

## SPECIAL SESSION SUMMARY

### Access versus Ownership in Consumer Research

Ashlee Humphreys, Northwestern University, USA

Markus Geisler, York University, Canada

#### SESSION OVERVIEW

This session sought to explore the distinction between access and ownership in consumption practices. We brought together three presentations that examined a paradigm shift from ownership to access organized consumer discourses, practices and theory. Within a paradigm of ownership, consumption objects are clearly defined, and the role of the consumer is circumscribed as simultaneous owner and user. Within a paradigm of access, however, property boundaries become blurred, and consumers play a more ambiguous role in constituting the consumption object by using objects that are not owned. As marketing paradigms evolve from a product-based orientation to a service-based orientation, these tensions between ownership and access have become more prominent in the marketplace (Vargo and Lusch 2005). Examining the relationships between access and ownership allows us to (1) explore the relationship between material and immaterial dimensions of consumption, (2) add to our understanding of how cultural values and interpretations are formulated and shared, and (3) document how consumers and producers collectively negotiate social and legal norms of access and ownership.

The applicability of this theoretical distinction was explored in three papers. Markus Giesler and Ashlee Humphreys examined the two conflicting paradigms in two consumption contexts: retail bookselling and music downloading. These two cases allow us the opportunity to theorize the dynamics between ownership and access, and its results at two levels of consumer-producer conflict, one cooperative and the other agonistic.

Clinton Lanier, Hope Schau, and Albert Muniz discussed the distinction's place in the consumer co-creation process in the case of three fan fictions (*Harry Potter*, *Xena: Warrior Princess*, and *Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers*). Although producers legally maintain the rights to the material aspects of mass culture, consumers co-create and disseminate the immaterial meanings and interpretations of popular culture. Who owns the "meaning" of these co-created texts is hotly contested between fans and producers. Traditional notions of ownership break down as we move from considering value as residing in the product to residing in the experience surrounding the product. The only way for producers to maintain ownership of the experience of the product is to restrict access to the product itself.

Eric Arnould, Carolyn Curasi, and Linda Price explored the interplay between access and ownership in a context in which access is historically privileged over ownership, and likewise takes precedence over ownership in several meaningful ways. In the context of Nebraska Century farms and ranches, access precedes ownership and flows uncontested into ownership. However, ownership must be earned via demonstration of guardianship skills. Ownership is a responsibility that entails considerable lifestyle trade-offs. A priority for agents occupying the guardianship role is securing access to the farm for existing and future generations of potential owners. Loss of the farm, which curtails future access, is a great ill, all guardians seek to avoid. Century farm families employ a variety of strategies to pass their farms forward into the future. A variety of economic and policy factors threaten the access/guardianship model of the Century farm.

Russell Belk then tied together the presented empirical work and drew conclusions using a framework of sharing and owning and contrasted them to previous work on material possessions. All three

presentations use the access/ownership distinction to theorize social relations between consumers and producers and between consumers themselves. By convening this session we tried to advance the understanding of these two modes of consumption and their interrelation in the marketplace.

#### EXTENDED ABSTRACTS

##### "Tensions between Access and Ownership in the Media Marketplace"

Markus Giesler, York University

Ashlee Humphreys, Northwestern University

When and why will a social actor use a framework of access over one of ownership? To answer this question, we examine ownership/access dynamics in the context of media consumption and production. Media products present us with a valuable opportunity to study the conflict between access, a viewpoint generally taken by the consumers of media that entails the sharing of goods and services, and ownership, the viewpoint more commonly taken by producers of media that entails placing restrictions on the circulation of goods and services. This paper seeks to organize and explain the tensions that arise between media producers and consumers based on divergent perspectives of the marketplace in two consumption domains, books and music.

Two ethnographic field studies of book and music consumption were undertaken including depth interviews, archival data, and extended experiential participation in a cultural context (Pettigrew 1990; Arnould and Wallendorf 1994; Stewart 1998). In the case of the bookselling industry, the transition from ownership to access, while on-going, has been relatively smooth and takes place through a process of continual gifting between company and consumer. In the case of the music industry, the transition from ownership has been contentious, heavily debated in popular and industry circles, and has taken the form of a social drama (Turner 1969).

