

## On the road to prosumption: marketing discourse and the development of consumer competencies

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This paper reveals the three major faces of the “new consumer” that has emerged during the last 30 years throughout marketing discourses. The paper shows how these faces interact to format the structure of consumer competencies: individualistic competencies of dialogue are combined with hedonistic competencies of play together with creative competencies of resources integration. The paper concludes with a discussion about the existence within these marketing discourses of a governmental process that puts pressure on today’s citizens to see and think of themselves as consumers in the first instance.

**Keywords:** co-creation; competencies; creative; governmentality; hedonistic; individualistic; prosumer

### Introduction

It has been widely argued that the new consumer is active, knowledgeable, demanding, channel-hopping and, above all, experience seeking. (Stuart-Menteth, Wilson, and Baker 2006, 415)

Despite the fact that research on the “new consumer” suffers from a lack of empirical evidence (Goulding 2003; Miles 1999; Ohl 2002), many marketing discourses try to outline faces of the new consumer in a bid to sustain the originality of their authors’ approaches and thought processes. Such attempts at mutating the image of consumers have given the marketing literature something to talk about for more than three decades (Baker 2003; Brookes 1988). A popular manifestation of the discourse at present is the advent of “consum’actors” (also called “prosumers” or “post-consumers”). The term is used to describe consumers as agents of their own destinies.

How do these marketing discourses help shape consumers? Indeed, how do marketing ideas perform, shape, and format the consumer, and consequently the market, rather than observing how they function (Araujo and Kjellberg 2010)? The purpose of the present paper is to discover the common thread that weaves together the marketing discourses of the past 30 years - following marketing’s mid-life crisis - about the faces of the new consumer, and in so doing, to highlight the role of marketing theories and ideas on the realisation of the new market orders. This effort can be classified as part of the school of critical marketing (Saren et al. 2007) that examines the discourses of

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marketing professionals and tries to reveal their historical, social, and cultural origins (Cochoy 1999). Its purpose is to study the construction of these new consumer discourses without delving into the reasons behind why marketing actors produce such rhetorical new consumer faces. In other words, the text aims to identify how such discourses progressively construct reality, as well as the form that such a reality assumes. This effort is closest to sociological studies that focus on the configuration, representation, and categorisation of consumer faces (Cochoy 2002). An important difference should be highlighted, however, our paper is not positioned as something external to the discipline, that is, as an analysis whose object of study is marketing *per se a la* (Cochoy 1999), but instead takes a reflexive internal stance towards marketing as a disciplinary field, as per precepts developed by the critical school (Saren et al. 2007). All in all, the present paper does not try to prove a particular hypothesis, but instead proposes one interpretation for a batch of available information, thereby opening new perspectives for the field of marketing.

The paper's specific contributions are to show: (1) how the main faces of the new consumer have been presented and popularised over the past 30 years, a period characterised by an explosion in the number of studies in this area; (2) to what extent these faces are both different and complementary, and how they interlink to formalise the attributes of a consumer in evolution; (3) to what extent the successive propagation of these faces can be analysed as a "governmentality" of consumers, as well as the implications thereof; and (4) what consequences there are for markets of the marketing efforts made to bring these consumer faces to life.

### Marketing and new consumer faces

Gabriel and Lang (1995) have shown in their famous typological exercise how different traditions have constructed different representations of the consumer. They contended that none of the representations satisfactorily comes to terms with the fragmentation, volatility, and confusion of contemporary consumption, which is the reason why they introduced the notion of "unmanageable consumer." In a recent paper (Gabriel and Lang 2008), the authors re-emphasise this notion:

The consumer, then, is unmanageable, both as a concept, since no-one can pin it down, to one specific conceptualization at the expenses of all others, and as an entity, since attempts to control and manage the consumer result in a mutation from a stable consumer to an unstable one. (Gabriel and Lang 2008, 333)

Nevertheless, the notion of "unmanageable consumer" seems alien to a large number of marketers who have tried in their work during the last three decades to provide one, specific, "new" and totalising conceptualisation of the consumer in order to control and manage her/him (Brown 1995). Indeed, discourses relating to a new kind of marketing - one apt to revitalise our discipline - have proliferated since marketing suffered its famous mid-life crisis, which is generally considered to have occurred around the mid-1980s (Brown 1995). Our focus is on the way new marketing discourses generate new consumer faces and how their attempts result in more control or more instability of the consumer.

Our analysis of the production of new marketing approaches and the many so-called consumer mutations that have accompanied them begins at marketing's mid-life crisis. According to certain calculations (Badot and Cova 2008), more than 70 new marketing approaches have been proposed by contributors from academia, industry consultants,

and practitioners. A suitable tool for structuring this cornucopia is publication-related indicators. We have chosen to use the number of times that a particular text or article dealing with a marketing approach pertaining to Badot and Cova's list has been cited on Google Scholar - a tool whose usefulness resides in the fact that it highlights not only articles published in academic reviews but also books, unlike other indicators such as EBSCO. The use of Google Scholar is more appropriate because the new marketing approaches are being produced within the framework of a heterogeneous literature where managerial writing is mixed with scientific articles. The need to include all formats of writing on this subject is imperative to forming an idea of the various marketing discourses in order to then address each in turn.

