

Good Bad Consumption – Paradigm Development of Consumer Research in Finland

The public attitude toward consumption is ambivalent. Consumption can represent both a desired, good thing which describes the general welfare in society, but also a wasteful, bad thing that contributes to the neglect of the environment and non-material needs. Past consumer research covers both sides. Several paradigm changes have taken place during the years, and they are discussed in detail in this article.

Starting from scarcity and poverty issues, consumer research first developed into economic analyses of aggregate consumption choices. However, the behavioral turn that took place in all business economics changed radi-

cally the focus of interest. The first behavioral wave directed the interest in cognitive information and decision processes of the individual consumers. The second behavioral turn introduced a social scientific perspective. Consumption was seen as socially and culturally determined, and an indicator of a broader way of life. In the next, environmental turn, researchers became interested in the external effects of consumer behavior. Consumers are increasingly treated in the role of citizens who cooperate in favor of the common goods. Finally, the cultural paradigm, which now seems to be predominant, is analyzing cultural and symbolic meanings of consumption and consumer experiences.

Correspondingly, methodological approaches have followed the changes, reaching from economic choice models and multivariate analyses to cultural approaches and methodologies such as constructivism and discourse analysis. Moreover, recent 'neuroeconomic' research on consumers' perceptual visual and brain processes and emotions have re-elevated the traditional experimental methods and causal models. Presently, several disciplinary and methodological paradigms live in parallel, and it is not always easy to find coherence between them.

Key words: Consumer research, Paradigm change, Cognitive, Social, Environmental, Cultural ■