In the case of bookselling, consumers have the option to read or 'access' titles in the store rather than to buy them outright. They view this access as a free service offered by the bookstore and use the service to read things they would not otherwise buy. Book producers, on the other hand, are structurally oriented toward selling media in material form. While they may offer free access to materials, they do so in order to entice consumers to buy and 'own' the book. The tension between access and ownership plays out as consumers try to maximize 'access' while producers try to place barriers on access in order to promote ownership.

In the case of music, downloaders, who are access-oriented, and music producers, who are ownership-oriented, are drawn into dramatic presentation efforts to legitimate their own cultural standpoint (Goffman 1959; Turner 1969). Members of each dramatic stakeholder group exert a moral demand upon their rivals and cultural bystanders to accept the cultural standpoint encoded in their dramatic performances as the most desirable, proper, or appropriate. Through their dramatic performances, consumers and producers invest themselves and others into a particular music marketplace ideology, legitimate their divergent cultural standpoint on music access and ownership, and reinforce their own sources of cultural identity and power.

In summary, this presentation contributes to our understanding of the access-ownership distinction in marketing in three

important ways. First, we profile media access and ownership as two fundamentally different perspectives in the marketplace. Second, we develop how these fundamental but abstract perspectives serve as a springboard for the construction of divergent dramatic narratives, roles, and behaviors. Finally, we show how marketplace stakeholders seek to manipulate the relationship between access and ownership to guide media consumption in particular directions. In summary, the two cases allow us to examine the multiple ways in which the tension between access and ownership can be negotiated, with more or less conflict between producers and consumers.

**“Write and Wrong: Ownership, Access and Value In Consumer Co-Created Online Fan Fiction”**

*Clinton D. Lanier, Jr. University of Nebraska-Lincoln*

*Hope Jensen Schau, The University of Arizona*

*Albert M. Muñoz, Jr., DePaul University*

This presentation specifically addresses issues of ownership and access in relation to fan community appropriation and alteration of media-based products through the writing of fan fiction (Bond and Michelson 2003; Caudill 2003). As marketing continues to evolve from a goods-centric to a service- and experience-centric dominant logic (Pralhad and Ramaswamy 2004, Vargo and Lusch 2004), the role of consumer involvement in the value and meaning creation process takes on greater importance. This active participation by the consumer exposes many of the limitations of our traditional understanding of property rights in marketing. It also raises many questions and concerns about the nature of products, consumer engagement, and the boundaries of consumer participation as they relate to access and ownership.

Copyrights protect intellectual property and lead to a legally legitimate and authenticated genealogy, but what happens when the protected property is subject to “textual poaching,” or the process in which people write around and through the “meta-text” of the protected property to meet their unique desires (Jenkins 1992)? The most common form of textual poaching by consumers is the writing of fan fiction. Because fans write stories that are based both on the primary text and the consumers’ imagination, we consider the writing of fan fiction as a form of active co-creation analogous to Vargo and Lusch’s (2004) new paradigm of marketing where consumers create both value and meaning, and are considered inextricable from the firm’s offering. Combining aspects of both the producers and consumers, the writing of fan fiction is considered a co-creation phenomenon in which consumers use the focal texts of mass culture as “cultural resources” to co-create the cultural meanings of popular culture (Fiske 1989). We interrogate the implicit assumption in this consumer orientation towards mass and popular culture, asserting that popular culture cannot be unilaterally produced or owned. We posit that media producers manufacture mass commodities (e.g., television programs, movies, music, fiction) and consumers turn them into popular culture through a co-creative process of access, interpretation, and identity negotiation (individual and collective).

In order to explore issues of ownership and access associated with the phenomenon of fan co-creation of media-based products, we examine three organically formed fan communities (Harry Potter, *Xena: Warrior Princess*, and Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers) and their interaction with three different types of media “texts” (i.e., novels, television shows, and music). We monitor ten online forums that contain fan fiction in a manner analogous to naturalistic observation: four devoted to Harry Potter fan fiction, four centered on *Xena: Warrior Princess*, and two related (directly and indirectly) to Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers. We analyze the content of the fan fiction on each site, the manner in which it is disseminated,

and discussions surrounding its interpretation and meanings to the fan communities and their various factions.