A first round of analysis results in a very simple hierarchy. Relationship marketing comes out as being the most-cited framework, although many would argue that it is not a new panacea but a paradigmatic change (Gronroos 1994). This approach shows 6687 quotes for Morgan and Hunt's (1994) article 1415 for Gronroos's (1994) article and 1332 for Berry's (1995) article. This statistic is complemented by a set of books on relationship marketing: Gronroos's (2000) book presents 963 quotes, Gummesson's (1999/2002/2008) book 490 quotes, and Christopher, Payne, and Ballantyne's (1991) book 439 quotes. Because of the proximity in their discourses about the consumer, one-to-one marketing and interactive marketing can be coupled with relationship marketing. Peppers, Rogers, and Dorfs (1999) article on one-to-one marketing accounts for 418 quotes while their book (1993) presents 607 quotes; Blattberg and Deighton's (1991) article on interactive marketing presents 447 quotes.

By far the second in this hierarchy is experiential marketing, with Schmitt's (1999) book presenting 729 quotes. Pine II and Gilmore's work on the "experience economy" need to be connected with experiential marketing: Pine II and Gilmore's (1999) book accounts for 926 quotes, while their (1998) article presents 494 quotes.

Other approaches do not seem to have made a significant breakthrough. Surprisingly, all the articles or books regarding such trendy approaches as viral marketing, tribal marketing, or guerrilla marketing do not go above 300 quotes.

Next we integrated other "new marketing approaches" into our marketing frameworks not quoted in Badot and Cova's list, which resulted in the integration of the service-dominant logic of marketing; Vargo and Lusch's (2004) article was quoted 1632 times. We decided to couple the service-dominant logic with Prahalad and Ramaswamy's works on co-creation of value with consumers: one of their papers (2000a) accounts for 784 quotes while another (2004a) accounts for 642. We gathered the two under the emerging heading of "collaborative marketing" as proposed by Beckett and Nayak (2008).

We have not integrated Brown's (1993) article on postmodern marketing in this list although it is quoted 647 times because rather than proposing a new framework, it criticises heavily the production of Panaceas. The same can be said for many other works which deal with a new phenomenon, but do not present a managerial approach, such as Muniz and O'Guinn's (2001) paper on brand communities (quoted 942 times).

All in all, we are able to delineate three main marketing approaches that have made a significant contribution to marketing thinking: relationship marketing, experiential marketing, and the so-called collaborative marketing. We are aware that this kind of identification involves an effort of construction, if not a reduction of reality. However, this selection of the three approaches constitutes a mere modelling of reality, one destined to sharpen the image of the consumer faces generated by each. We are also aware that these three approaches are not independent and we will

subsequently show how they mesh with one another. Globally, our objective is not to be exhaustive, but to construct a summary capable of highlighting the key ideas of each approach, as well as the face of a new consumer associated with it.

### ***Relationship marketing and the emergence of individualistic consumers***

The development of relationship marketing and its derivatives has been analysed as an application of the metaphor of interpersonal relationships to all exchanges between customers and companies (O'Malley, Patterson, and Kelly-Holmes 2008). In the mid-1970s (Guillet de Monthoux 1975), industrial marketing stressed the importance of the relationship between suppliers and customers for purchasing decisions. Work done by the Industrial Marketing and Purchasing Group paved the way to the notion of an original marketing approach (Ford 1990; Hakansson 1982) viewed as the construction, development, and maintenance of long-lasting relationships between suppliers and customers. From the early 1980s onwards (Berry 1983), the field of services marketing also began to integrate the management of personal relations between service providers and customers, deeming this the cornerstone of its approach. From the late 1980s onwards, Gummesson (1987) and the Northern School of Service Management broadcast the advent of a new marketing based on the development of long-term relationships with customers. Until the late 1980s, however, the idea of relationship marketing had remained confined to two specific areas of marketing: business and services. The 1990s saw it overcome this marginal status to become a principle applicable to all areas of marketing, notably mass consumption. Relationship marketing (Berry 1995; Christopher, Payne, and Ballantyne 1991; Gronroos 1994, 2000; McKenna 1991a, 1991b; Morgan and Hunt 1994) and proximate approaches like one-to-one marketing (Peppers and Rogers 1993; Peppers, Rogers and Dorf 1999), interactive marketing (Blattberg and Deighton 1991), individualised marketing (Rapp and Collins 1990), or database marketing (Petrison, Blattberg, and Wang 1993) all rely on the idea of market fragmentation (McKenna 1988), resulting from the individualism of the consumers typifying the era, called "the age of the individual" on the cover of Rapp and Collins's book (1990).

To substantiate their discourses, proponents of these new approaches integrate the ideas of futurologists and consumption futurists like Popcorn (1992) and Naisbitt and Aburdene (1990). To some extent, the American futurist Popcorn, called the "Nostradamus of marketing" by *Fortune* magazine, is the most prolific member of this cohort. In particular, she gained a great deal of fame for inventing a term that has since been widely used by marketing managers - "cocooning." Such futurists recycle sociological texts announcing the rise of individualism in Western postmodern societies (Lyotard 1979) as well as the growing role of consumption in postmodern societies (Baudrillard 1970). Indeed, according to a certain stream of research (Elias 1991; Jameson 1991; Lipovetsky 1983, 1987), postmodernity constitutes the culmination of individuals' quest for liberation. The right to freedom, which in theory is unlimited, but until that point in modernity had been socially circumscribed within economic, political, and knowledge-related spheres, would soon be viewed as something that was inalienable. This gives strength to the concept of a postmodern condition where individuals, freed from collective ideals and from the rigours of education, family, and sexuality (Jameson 1991), undertake a personalisation process, which then becomes a way of managing their behaviour with the fewest possible constraints and widest possible choices.

Consumer behaviour researchers also develop similar analyses (Firat 1991; Van Raaij 1993). They see new consumers as highly inconsistent and volatile, desiring one thing in the morning and the exact opposite in the afternoon. This fickleness makes it impossible to characterise their behaviour for a sustained period of time. Eclecticism (Van Raaij 1993) is the new marching order. As Rapp and Collins (1990, 11) write, this leads to "the disappearance of Mr. or Mrs. Average Consumer."

