# Course Outline

**Course Code** : MKT4716
**Course Title** : Consumer Culture Theory
**Semester** : Semester 1, AY 2025/2026
**Faculty** : Assoc Prof Siok Kuan Tambyah
**Department :** Marketing
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## Important Notes for this Course

**Attendance for the first two sessions is mandatory as we will be discussing the theoretical framework, course details and expectations for the entire semester. If you are not able to attend Sessions 1 and 2, please do not register for the course.**

## Overview

Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) is a synthesizing framework that examines the sociocultural, experiential, symbolic and ideological aspects of consumption. The major topics to be covered are aligned with the four research programs of Consumer Culture Theory (CCT), namely Consumer Identity Projects, Marketplace Cultures, The Sociohistorical Patterning of Consumption and Mass-Mediated Marketplace Ideologies and Consumers' Interpretive Strategies. The CCT framework is explained in detail in the following article: **Arnould, Eric J. and Craig J. Thompson (2005), "Consumer Culture Theory (CCT): Twenty Years of Research," Journal of Consumer Research, 31 (March), 868-882.**

## Course Objectives

In this course, we will explore the dynamic relationships among consumer actions, the marketplace and cultural meanings using theories and methods from multiple disciplines. At the end of the course, students will be able to appreciate the different modes of inquiry for studying consumer culture. They will learn how consumer culture theory enables them to understand consumers and markets from multi-disciplinary perspectives. They will also be encouraged to critically analyse the readings and develop their own ideas for exploring consumer culture.

## Assessment

| Assessment Components *(to be confirmed)* | Weightage |
|---|---|
| **Class Participation** | 20% |
| **Discussion Leadership** | 20% |
| **Test** | 30% |
| **Group Project** | 30% |
| **TOTAL** | 100% |

## Readings

As CCT is a broad, multi-disciplinary theoretical framework, there is no assigned "textbook" for the course. Readings are mainly from consumer research journals and can be accessed via Course Readings in Canvas. **Please note that there is a very heavy reading workload for this course. We will be reading about two to three journal articles a week (about 25 single-spaced journal-style pages for each article).**

## Individual Assessments

Please read through and comply with all the requirements and deadlines. Failure to do so will result in a grade penalty. Please plan ahead as there will be no deadline extensions; all completed assessments are to be uploaded into the appropriate folders in Canvas.

Class Participation (**20%**)

This involves showing an understanding of the critical issues raised in the readings, and a willingness to speak up and participate in the discussions. It is the quality of your contribution that matters, not the quantity. You should also pay attention to the ongoing discussion and show how your contribution adds value to our overall understanding of the issues discussed. If you miss class, your class participation score will be adversely affected.

There will be opportunities for class participation on various platforms. Primarily, this will be through **class sessions** and **shared Google documents.** You will also be asked to keep track of your contributions in class through a weekly **Class Participation Survey**, which can be found under the "Quizzes" tab in Canvas. There will be additional room in this survey to provide your views. **If you are absent, you do not need to fill in the Class Participation Survey**. I will review your responses after each session. Please note that I will be assessing your contributions during the discussions, and will be "moderating" these taking into account the performance of your peers. **Deadline for Class Participation Survey: 11.59pm Friday.**

Discussion Leadership (**20%**)

This assignment is done by you and your partner(s). It involves taking the initiative to lead the discussion for the article (except for Reference Articles) in a particular class session. Sign-ups for articles / sessions are on a first-come first-served basis.

This Discussion Leadership assignment involves the following:

(1) Provide an overview of the key points of the article and share your insights on these key points. You may offer supplementary materials to highlight additional learning points.

(2) Craft one discussion question that will help the class to delve deeper into the issues discussed in the article.

(3) **Your slides and discussion question are to be shared before class via the Google Folder,** so that your peers can prepare ahead of time. **Deadline: 24 hours before your scheduled class (i.e., 12pm/noon on Wednesday)**

(4) You have **a quota of up to 20 Powerpoint slides** (including the slides for Introduction, Discussion Question and References) and **20 minutes for the presentation**.

(5) After the presentation, you will be given **20 minutes to lead a discussion.** I will help to facilitate but the leadership should come from you and your partner(s).

Test (**30%**)

This is an open-book test (two or three essay questions) that will cover the course content/materials up to the end of Week 10. You may use hard-copy materials at the test venue, but not soft-copy materials stored on your electronic devices. The focus of the test is on application of CCT concepts. Please note that **this test (about 90-100 minutes long) will be scheduled for Week 11 (Thursday 30 October 2025).**

**Group Assessments**

Teams will be required to conduct an in-depth study using a specific consumption context of their choice. The purpose of this project is to use insights from the course to explore and analyze the meanings and experiences that are important to consumers. Some examples would be consumer identity projects, marketplace cultures or consumption communities based on certain ideologies. As part of this project, you will be encouraged to use some of the methods you have been reading about in the articles such as face-to-face interviews, participant/non-participant observations, nethnography, etc.

