzed individually. Categories and themes identified for each interview is, then, compared with other interviews, first within their respective groups (i.e., pioneers or followers), and then across groups. Finally, we established relations among the emerging patterns and identified how they relate to pertinent theoretical constructs. Due to space limitations, we discuss only two of our findings, gentrifiers as a consumption community and the transformations in the retailscape, and omit informants' quotes.

FINDINGS

Gentrifiers as a Consumption Subculture

Pioneers and followers constitute a significant portion of the population of Cihangir. Pioneers consist mostly of university students, academics and artist who moved to the neighborhood when it provided affordable housing at the early stages of gentrification. Followers, on the other hand, usually have more income and hold positions in creative sectors, such as advertising and design, as well as white-collar jobs in the service sector. They express a taste for historical buildings, and usually seek dilapidated apartments, which provide an opportunity for large-scale restoration. They consider the neighborhood as a livable residential alternative, as well as an investment opportunity.

Both pioneers and followers, almost unanimously, state that proximity of Cihangir to the urban core as their reason of moving to the area. Being close to the center reduces the burden of transportation in a congested city like Istanbul. Living in the urban core also provides easy access to cultural amenities, a factor that is valuable especially for pioneers. The informants also mention the physical landscape, characterized by stone buildings with extravagant facades, built in the 19th and early 20th centuries, as an important motive for their settlement. However, what emerges as the most important reason for their preference of Cihangir is an enthusiasm for social diversity. They still consider the area as highly cosmopolitan, comprising of artists, students, lower and working class households, prostitutes, drug dealers, subcultures of different sexual stances–transvestites and homosexuals–and foreigners that work at the nearby foreign high schools and consulates. Many informants state that the existence of such diversity creates a feeling of anonymity, a sentiment that is perceived as emancipatory (Caulfield 1994).

Informants depict a prototypical resident, the *Cihangirli* [translates as one who resides in Cihangir], who is a frequent attendant of cultural amenities, tolerates and appreciates social diversity, and is interested in the historical character of the neighborhood. The *Cihangirli* possesses a proper combination of cultural and economic capital. While cultural capital is appreciated more, economic capital is also necessary, as one needs substantial financial resources in order to afford residing in the neighborhood. The *Cihangirli* identity stands in opposition to several other residential typologies present in contemporary Istanbul.

First, there are those who stay away from Cihangir because they view the urban core as "unclean"–characterized by security problems, threats of social diversity, congestion, etc. They are, according to the informants, *site* people. *Site,* a gated, suburban housing complex, is viewed as socially homogeneous and homogenizing, conformist, controlling, sterile, and artificial (for a detailed analysis of *site,* see Öncü, 1997). In concurrence with Caulfield's observation that gentrifiers "find suburbs and modernist spaces unlivable" (1994, p.124), most of our informants explain their choice of living in Cihangir as a reaction to the sterile urban life. In a "sterile" environment, everybody looks similarly, thinks similarly, and behaves similarly.

Another group that *Cihangirli* identity stands in opposition to is the *Televole* type. *Televole* is a television show, which has been broadcasted since 1995. It first appeared as a football commentary program, then turned into a magazine show articulating the lives of football players, models, pop singers, TV and movie stars, and the like. For many, it has become manifestation and celebration of the materialist values triggered by the liberal economic policies that the government pursued in the late 1980s (Sandikci and Ger, 2001). As the spectacle of *nouveaux riches* and celebrities, *Televole* has become one of the most important symbols of degeneration of

moral values within the society. As the epitome of a materialist culture, *Televole* type is disdained by the residents of Cihangir. According to our informants, these shallow and ignorant people worship nothing but money. They consume only Western brand name products, spend most of their leisure time in big shopping malls, and live a life revolving mainly around conspicuous consumption. They construct themselves a world immune from lower classes and problems of a developing country where income difference is enormous. Similar to *site* people, they refrain from any encounter with social diversity and chaos of urban core.

The *Cihangirli* identity stands in opposition to old, conservative middle classes as well as recently emerged conspicuous middle classes. Materialist consumption values and practices, typified in suburbs and malls, are viewed as imported from the West–especially from the United States of America–as a result of the global flows of capital, are resisted. The construction of the *Cihangirli* identity indicated the existence of a consumption community that seeks to distinguish itself not only from the old middle class but also from various new middle classes. As this community has been articulated through particular consumption preferences and practices, the retailscape went through a significant transformation as gentrification proceeded.

Transformations in the Retailscape

As Cihangir went through gentrification, its retailscape transformed drastically. There is now an abundance of real estate agencies, food related businesses including groceries, convenience stores, butchers, cafes, restaurants, gourmet food sellers, pet shops and veterinary clinics, hair dresses and beauty salons, as well as banks, pharmacies and hardware stores. We learned from our informants that while there were less than ten real estate agents prior to gentrification, the area now hosts more than hundred. As one of the oldest agent states, the neighborhood has become so profitable for real estate business is that there is fierce competition, which sometimes results in one real estate agent selling an apartment already sold by another real estate agent. The number of pet shops and vet clinics are also on the rise. In line with the informants' image of Cihangir as a "colony of singles," a large portion of the residents has pets. The high rate of pet ownership signals potential for making profits and, consequently, attracts related businesses to the area.