The new marketing approaches that arise in the wake of this ferment (Christopher, Payne, and Ballantyne 1991; McKenna 1991a; Peppers and Rogers 1993; Peppers, Rogers and Dorf 1999) suggest using technological progress to track consumers individually, thereby creating the capability of reacting as quickly as possible to peoples' new aspirations by establishing continuous contact. These approaches characterise new consumers as individuals capable of dialoguing with a company (Peppers and Rogers 1993; Peppers, Rogers and Dorf 1999) and getting involved in communications and knowledge-sharing efforts (McKenna 1991b). This paves the way to "mass customisation" techniques (Pine II 1992) that assume, on one hand, that consumers and companies can dialogue and therefore specify *a priori* certain details of the goods or services on offer; and on the other hand, that consumers can themselves adapt some of these details *ex post facto*.

### ***Experiential marketing and the advent of hedonistic consumers***

The rise of experiential approaches in marketing concretised Holbrook and Hirschman's seminal consumer behaviour studies (1982) on experiential consumption and how they might translate into a managerial approach. Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) view an experiential outlook as a way of counter-balancing the functional and utilitarian view of consumption within the field of consumer behaviour research by a so-called experiential view that stresses hedonistic values and individual subjectivity. This vision enables other authors to draw the face of a new, experiential type of consumer (Pine II and Gilmore 1998, 1999; Schmitt 1999). In turn, this consumer-typing calls for the construction of a new kind of marketing approach. Experiential marketing (or the marketing of experiences) represents, according to its advocates, an innovation that is at least as important as relationship marketing. Here, it is the management of a consumption experience that becomes the marketing means for promoting a brand, with the consumer being considered not only as rational but also emotional. "Today, consumers take functional benefits features and benefits, product quality, and a positive brand image as a given. What they want is products, communications, and marketing campaigns that dazzle their senses, touch their hearts and stimulate their minds" (Schmitt 1999, 22). In other words, experiential approaches account for the fact that what consumers are supposed to seek through (and in) their consumption is pleasure.

Towards this end, and much like their relationship marketing cousins, the proponents of experiential marketing (Pine II and Gilmore 1999; Schmitt 1999) rely on the output of certain futurists and trend analysts. This includes works by Wolf (1999) or Jensen (1999) who announce that consumption in today's society has become a question of entertainment and pleasure. Experiential marketing's supporters also rely on work by marketing researchers who are increasingly transforming themselves into consumption analysts (Elliott 1997; Firat, Dholakia, and Venkatesh 1995). Researchers in this school rely on developments in the field of postmodern studies to substantiate this new face of the hedonistic consumer. For some scholars (Gergen 1991), postmodern individuals can be constructed by intensifying a particular moment through the

aestheticisation of daily life (Featherstone 1991). This is notably characterised by a search for fleeting passions, with everything being experienced cyclically and all the more intensely due to the ephemeral nature of the cycle in question (Maffesoli 1990). Note that this hedonistic orientation would also mobilise all the simulation capabilities offered by new technologies - something Baudrillard (1992) would call hyper-reality.

A text by Hetzel (2002,25) delineates clearly the way in which experiential marketing thinks consumers have changed: "Consumers no longer have a complex about seeking pleasure through consumption. Quite the contrary, they demand, affirm and display this openly." In addition to the eclecticism highlighted by the advocates of relationship marketing, Hetzel (2002) adds hedonism as a key element for understanding contemporary consumption. In this view, new consumers are supposed to be trying to re-enchant their lives via consumption (Firat and Venkatesh 1995). The idea of re-enchantment is introduced in marketing to affirm consumers' demand for sensuality (Schmitt 1999). New consumers are said to prefer being immersed in consumption experiences instead of purchasing single products or services (Pine II and Gilmore 1999). For some analysts, postmodern consumption could be summarised as "an immersion into experiential moments of enchanted, multifaceted and spectacular encounters" (Firat and Dholakia 1998, 101). Thus, the focal point of experiential marketing is consumers' immersion in experiences. Towards that end, however, it is also necessary that consumers invest themselves in an experience, and that they commit to (and interact with) a company. It is not enough for companies to create stimulating contexts and environments ("theatres of experience" in the sense attributed to this term by Pine II and Gilmore 1999). Consumers also have to play an active role in the theatre, that is, assume a positive role as an actor. Returning to ideas formulated by Deighton (1992) regarding consumer performance, Pine II and Gilmore (1998, 101) state that consumers "play key roles in creating the performance or event that yields the experience." By so doing, they help to customise experiences since "no two people can have the same experience, because each experience derives from the interaction between the staged event like a theatrical play and the individual's state of mind" (Pine II and Gilmore 1998, 98). In this way, experiential approaches position consumers as individuals capable of playing a defined role. Consumers do this by mobilising their bodies insofar as "an experience will only materialise when the body has been mobilized" (Hetzel 2002, 50). This mobilisation can involve a playful mode where "consumption becomes a game" (Hetzel 2002, 23). In this view, consumers are both actors and players - they play with the brands and products that companies offer them, and in the locations that companies have made available to them.