Through examination of these three fan communities, we find that fans engage in co-creation of meaning and value through the writing of fan fiction that involves the focal texts of the community. We find that this access-oriented form of co-creation is a transformative process that converts the commodities of mass culture into meta-texts of popular culture. That is, although producers legally maintain the rights to the “material” aspects of mass culture, consumers co-create and disseminate the “immaterial” meanings and interpretations of popular culture. Who owns the “meaning” of these co-created texts is hotly contested between fans and producers. We also find that the success of fan co-creation is based on the richness of the focal text, what is left unwritten in the focal text, and the degree to which the focal text can be appropriated and reconstructed by the consumer. Harry Potter, *Xena* and Tom Petty fan fiction writers all adore the focal texts, are intrigued by what is not contained in these texts, and engage in poaching and refashioning these texts to create broader meanings that meet their individual needs and the needs of the fan community.

We also find that the writing of fan fiction allows consumers to mitigate the cultural tensions between mass culture and popular culture. Although the products of mass culture are often described as the primary hegemonic tool of capitalist society to oppress and pacify the masses (Adorno and Horkheimer 1979), this co-creative process allows consumers to alleviate their feelings of being exploited and alienated by actively engaging these “texts” to produce the meanings of popular culture. Interestingly, although consumers are able to carve out a separate cultural space (i.e., popular culture) in which to create their own symbolic meanings and build their own communities, they replace one form of tension (mass culture vs. popular culture) for another (the tensions that exist between equally adoring fans with disparate reads of the focal storyline). In a sense, after transcending the issue of ownership, consumers wage their own internal battles concerning access and the degree of transformation of the focal text. We posit that the latter tension is preferable to consumers because it is a byproduct of the co-creation process and part of the tensions that consumers actively employ between individual and collective identities (Arnould and Price 2000; Schau and Muniz 2002).

In addition, these communities also face anxieties as some producers try to wrest control of the focal text away from highly involved fan consumers. Some producers of mediated-texts (e.g., Anne Rice) attempt to strictly control both the material and immaterial aspects of the focal text. This typically does not stop the fan community from co-creating their own texts and meanings, but usually forces them underground. Other producers attempt to put boundaries on how far the characters, meanings, etc. of their texts can be extended (e.g., many producers forbid the creation of sexually explicit stories based on their characters). A few producers actually invite consumers to suggest ways to extend the meaning of the focal text in upcoming productions. Since there are obvious advantages to producers from encouraging consumers to co-create with their products (e.g., the transformation of products from mass to popular culture), the issue of how much access and control to provide to consumers will need to be carefully considered.

We contribute to the existing literature by arguing that traditional notions of ownership break down as we move from considering value as residing in the product to residing in the experience and meaning surrounding the product. The only way for producers to maintain ownership of the “immaterial” aspects of the product is to restrict access to the product itself. Obviously, this defeats the purpose of any market offering and is almost impossible to control.

Likewise, although Holt (2004) asserts that it is the cohesive myth that binds people to a community, we find that it is precisely what is left unwritten in the focal text that inspires fans to actively engage in co-creation and form fan communities. Lastly, although the co-creation literature views this process as between producers and consumers (or consumption communities), it does not really address how co-creation goes on between consumers. Members of these fan communities not only engage the focal text (i.e., meaning creation and interpretation), but also co-create texts with other consumers (i.e., meaning development). This process generates the “meta-text,” which in turn provides consumers with more “cultural resources” to continue their creative endeavors.

#### **“Guardianship and Access on Nebraska Century Farms”**

*Eric Arnould, University of Arizona*

*Carolyn Curasi, Georgia State University*

*Linda Price, University of Arizona*

Nebraska “Century Farm” families have owned a farm or ranch for at least one hundred years. Perhaps paradoxically, our research with these families extends our understanding of a paradigm of object relationships highlighting access, where property is in some sense shared, and the agents involved have complex roles in constituting consumption objects imbued with relational symbolism within kinship groups (Curasi, Price and Arnould 2004; McGraw, Tetlock and Kristel 2003). Our research exposes cultural tensions agents experience between guardianship of something inalienable and loss through alienation, as well as the way these tensions shape their “curatorial” consumption (McCracken 1988). Access to and transfer of Century farms illustrate the interplay between alienability and inalienability across generations of farm families. Our paper exposes a variety of tactics for establishing and maintaining guardianship of the farm as site of production and consumption.

