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CONSUMMATION:  
RE-IMAGINING THE ROLE OF  
MARKETING FROM  
DRIVING CONSUMPTION TO ENABLING CONSUMMATION

完善消费  
重新定义营销的角色：  
从驱动消费到实现完善的消费

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For the last century or so, the defining economic paradigm of modern nations has been that of ‘the Consumer Society’ (Baudrillard 1970). The phrase describes a set of dynamics in which users of products and services are identified as consumers who follow the acquisitive tendency to maximise the benefits of their consumption. By so doing they ensure the maintenance of economic progress and the provision of benefits to consumers and also to wider society, through the redistribution of surplus value.

As economies develop, they rely more on intangible assets to drive economic activity and brands have been identified as a prime example of how intangibles fuel GDP growth. (Ökten et al, 2018). Within commercial enterprises the marketing function has been at the centre of generating consumer demand and the dynamics of the consumer society. Marketing can be described as a set of processes

that define and fulfil market opportunities. (American Marketing Association <sup>1</sup>).

The concept of the consumer society as an organizing paradigm for a society or economy has drawn negative critiques from a range of quarters (Offner, 2006; The Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2012; Moore, 2015; Polman, 2015). The sustainability movement has highlighted the incompatibility of such a model with planetary boundaries, or the capacity of the Earth to provide raw materials for this consumption and to accommodate its waste outputs, most notably greenhouse gas emissions. This is epitomised in the idea of the “tragedy of the commons” (Hardin, 1968).

Enterprises are already wrestling with the need to operationalise more ‘sustainable’ consumption and production. Corporations are making sustainability pledges and framing these with narratives of sustainable growth. Start-ups are creating new business models addressing social or ecological issues, internalising hitherto neglected externalities.

The root meaning of the word consume - “use so as to destroy; take up and exhaust; use up” (Shorter Oxford Dictionary) - indicates the unsatisfactory and incomplete nature of consumption and the consumer society as an economic paradigm suitable for a future of human and planetary flourishing. A new economic framing must expand the imaginative horizons of producers, marketers and consumers and include the needs of currently excluded as well as future citizens. This new paradigm of economics must inspire societal hope and spur entrepreneurial innovation.

I propose a new manifesto of *Consummation* for marketing at the centre of a new paradigm of economics. Consummation is defined as “the act of making something

complete or perfect” (Oxford Shorter Dictionary). Building on this definition we can start to define a set of principles that make Consummation an actionable marketing concept.

These principles would include:

a framework of foundational ethics to direct the decision-making of marketing leaders;

transparency in decision-making demonstrating a common good intent;

creative application of the marketing mix to execute the Consummate nature of the brand experience, and,

an agile and creative development of the business model to incorporate externalities whilst ensuring margin and growth.

This list is illustrative, and more research, consultation and design needs to be undertaken to develop a set of principles and tools.

Consummation evolves marketing driven consumption in three important ways.

### **Purpose branding**

Firstly, Consummation signals a shift from the positioning of brands of products and services purely in the transactional dynamics of the marketplace to brands conveying a purpose relevant to wider relational dynamics of society. Unilever has been a pioneer of integrating purpose into its portfolio of consumer brands and reports on both the positive impact these brands are having on society as well as their superior business performance. (Vizard, 2020).

One example is the personal care and beauty brand, Dove. This brand defined a purpose “to help women everywhere develop a positive relationship with the way they look, helping them raise their self-esteem and realise their full potential.” This proposition integrates the needs of individual consumers in a transactional

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<sup>1</sup> American Marketing Association, (2017). “Marketing is the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large.”

relationship with the brand but goes beyond to address a broader social need related to the category and focused on women's self-esteem and societal notions of beauty. This has delivered significant results measured in terms of social impact and business value. Thirty-five million girls have been reached with messages about self-esteem and the brand has added \$280 million in incremental revenue through purpose-related marketing (ROI of \$3.00 per \$1.00 spent on communications). (Kramer et al, 2020)

### **Impact innovation**

Secondly, Consummation spurs a new form of innovation beyond satisfying consumer needs towards designing products and services that address wider social needs.

In the coffee sector, industry experts have been concerned by a concentration of supply in Brazil and Vietnam and a long-term loss of the diversity of producing origins, exacerbated by civil conflicts, poor governance and climate change. This has impoverished farmer communities and reduced flavour variety which is an important dimension of the consumer experience. Nespresso, the high-end coffee company, has been reviving coffee production in marginalised regions to preserve rare origins. The Nespresso "Reviving Origins" range is creating a positive impact in South Sudan, Puerto Rico, Zimbabwe and other countries and offers Nespresso consumers rare tastes of undiscovered coffees and stories of positive impact in producing communities. Nespresso reports that Reviving Origins products are the highest priced and fastest selling in the range. Tens of thousands of farmers are benefiting from the positive impact that Reviving Origins is generating.

### **Hope narratives**

Thirdly, Consummation heralds a move from communications that primarily drive awareness of the features of a brand to the dissemination of messages that inspire people to change behaviour in ways that shape society for the better. In India, the detergent brand Ariel, created an advertising campaign that addressed the perception that laundry was the sole responsibility of the woman in a household. The "Share the Load" campaign featured advertising and social media messages that encouraged men to change their attitudes and behaviours towards domestic chores. The campaign succeeded in signing up 1.6 million men to share the load as well as doubling sales in the campaign period (BBDO India, 2016).

In all these examples the ideals of Consummation seek to fulfil the core transactional dynamics of a brand and not necessarily to replace them. After a Consummation brand experience, the user will attain a deeper, more enduring satisfaction due to awareness of the broader public good achieved. The "consumer" or "consummator" should feel satisfied against standard measures of consumer satisfaction but also be elevated to a higher order of fulfilment by understanding the full impact of their choice.

In Consummation marketing creativity and attractiveness of the brand experience should be at least at parity with consumptive experiences. Consummation-inspired marketing has the potential to refresh the role of marketing as a creative, respected and influential positive force in enterprise as part of a new economic paradigm of The Consummate Society. It can deliver excellence in global value chains, redirecting people's needs, wants and desires and the processes, products and services that fulfil them.

In its ultimate practice Consummation will inspire and facilitate a strategic and creative internalisation of unaccounted external impacts

into the value proposition of a brand. For this to be achieved at scale the process of internalisation should expand management thinking in two ways. Firstly, the additional cost of the internalised externalities can be, in part, managed by more imaginative co-financing. This may include grant funding, public-private partnerships and impact investment capital or form part of ESG accountability to more traditional sources of invested capital. In all of this work there must be a focus on delivering impact in the most resource efficient way possible. Secondly, the end consumer of a Consummate proposition will be made to feel more deeply integrated into the purpose, impact and hope ambition of the brand. This points to a new level of meaningful engagement with customers and an integration and unity of intent between the branded product or service proposition and the aspirations of the Consummator.



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