### ***Collaborative marketing and the rise of creative consumers***

The roots of collaborative marketing approaches reside in innovation and design studies that view users as a company's potential collaborators - in line with the concept of lead users (Von Hippel 1986). They also derive from service marketing studies (Eiglier and Langeard 1987), which view the co-production of services as the basis for servuction systems (i.e. production of services). The strong emphasis on consumer collaboration corresponds to a re-integration of these seminal studies into a new marketing approach that has become known as the service-dominant logic (Lusch and Vargo 2006; Vargo and Lusch 2004). The aim here is no longer to "market to" consumers but to "market with" them. The co-creation of value (Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004a) by the

company and its consumers) becomes the key process in the new marketing logic. By operating in this manner, marketing specialists start considering consumers as "market partners" (Peppers and Rogers 2005; Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2000). Note, however, that the service-dominant logic never refers explicitly to the notion of a new consumer to argue its originality. On the other hand, similar collaborative marketing approaches (Peppers and Rogers 2005; Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004a) do refer explicitly to new creative consumers and their new technological context.

To substantiate their ideas, the proponents of collaborative marketing (Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004a) draw inspiration from older visionary studies like those undertaken by the American sociologist and futurologist Alvin Toffler who had announced the advent of prosumers (producer-consumers) back in 1980. In addition, and even more importantly, this school of thought (Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004b) relies on recent studies like those undertaken by Patricia Seybold or Seth Godin, analyses combining sociological developments with technological evolution, and announcing the imminence of a revolution in which consumers would be empowered (Seybold 2001). Extending this idea even further, Wipperfurth (2005) announced that the hijacking of brands was about to become a favourite activity of new consumers. More recently, Li and Bernoff (2008, 13) have declared there is a "groundswell" among customers, that is, "a social trend in which people use technologies to get the things they need from each other, rather than from traditional institutions like corporations." This rising power of consumers, associated with the confusion between the roles of producers and consumers is also predicted by other marketing researchers. For example, Firat and Dholakia (2006, 151) stress that "marketing becomes everyone's activity, and the post-consumer is a marketer." Other researchers who are part of the consumer culture theory trend - such as Arnould and Thompson (2005) - agree with this vision and have developed the concept of "consumer agency," one that becomes particularly operative when consumers generate ideas that companies could use (Berthon et al. 2007; Mufiz and Schau 2007). This elimination of the border between consumers and producers is a key proposition of the proponents of collaborative marketing. It is based on one of the main components of postmodernity, to wit, anti-totalitarianism according to Lyotard (1979). In the postmodern vision, individuals reject dominant and universal values and everything that is normal or average. They all want to live in their own way and by so doing become the co-producers of their daily lives, de Certeau (1980), for instance, had already noted that users are always part designers and part producers, silently subtracting themselves from the utilisation structure of products and services as defined by the producer, and re-inventing their daily routines thanks to the artfulness, subtle ruses, and resistance tactics that they use to hijack objects and codes and to re-appropriate space and usage as they see fit (de Certeau 1980). According to this school of thought, postmodern individuals resist, alone or in a group (Fiske 1989), the meanings that institutions and companies try to force upon them, instrumentalising this as a concrete means of regaining power and autonomy (Keat, Whiteley, and Abercrombie 1994).

The Internet enables a good understanding of this representation of the new consumer:

Technological developments are progressively giving birth to new consumers, ones who are more intelligent because they are better informed and more demanding, who are freer and show greater strength in their dealings with distributors and brands. Consumers are becoming actors in their own consumption. This is a rapid mutation, the new world in which new generations operate from day one. (<http://lenewconsumer.blogspot.com/2006/03/rappel-du-contexte.html>)

According to collaborative marketing proponents and their allies, new consumers want to collaborate in defining the products, services, and experiences they are offered. They are co-creators of value (Lusch and Vargo 2006; Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004a) and it is in this sense that they can be globally qualified as "consum'-actors" or post-consumers (Firat and Dholakia 2006). The Internet is a platform where they can learn to build a different relationship with companies, one based on equality since their exchanges with other consumers allow them to develop knowledge about a given product or brand without having to wait for the company to take the initiative of setting up collaborative exchanges (Li and Bernoff 2008; Seybold 2001). Thus, a generic idea across collaborative marketing discourses is that, thanks to the Internet, consumers have become more powerful and creative as subjects (Muniz and Schau 2007) and that this new way of being has a knock-on effect on their consumption and on the way they use the market, with the act of consumption itself having turned into an area where they can exercise creativity and power (Berthon et al. 2007).

All in all, collaborative marketing views consumers as fully fledged subjects in their relationships with companies, that is, as subjects possessing their own resources and the capacity to implement them. This discourse reproduces the aforementioned construct of consumers as actors while enriching its meaning. The new depiction states that consumers materialising their consumption experience integrate the resources offered by companies and combine them with their own (Vargo and Lusch 2008) to co-create and co-extract value from a consumption experience (Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004a). Thus, the new consumer is said to assume the shape of an integrator of resources (Vargo and Lusch 2008). By becoming a partner of companies in this way, "consumers have to also learn that co-creation is a two-way street. The risks cannot be one sided. They must take some responsibility for the risks they consciously accept" (Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004b, 14). Collaborative marketing sees new consumers as an equal of companies, with both sides being resource integrators capable of agency in their consumption and in the marketplace. It is interesting to note here that this approach (Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004a) senses a reinforced need for dialogue (the "D" in Prahalad and Ramaswamy's Dialogue/Access/Risk/Transparency DART model 2004b) between the two categories of actors. This constitutes an unprecedented degree of consumer-marketer dialogue since it is consumers who choose with whom they dialogue, and not the other way around.

### **The marketing construction of consumer competence**

Several insights can be gained from this overview of the faces of the new consumer highlighted in the three main marketing approaches that have emerged since marketing's mid-life crisis. First and foremost, it has helped to show the interplay of authors - academics, industry consultants, journalists, and practitioners - specialising in the faces of the new consumers. It has also highlighted that the attributes of these faces which are supposed to be "new" mainly belong to a stock of concepts that has remained relatively unchanged ever since the 1980s/early 1990s and the great wave of postmodern writing. Finally, it has highlighted a process where individuals are being formatted and asked to become increasingly competent consumers: a process that can be termed "governmentality."