The Aksarben Foundation recognizes over 5000 Century Farms in Nebraska. Given the history of settlement, this often means a single family has held title to these farms since the original homesteading in the 1870s and 1880s, which was itself an access gaining process. In other words, Century farms have been transferred between four and six generations of farm family members. We conducted long interviews with over 30 families and participant observation with two of them to investigate contemporary management practices, curatorial consumption and family farm culture.

For individual agents, access to the farm precedes ownership and typically is mediated by kinship, that is, nuclear or extended family membership. It is enacted over time through expressions of interest that senior guardians recognize in more junior kinsfolk, and through their investment of productive labor in farming operations. Access may lead to increasing levels of agent’s engagement or desire for ownership/guardianship. Engagement is effortful. It is expressed through obtaining educational qualifications. It is further expressed through farmers’ commitment to what they term stewardship, care of the land and steps taken to improve it, such as sustainable management practices with a view to preserving access for future generations. In some cases, rescuing a failing family member’s farm operation may entitle one to greater say in the eventual disposition of the heritage farm removed from risk. Heirs are not simply designated, but become heirs through long-term demonstration of effort, worth, and ability.

Guardianship entails lifestyle commitments involving trade-offs between investments in the farm and additional land (rent and purchase) and consumption attractions available to city dwellers such as vacations, nice clothing, and the like (Machum 2005). Those who enjoy current guardianship/ownership make choices to

have access to the farm and the way of life it entails instead of something else (due to time, money, etc). A jack of all trades’ ethos with regard to production, and an attitude disparaging of farmers who engage in conspicuous consumption of new agricultural equipment or materialistic lifestyles was common among Century farms owners/guardians.

In this context, access has preeminence over ownership. As a necessary precursor to guardianship/ownership, access flows naturally into guardianship. Absentee owners, i.e., those without day-to-day access, even cash renters are suspect, even resented. This may be because absenteeism and alienated relationships to the land threaten the access-guardianship pathway. Access to the farm induces positive identity claims and symbolism that are shared with younger family members. Through the length of time they’re on their land, many Century farm families feel they have earned a type of distinction that resonates with the concept of ‘patina’ associated with inherited family possessions before the industrial revolution. Many informants seem to feel that Century Farm families have earned a level of distinction (good character, dependability, strong work ethic, faith, etc.) due in part to the longevity of their guardianship, and that these distinctions are lost when access is lost, but may be regained if access is renewed.

Guardians go to some lengths to preserve access for themselves and future generations (Coyné 2005). Developing niche markets and blending farm and off-farm income sources are tactics some employ (Edgcomb and Thetford 2004). A legacy of cautious innovation is common among these families. Nevertheless, market pressures lead some families to expand the scale of farmland and farm operations at the expense of other harder-pressed farm families. Guardians that are unable to actively farm the land due to financial reversals or advancing age may rent their farm to others family members preferentially but not necessarily, but resist the temptation to sell it out of the family. In these cases, they trade off their own access to the land against the responsibility to act as guardians for future generations. They express the hope that some family member will be able and willing to take over access and guardianship of the farm. Guardians also gift access of the farm to family members who have migrated to town or to other states, and encourage members of the migrants’ families to return for the agricultural summer season or important family holidays. In this way, ownership is symbolically shared and future guardians are sometimes even recruited. Those who see an off-farm future ahead express regret and misgivings.

Century farm families engage in creative strategies to retain family farms within the family and across generations. Farm transfer practices are quite complex from family to family. Engagement is expressed in an array of everyday practices such as ongoing labor commitments in the absence of ownership guaranties. This behavior is characteristic of younger family members who may hope to assume guardianship of the farm at some future point. Living trusts, intergenerational gifting, intergenerational installment purchase, investments of labor and even capital investments by younger family members in the farm to which they do not have title, are among the tactics employed to transfer guardianship between generations of farm families. Older guardians may signal progressive transfers and their change in status by moving from the main house to a secondary home either built on the property or at its margin, or in some cases in nearby small towns. Overall, progressive intergenerational transfer of limited rights characterizes these practices.

We found many cases where the burden of guardianship (Curasi, Price and Arnould 2004) had become great; farming is just “no fun” anymore, and selling out appears to be the only option.

Still, many informants indicate that an important goal is to pass the farm forward into the future, and they desire at all costs to avoid being the one who "lost the farm." These behaviors resonate with those of the guardians of inalienable wealth in other contexts (Curasi, Price and Arnould 2004). In other words, curatorial behavior is a key factor distinguishing the behavioral models of family and corporate farming in the minds of our informants.