Many informants remark that the number of cafes and restaurants has also increased rapidly. Common characteristic of these establishments is that they provide meals with reasonable prices and hospitable service. They do not only cater to residents who are reluctant to cook food at home but also serve as spaces of socialization. Most of these restaurants are run by the residents of Cihangir, which modifies the buyer-seller relationship into that of one between neighbors. Such personalized transactions between buyers and sellers seek to "rehabilitate from the impersonality of corporate marketing" (Ley, 1996, p.185) and manifest resistance towards global chains such as McDonald's and Starbucks.

Apart from cafes and restaurants there also several specialty food stores, such as wine and organic and gourmet food sellers. Wine and gourmet foods entered into the Turkish consumptionscape in the last decade, and have become status markers (Bali, 2002). The proliferation of wine/gourmet food sellers in Cihangir invokes similar developments observed in gentrified neighborhoods in North American and European cities. As Ley (1996) argues, retail districts in gentrified neighborhoods serve as external markers of cultural identity sought by gentrifiers. Food and wine preferences, taste and practices become means of distinction for gentrifiers. Rejection of fast food and appreciation of ethnic, organic and homemade food, express opposition to the Americanization of

Turkish society as well as tolerance for diversity. The knowledge of wine, on the other hand, operates as a cultural capital used strategically to distinguish one from *nouveaux riches* personified as the *Televole* type.

CONCLUSION

Scholars studying gentrification perceive gentrification as a consumption practice of the new middle class. However, they fail to capture the emic meanings of gentrification for the gentrifiers; rather they conceptualize gentrifiers as fictional characters yearning to create and maintain distinction from the old middle class. Moreover, existing studies try to explain gentrification in terms of consumption. An alternative approach, as we try to argue, is to conceptualize and explain gentrification as a spatial manifestation of wider consumption ideologies. The reversal of the relationship between gentrification and consumption proves useful in two respects. First, we can recast gentrification as a by-product of consumption, and in a broader sense, of urban lifestyle. Second, we can study gentrifiers as a critical consumption community who does not only seek to create distinction from middle class but also from a diverse range of local and global consumption collectivities.

For the members of a subculture, subcultural ideologies and practices draw the boundaries between the mainstream and the subculture (Thornton, 1995), and serve as a means of inclusion and exclusion. Through subcultures, members express their distinctiveness from the undifferentiated mass. We believe that gentrifiers constitute a consumption community through the rejection of not only the mainstream consumption ideologies and practices but also various subcultures of consumption, such as suburban and *Televole*. They construct an alternative life-world through a shared commitment to a particular space. This life-world is socially constructed as a network of ideologies and related consumption practices, and entails an ongoing process of creation through constant contestation of the mainstream and subcultural values. The gentrifiers construct a narrative of how to be a *Cihangirli*. This narrative guides acceptable and unacceptable behaviors within the community, and defines who they are, who belongs to their community, and who is excluded.

Toleration and appreciation of social diversity embedded in this narrative resonate with cosmopolitan inclinations. Few studies looking at the relationship between cosmopolitanism and consumption present opposing views. Some suggest that cosmopolitan consumers tend to avoid the parochial culture of their local surroundings in favor of new and exciting experiences, such as exotic foods and music, as they construct their reference groups on a national or international basis (Holt, 1998; Cannon and Yaprak, 2002). Thompson and Tambyah (1999), on the other hand, study how expatriates employ cosmopolitan consumption behavior as a strategy to acquire status and cultural capital, a behavior that requires a mingling with and an appreciation of local tastes, meanings, and habits. This study contributes to the existing literature by offering a "local-cosmopolitan" perspective based on Hannerz (1990) and Abbas (2000) who contend that today's cosmopolitanism has become an appreciation of social diversity in the local settings. Our findings suggest that local-cosmopolitans employ cosmopolitanism as a strategy to achieve distinctiveness through the valuation of inner urban living and an appreciation of the social diversity of the urban core.

Caulfield (1994) perceives gentrification as a "critical social practice," which represents a resistance to post-war urban development and the dominant ideals of suburbia. In our case, we conceive the gentrifiers of Cihangir as a critical consumption community, opposing both the modernist institutions and city forms, such as

suburbs and malls, and the social homogenization aimed by the modernist ideology. The alternative identity embodied in the term *Cihangirli* is a criticism of, on the one hand, new middle classes increasingly shaped by the global flow of goods and culture, and on the other hand, the Turkish project of modernism which sought to create an ethnically and culturally homogenized nation (for a discussion of Turkish modernity, see Kasaba, 1997). The appreciation of social and ethnic diversity, the taste for history, the interest in cultural and artistic activities, and the preference for local and smaller retailers constitute components of a yet another consumption ideology, for which gentrification becomes a means of articulation.

This study offers an initial attempt to explore gentrification from a consumption behavior perspective. Given its exploratory nature, it points at future studies. While we briefly talk about the transformations in the retailscape, further studies are needed to better understand how these retail spaces are used by gentrifiers as well as business and marketing strategies of retailers. Furthermore, while we discuss only the values and practices of the gentrifiers, an investigation of how other residents in the gentrified neighborhoods respond to and negotiate these consumption strategies is needed to get a complete understanding of the phenomena. The Turkish case also demonstrates that consumption-gentrification relationship is likely to have globally common and locally specific aspects. Future studies on non-Western examples of gentrification are likely to be helpful in the development and extension of existing understandings.

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