*All of these faces originate in the postmodern wake of the 1980s/early 1990s*

The idea that each face of the new consumer results from a process of construction is neither surprising nor disturbing. One would do well to recall that the very notion of consumers can be considered the result of a construction, or of a succession of constructions, since the distant era when such actors were called "households" (Ohl 2002). According to Marion (2004, 53), "Every marketer, like every critic of marketing, tries to construct a representation of consumers and attribute a role to them."

Each new consumer face is constructed by marketing discourses, reflecting a whole series of postmodern studies, most of which were published in the 1980s/early 1990s. This gap between the time when postmodern studies were published and when marketers produced their work illustrates this phenomenon of the construction of new consumer faces. Each of these faces supports one of the main contemporary marketing discourses, whereas the different postmodern studies evoked by their authors do not in fact date from the same periods. Marketing theorists sifted through the body of literature, selecting those ideas and items that were most useful in supporting their ideas regarding the reality of a new consumer at that particular moment in time. Then, proponents of new marketing approaches present them (Marion 2001) as a "paradigm reversal" capable of matching the face that they had chosen for the new consumer. This is a cyclical movement and one that has been repeated for 30 years now:

Market researchers and the agents of production endlessly pursue the Holy Grail of control, seeking to anticipate consumer trends on behalf of capital, which stands to gain massively from accurate predictions, coupled in attempts to shape or tempt consumption to its benefit. The task of those who seek to anticipate trends is inevitably partisan, their goal to mould the future to their ends. (Gabriel and Lang 2008, 334)

Very often over the past three decades, the face of the new consumer has been associated with the descriptor "postmodern," seeing how new and postmodern consumers have been portrayed as very similar if not synonymous constructs in a large number of studies (Simmons 2008). At the same time, using the descriptor "postmodern" does not facilitate the definition of this new consumer, given the many (often conflicting) definitions of the term "postmodern." As mentioned before, the texts dominated by postmodern theories written during the 1980s/early 1990s already featured new consumer faces. Confirmation of this state of affairs can be witnessed in the way in which a relationship is postulated between new consumer faces and the faces presented in the impressive study that Gabriel and Lang published in 1995, listing 10 major consumer faces. The individualistic consumer presented by relationship marketing corresponds to the "consumer as identity-seeker" in their Chapter 4, with the new consumer from experiential marketing corresponding to the "hedonist consumer" detailed in their Chapter 6 and the creative consumer of collaborative marketing more or less corresponding to the "the consumer as rebel" detailed in their Chapter 8.

At different moments in time and depending on the actors involved, any one given characteristic of a consumer has generally received special attention, whether individualisation, hedonism, or creativity. The analytical matrix has always remained the same, however - postmodernity in social sciences. This body of writing forms the conceptual basis of all the new consumer faces that have appeared over the past 30 years. All the authors used a certain translation effect to accentuate one facet of postmodern consumption at a given moment in time, arguably turning it into a function as much of external (social, economic, technological) contingencies as of personal strategies or beliefs.

Table 1. Marketing approaches, faces and competencies of the new consumer.

Marketing approaches	Faces of the new consumer	Competencies of the new consumer
Relational marketing	Individualistic consumer	Dialogue
Experiential marketing	Hedonistic consumer	Dialogue + role play
Collaborative marketing	Creative consumer	Dialogue + role play + resource integration

### ***Faces embedded in one another to structure the consumer's competency***

The faces on offer may appear at first glance to have been lacking in any obvious connections. Marketing discourses have tended to accentuate a few specific traits of the consumer face that each approach defends in its attempt to differentiate itself. What our analysis of the new consumer's supposed practices has actually revealed, however, is continuity and even a kind of sedimentation.

The three consumer faces were not born as spontaneous new generations, but rather assisted in a progressive construction of consumer competency by marketing discourses, as predicted by Hetzel (2002). One could even say that they trace a genealogy of consumer competency (Table 1), ranging from a superficial level of dialogue to a deeper level of integration and including an intermediary level of playfulness and performance, in the sense attributed to this term by Deighton (1992). The question remains of whether all of these dispersed and multiple discourses voluntarily construct this consumer competency or if they imply it involuntarily. Some analysts (Zwick, Bonsu, and Darmody 2008, 164) speak of a "large marketing project currently underway" that they see as constructing such consumer competency. Others (Kniazeva and Belk 2007, 51) view marketers as storytellers who "collectively create a grand postmodern marketplace myth - that of an empowered and ennobled consumer." We prefer instead the idea of "chaotic production" - in Dubet's (2009) sense of the term - by intellectuals and scientists occupying a dominant position, enabling them to prescribe the faces of individual subjectivity. The one proviso is that "it is not necessary to want to dominate to be dominant" (Dubet 2009, 244).

### ***The governmentality of new consumers***

The three faces of the new consumer generated by our analysis all derive from a constantly renewed construction driven by postmodern writings and concepts dating from the 1980s/early 1990s. This construction rejoices in the alleged existence of rising consumer competency. Along with Beckett and Nayak (2008), we enquire about the actual tenor of this trend. Some authors, like Amould (2007, 192), are already convinced that passive consumers have in fact shifted to an active and even creative state:

Whether one chooses "protagonist," "consum'actor," "prosumer" or some other neologism of choice, the point of these awkward verbal gestures is that the co-creative producer of genuine, political, less commercial experiences is far removed from the passive mass market consumer of the post-war consumerist boom.