Today, working century farm families operate within a complex and highly competitive market economy that imposes a host of threats to the guardianship/ownership model (Hassebrook 1999; Salamon and Toratore 1994). But family farms persist, and Nebraska Century farmers recognize significant distinctions between the logic of family farm operations and those of corporate farms.

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**SPECIAL SESSION SUMMARY**  
**‘Fakin’ It’: Why Do Consumers Buy Counterfeit Goods?**

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**SESSION OVERVIEW**

*Objective.* Despite a booming multi-billion dollar global market for counterfeit goods, academic research on the consumption of such goods remains sparse. Who are the consumers of counterfeit goods? Why do they engage in such illegal consumption behaviors, even when they can afford the genuine goods? And how do others view those who engage in such questionable but, at the same time, often *de rigueur* actions? These are the questions that motivate this session, the objective of which is to further our understanding of this increasingly important but largely overlooked domain of consumption behavior.

*Content.* This session comprises four papers that together shed light on the individual and product-specific determinants, the motivational underpinnings, and the social and product-specific consequences of counterfeit good consumption. The papers are in advanced stages of completion, each containing empirical findings from one or more studies. The session’s scope is both broad and deep: the papers draw on a diversity of theoretical and empirical perspectives to contribute towards an incipient but persuasive, coherent understanding of how the social environment interacts with individual motivations to influence the consumption of counterfeit goods.

The first two papers examine the nature and extent of social sanction for counterfeit consumption behavior. The Geiger-Oneto paper draws on social identity theory to implicate the counterfeit buyer’s social distance as a determinant of others’ reactions of such a person. While counterfeit buyers are in general evaluated less favorably than buyers of genuine brands, the former are evaluated more favorably when they are members of an in-group than of an out-group. The Chang, Keinan and Lehman paper examines the moderating role of product type on such social perceptions by undertaking a product-specific (i.e., hedonic versus utilitarian) investigation of people’s opinions of counterfeit good buyers on dimensions of morality, likeability and attractiveness as a social other (e.g., friend, fellow shopper, etc.). Interestingly, while buyers of counterfeit utilitarian goods (e.g., software) are viewed as less moral, fair and considerate compared to buyers of the genuine versions, buyers of counterfeit hedonic goods (e.g., fashion) are views as more moral, fair and considerate compared to buyers of the real goods.

The final two papers complement the first set by investigating the socially-driven motivations guiding consumers’ pre- and post-counterfeit good purchase psychologies. The McCabe & Rosenbaum paper draws on sociological research on delinquent behavior to examine how consumers rationalize this illegal consumption behavior. Their findings suggests that consumers of counterfeit luxury branded goods not only employ multiple rationalizations to justify their purchases but also do not, paradoxically, desire the real brands any less. The Wilcox, Kim and Sen paper draws on theories of self-monitoring and accompanying attitude functions (social-adjustive vs. value-expressive) to demonstrate a consumer by product interaction in the motivations underlying purchases of counterfeit luxury brands: the purchase decision of low versus high self-monitors is differentially influenced by the extent to which the counterfeit product is identifiable as a desired luxury brand.

*Structure.* Each presentation will be 20 minutes long. As with most fruitful sessions on emerging topics, this session is likely to generate more questions than answers and the final 10 minutes of

the session will be devoted to a discussion of worthy research directions in this domain of consumer behavior.

*Audience.* The potential audience for this session is quite broad. It will appeal to researchers interested in illegal/aberrant consumption behaviors as well as, more broadly, to those interested in consumer decision making, motivation, and social norms and influences. Equally importantly, the session will be of interest to practitioners and regulators seeking to formulate effective anti-counterfeiting or piracy policies/strategies grounded in consumer insights.

*Contributions.* The contributions of this session are four-fold. First, it enhances our substantive understanding of the motivational and social underpinnings of an increasingly important domain of consumption behavior. Second, it draws on relevant theories of motivation, perception, preference and groups to advance our theoretical understanding of counterfeit good consumption. Third, this session combines the internal control of experimental work with the external validity of field surveys and ethnography to yield a methodologically robust set of insights into the consumption of counterfeit goods. Finally, this session brings together a diverse set of researchers whose research efforts in the area of counterfeit good consumption complement each other in the articulation of a fruitful research agenda on this important but under-examined consumer behavior topic.