These authors laud consumers' growing ability to mobilise their competencies and play with brands and products in a personalised and unpredictable manner, thereby

producing their own daily consumer lives. Other more critical authors see in this supposedly more competent consumer a depiction of individuals as beings who only exist by and through consumption and whose practices are shaped and disciplined by marketing discourses. For example, commenting upon new consumers of financial services, Hodgson (2002, 323) states that "individuals must embrace their identity as consumer, learn to play their part in the game of production and consumption, and take responsibility for the accomplishment of this role." This school of critical authors continues to harbour some doubts about the occasions and opportunities that consumers are offered to develop and exercise their competencies - a trend that has given them greater control - mainly relating and applying to consumer practices. The idea here is that individuals are being given an impetus to define themselves more and more within a consumer framework. This raises a fundamental question about what lies behind the constructed face of the new and increasingly competent consumer identified in our analysis of new marketing discourses.

Co-opting consumers' competencies - as formulated by Prahalad and Ramaswamy - requires the strategic institutionalisation of control over consumers in markets. Marketing as the exertion of political power to produce particular forms of creativity and practice, clearly does not mean domination because marketers expect the consumer to act, innovate, tinker, and run free. Thus, the marketing challenge posed by the new marketing approaches rests with developing consumers who will become "agents" of their consumption.

### ***Governmentalised consumers***

The concept of governmentality (Foucault 1978) has recently been mobilised in different marketing approaches (Beckett and Nayak 2008; Hodgson 2002; Shankar, Cherrier, and Canniford 2006; Skalen, Felleson, and Fougère 2006; Zwick, Bonsu, and Darmody 2008) to interpret the role that marketing plays in the evolution of consumers who have increasingly become "agents" of their consumption. This is because the notion of governmentality "is useful in discussing how the authoritative realm learns about and forges self-disciplined consumers" (Shankar, Cherrier, and Canniford 2006, 1018). Governmentality studies the capacity of autonomous individuals to control themselves and analyses the connection between this capacity and different forms of political power and economic exploitation. According to Foucault (1978), governmentality corresponds to a formation of the kind of political rationality that characterises the transition from sovereignty to government. Governmentality is viewed here as a concept forged to designate "the conduct of the conducts" of people.

Based on these elements, we can envisage marketing discourses as participating in a governmentality of consumers through the new faces that they produce and promote. These discourses create a face of consumers who are autonomous co-producers, thanks to their own competencies, and who are therefore co-producing a system of consumption by which they are subsequently moulded. Under this regime of governmentality, consumers are urged "to engage in proactive destabilization and permanent requalification of themselves" (Zwick and Cayla 2011, 8). As demonstrated by Shankar, Cherrier, and Canniford (2006), this type of discourse is simultaneously liberating and disciplining. Researchers who argue for marketing's governmentality of consumers use it to criticise the liberating discourses of consumer power along with the discourses of consumer agency (Arnould 2007) and the service-dominant logic (Lusch and Vargo 2006) that accompany them - the argument being that they are

only superficially liberating. Our analysis of the construction of new consumer faces by marketing discourses agrees with Zwick, Bonsu, and Darmody's analysis (2008) of governmentality. In this view, the spectre of competent, empowered, and freed consumers haunts today's marketers:

All the marketing powers, business academics, advertising agents, marketing executives, and journalists have entered into a holy alliance to (no, not exorcise!) understand, celebrate, and ultimately harness this spectre. The image in the epigraphs, of a brave new world where nonplussed marketers have lost control over the management of their "core assets" such as brands and customers, has diffused quickly through the halls of business schools and corporations. (Zwick, Bonsu, and Darmody 2008, 164)

Pursuing this analysis, Zwick, Bonsu, and Darmody (2008) show that this spectre, constructed by the aforementioned actors, does not at all liberate consumers, but instead establishes a form of governmentality, the purpose being to summon a specific form of life where consumers participate voluntarily in the co-creation of value. Indeed, to be able to act as creative consumers, individuals must have been "shaped, guided and moulded" (Hodgson 2002, 326) into this persona of the new consumer. Thus, the three faces of the new consumer along with ancillary competencies all show how marketing discourses are used to shape governmentalised consumers (Skalen, Felleson, and Fougère 2006). Although we do not subscribe to any conspiracy theory of a large governmentality marketing plot, there is little doubt that the discourses that we have identified combine with other actions within a governmentality framework. In short, actions undertaken by companies and advertising agents interact with these discourses.

What emerges from collaborative marketing is not a hyper-confident, empowered consumer but one susceptible to the suggestions and incitements of producers. (Beckett and Nayak 2008, 313)

### *A critical consideration of consumers' governmentality*

In governmentality, individuals become "entrepreneurs of themselves" (Foucault 1978). As such, they find themselves connected to society through the choices they make, the risks they take, and the ensuing responsibility for themselves and for others - risks that they must assume. According to this reasoning, the "consum'actor" or prosumer described in the introduction to the present text is no more than the most recent stage of a governmentalisation process where consumers are supposed to become capable of dialogue, role-playing, and resource integration. Transforming individuals into competent consumers means that they should become attached to the project of consumer empowerment (Shankar, Cherrier, and Canniford 2006) and increasingly competent in their consumption practices. The question is whether consumers are aware of the real issues at stake in this governmentality process, and of what they might lose. An ancillary question is whether the competencies being acquired and developed to help them assume the role of new consumers are detrimental to non-consumption-related competencies like walking outdoors, picking flowers or mushrooms, pottering around the house, chatting with friends, and more than anything else, doing nothing at all. Manzini (2001) highlights the loss of contemplative time as one of the main possible outcomes of this trend towards the development of contemporary consumers' competencies. So, do new consumer discourses impoverish us in terms of non-consumption-related competencies? The current crisis, far from being a banal old tune, actually reminds us that in the absence of financial resources, consumer competencies are not very useful in daily life.

From a theoretical perspective, consumers' governmentality (partly created through marketing discourses) invites us to reflect upon the ethical aspects of our analysis. Are marketing actors always aware of what they are doing when they promote a new consumer face? Do they realise how this may contribute to neo-liberal discourse and its managerial excesses (Hackley 2009; Witkowski 2005)? If as a community, we were to take a greater interest in consumers' well-being, we might become less inclined to create, convey, or promote some of the new consumer discourses in such an uncritical manner. This might help us to detect what exactly is seen as liberating about recently formulated theoretical frameworks like consumer culture theory (Amould and Thompson 2005) or service-dominant logic (Lusch and Vargo 2006) - but also what is disciplining. Such an attempt has been made by Bradshaw and Holbrook's paper (2008), which wonders why one side of marketing scholarship is so interested in identifying points of agency while another is concerned with transforming social sites into places of social control.

### **Consequences for markets**

What consequences do the marketing efforts made to realise these consumer faces have for markets? If consumers now have been accorded a role in shaping markets, how do these consumer faces influence them? (How) can one resist the development of these new consumer faces? We answer these questions through an examination of the case of brand communities. Brand communities have become an increasingly important phenomenon in contemporary marketing (O'Guinn and Muniz 2005). Brand communities are said to provide a favourable context (Hatch and Schultz 2010) for the emergence of consumer-producers who can become true partners of the company. This erasure of boundaries between consumers and producers is clearly very much in fashion, as witnessed notably by the co-creation concept that the service-dominant logic has introduced (Vargo and Lusch 2004) and which contributes to building the face of a creative consumer. Indeed, with brand communities the concept of value co-creation has been pushed to the limit insofar as brands are being transformed into virtual platforms (Arvidsson 2006) used to stage a collectivity of employees and consumers united by the same passion.

However, this ideal marketing scenario, in which consumers co-create value for the brand, seems to be threatened by a series of phenomena which have been equally favoured, or even driven by, the development of consumers' competencies (Fuller, Ludicke, and Jawecki 2007). Mobilising their newly developed competencies of creativity and co-production, consumers can create other form of communities around brands in ways not expected or indeed intended by marketers: counter brands and alter brands.

### **Counter brands**

The brand co-creation process is often a way of taking advantage of consumers (Zwick, Bonsu, and Darmody 2008). Productive consumers increase the value of brands, and companies capture this value on the market, but almost none of this is returned to consumers. If cult brands belong to their consumers as advocated by O'Guinn and Muniz (2005), their profits do not (Foster 2008). This is indeed the main source of frustration for members of the community: they feel exploited and sometimes even doubly exploited (Cova and Dall'Aglio 2009). First, consumers are not generally paid for the know-how, enthusiasm, and social cooperation that they contribute to. Second,

customers typically pay what the marketing profession calls a price premium for the fruits of their labour, as the value provided by co-created offers is said to be higher than that which can be achieved through company creation. As a consequence of this double exploitation, some consumers gather into counter brand communities to rebel against strong brands and companies in order to create a competitor. They do that not only by criticising companies or boycotting their products, but also by becoming competitors of the brand that they once supported. Counter brands exist mainly as a reaction from members of the brand community that are frustrated with the company's behaviour. Examples are the French community of ex-Warhammer fans who created the game confrontation (Cova and White 2010) and the German community of ex-Afri-Cola devotees who created the beverage PremiumCola (Ladstatter 2011). A notorious case of the counter brand creation is that of the football club FC United of Manchester in the UK: the club was set up by a community of 2000 ex-Manchester United fans in protest of Malcolm Glazer's takeover of Manchester United (<http://www.fc-utd.co.uk/history.php>). The same happened with the fans' protest against the owners of the Liverpool FC which resulted in the creation of a new, separate football club, AFC Liverpool (<http://afcliverpool.org.uk/go/>), set up by 1000 Liverpool football club fans.

In these cases, the community creates value by spinning off products or concepts that are branded and this value is captured directly by this secessionist community. The company itself gains no value from such creations; on the contrary, these creations diminish value creation because they create direct competition that may be either legal or illegal.

### ***Alter brands***

Alter brands provide "an open perspective to branding wherein prosumers create the physical offering, author the text, generate the experience and evolve the brand meaning" (Pitt et al. 2006, 119). Inside these community brand systems, the product does not exist until it is designed and developed by the project team. "In most cases, membership of the project team is voluntary and based on desire for the product under development" (Cromie and Ewing 2009, 219). Thus, ultimately the producer is also a consumer of the product. "But the process is not value co-creation in the sense of producer and consumer as separate entities ... Producer and consumer are, in fact, one and the same group" (Cromie and Ewing 2009, 219). An example of an alter brand is the international community of Couchsurfers (Cova and White 2010), as well as the one of Bookcrossers (Dalli and Corciolani 2008). Another interesting example is the community of German, Austrian, and Swiss hiking enthusiasts named Outdoorseiten.Net which is registered as a non-profit association in Germany (Fuller and von Hippel 2008): it has generated a strong community-owned brand named ODS.

Contrary to counter brands, the reasons that lead consumers to create alter brands are not related to economic frustration or other forms of dissatisfaction in terms of what the market is offering. It is rather a series of positive motives that guides consumers towards co-creating such brands. Alter brands exist mainly to serve the common collective goals of community members. In this case, the community creates value by generating its own concepts, services, relationships, etc. without interaction with the company, and this value is, therefore, captured directly by the community. Companies gain no value directly, but must face a risk of indirect and often free competition (Fuller and von Hippel 2008).

While the brand community model assumes that there is co-creation of value between communities of consumers and the company, with acquisition of value by

the company, recent phenomena - underpinned by the promotion of a creative consumer and his overdeveloped competencies - show alternative approaches in which the company fails to capture this value. This creates serious issues for brand managers who may have to face a new type of competition on the market. And this new type of competition is shaping the market in a way which is unexpected and unusual for these companies. "There is a greater resistance to the incursions of capitalism (e.g. efforts to gain greater control and greater profits) by at least some contemporary prosumers than by any of the others" (Ritzer and Jurgenson 2010, 21).

The rebound effect of marketing discourses that dream of managing active, value-adding contemporary consumers is an increased instability of the consumers who subvert, refuse, accept, interpret, surrender, or embrace companies' vision (Gabriel and Lang 2008). The more these discourses try to mould and shape consumers to be collaborative prosumers, the more companies are unable to control these consumer-prosumers in the way - and to the degree - that they have been able to control producer-consumers and traditional consumers (Ritzer and Jurgenson 2010).

However, we should not underestimate capital's desire to maintain control over production and consumption, as well as over producers and consumers, by adapting its techniques of surveillance, legal definitions of private property and modes of value creation and appropriation. Indeed, according to Sassatelli (2007), the very idea of co-creation overly heroicised consumers and the power that they wield in their relationships with companies and is, as such, not an objective portrayal of the asymmetry between consumers and companies.

We should acknowledge that these heroicised consumers or digital prosumers are first and foremost Western consumers. Marketing discourses of the last three decades that have tended to participate to the rise of prosumer capitalism (Ritzer and Jurgenson 2010) have referred to the affluent countries of the developed world. The many cases of counter brand and alter brand communities presented above show examples of Western prosumers at play. Indeed, the governmentality of consumers through the new faces that marketing discourses produce and promote and its unexpected consequences in the brand community essentially concern Western consumers. Albeit tacitly, this ethnocentric vision is inherent to these discourses: they do not directly concern the base of the pyramid (BOP) and consumers from the less-developed world. Interestingly, it may be especially in these BOP contexts that one finds non-governmentalised consumer competence and creativity - but one that cannot be captured by capital.

## **Conclusion**

Remember that the present text's starting point was the production of consum'actors, creative consumers, or prosumers by recent marketing discourses. This led us to identify the three faces of the new consumer that have emerged from marketing discourses over the past 30 years: individualistic consumers, hedonistic consumers, and creative consumers. It also helped us to reveal the common thread linking these three faces, to wit, the rise in consumer competency. Individualistic consumers' capacity for dialogue has been enhanced by hedonistic consumers' playful and aesthetic practices and creative consumers' resource integration capabilities - all of which allegedly empowers consumers in their relationships with companies. We interpreted consumers' empowerment in these marketing discourses as a process of governmentality in the Foucauldian sense of the term (Foucault 1978). Such discourses shape present consumer generations, getting them to participate (through their competencies) in a

movement where they can assume power over their consumption and thereby become prosumers. The discourses place people in a situation, wherein they increasingly define themselves as consumers and, above all, as competent, creative, and responsible consumers. By so doing, they push people to disengage from definitions that are external to the consumption sphere, creating the risk of lost competencies in other areas of daily life. But we also demonstrated that some consumers, becoming the "face" that is presented of them in marketing discourse, do acquire more power vis-a-vis companies such as in the case of counter brand or alter brand communities.

Globally, by focusing on texts and not on actions, this paper shows that consumers' governmentality is also related to our discipline's intellectual output. Thus, this paper's main contribution is to shift criticism from corporate action to marketing research and to raise questions about what is liberating, but also disciplining about the most recent theories that we use and what kinds of images of markets and market users these theories produce and impose. Admittedly, the structuring of the new consumer faces developed here is also a construction, and others are possible. It is prone to the limitations inherent in this kind of exercise, specifically a degree of subjectivism. Even when substantiated by quantitative data found on Google Scholar, the choice of these three marketing approaches is tied to the authors' personal history and to their own construction over the 30 years in this field. The thesis of governmentality could be subtly altered and even disproved by different movements relating to consumers' conscious compromises or even consumer secession that attests to consumers' critical reflexivity (Ozanne and Murray 1995). Nor does this interpretation exhaust all of the issues raised by the production of new consumer discourses. For example, we might study why such discourses emerge and are promoted by certain actors. What is the impact of technological innovation on the emergence of these discourses? Indeed, following Science and Technology Studies, the role of technologies in making markets work merits investigation (Callon, Millo, and Muniesa 2007) and especially the role of technologically based market devices in supporting marketing discourses: databases have played a crucial role in the development of relationship marketing approaches by providing a unique platform for one-to-one relations; immersive technologies that blur the line between the physical world and the digital world have facilitated consumers' immersion which is a key element in experiential marketing approaches; Internet - and especially Web 2.0 - has become a central device in the development of collaborative marketing approaches by allowing many-to-many interactions. The potential role of technology in this shaping process must be recognised just as we have to recognise the role of Google Scholar in our own research. We might study, too, how important the marketing author's desire is to differentiate themselves in the marketing knowledge and consultancy markets? We could also show how these discourses help to produce novelty intrinsically or artificially by trying to depict something as new even if it is only a product of the differentiation efforts of some actors. We could also conduct more empirically driven investigations to determine whether these discourses - as we have tried to show - shape new consumer faces or if they are simply a way for theory to catch up with reality and upcoming trends, thus reasoning more in terms of co-production of markets and ideas about markets (Kjellberg and Helgesson 2006). The road to presumption is paved with good intentions by marketing actors who do not always realise how they contribute, through the promotion of new consumer faces and related competencies, to neo-liberal discourse and to increasing resistance to it.

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