**Interviews and Transcripts**

For interviews, the number of interviewees should be two multiplied by the number of project team members (e.g., if you have 5 team members, you should do 10 interviews). The use of a recording device is strongly recommended. Each interview must be transcribed.

All transcripts must have the following identifiers – date/time/location of interview, name of interviewer, pseudonym for interviewee and pertinent demographic information for the interviewee. All the interview transcripts should be uploaded collectively as <u>one dataset</u> into the **"Group Projects – Transcripts and Slides" Folder** in Canvas together with your <u>Interview Guide</u> and a <u>Profile of Interview Respondents</u> with pertinent demographic information. **Deadline: 11.59pm on Saturday 18 October 2025 (end of Week 9)**

Your project grade will be based on a holistic appraisal of the content and quality of your project according to the requirements outlined below:

1. **Application of CCT Concepts and Theories (20%)**

First and foremost, your team will be evaluated by how well you have used the concepts and theories discussed in class to gain insights into your choice of consumption context. The insights you share should be supported with rigorous and relevant data collection and analyses.

2. **Presentation (10%)**

You will be required to make an engaging and interesting "live" presentation (not a presentation video) lasting no more than **20 minutes**. Your presentation should highlight and articulate the key insights. **Every team member must present.** A <u>hard-copy of your presentation materials (2 slides per page)</u> must be made available to me at the time of your presentation.

Regardless of your presentation date, a <u>soft-copy</u> of your presentation slides must be uploaded into the **"Group Projects – Transcripts and Slides" Folder** in Canvas. No formal written report is required. **Deadline: 11.59pm on Wednesday 5 November 2025 (mid-Week 12)**

**Peer Evaluations**

Your contributions to the project will also be evaluated by your team-mates, and the project grade may be adjusted based this evaluation. **You will not receive any marks for the Group Project if I do not receive your Peer Evaluation. Deadline: 11.59pm on Friday 14 November 2025 (end of Week 13)**

**<u>Reading List</u>**

This is the reading list for this semester. All readings can be accessed via Course Readings in Canvas.

**#** -- This Article is designated for <u>Discussion Leadership</u>, and part of <u>required reading</u>. You will lead the discussion with your partner(s).

<u>Reference Article</u> – This article provides some theoretical grounding for the topics in a particular week/session and is part of <u>recommended reading</u>. While this is not an article designated for Discussion Leadership, it is a useful resource for those doing the Discussion Leadership assignment. For the rest of the class, please browse through and take note of key concepts.

## Academic Honesty & Plagiarism

Academic integrity and honesty is essential for the pursuit and acquisition of knowledge. The University and School expect every student to uphold academic integrity & honesty at all times. Academic dishonesty is any misrepresentation with the intent to deceive, or failure to acknowledge the source, or falsification of information, or inaccuracy of statements, or cheating at examinations/tests, or inappropriate use of resources.

Plagiarism is 'the practice of taking someone else's work or ideas and passing them off as one's own' (The New Oxford Dictionary of English). The University and School will not condone plagiarism. Students should adopt this rule - You have the obligation to make clear to the assessor which is your own work, and which is the work of others. Otherwise, your assessor is entitled to assume that everything being presented for assessment is being presented as entirely your own work. This is a minimum standard. In case of any doubts, you should consult your instructor.

## Additional guidance is available at:

- http://www.nus.edu.sg/registrar/administrative-policies-procedures/acceptance-record#NUSCodeofStudentConduct
- http://nus.edu.sg/osa/resources/code-of-student-conduct

## Schedule and Outline

| Week/date | Session |
|-----------|---------|
| 1 | What is Consumer Culture? And What is Consumer Culture Theory (CCT)? |
| 2 | Who are the Consumers? And How Do We Understand Them? |
| 3 | Consumer Identity Projects I: Fans (fandoms, fanaticism, identity ambiguity) **Discussion Leadership assignment** |
| 4 | Consumer Identity Projects II: Productivity versus Deceleration (collectable experiences) **Group Project Topics** |
| 5 | Brand Communities (brand community practices, online communities) |
| 6 | Extraordinary Experiences (liminality, rites of passage, marketplace tensions, bleed) |
| | Recess Week |

| | |
|---|---|
| 7 | Social Class and Cultural Capital (thrift, economic status) |
| 8 | Status Consumption – Luxury Consumers (luxury consumer maturity, cultural collisions, counterfeiting) |
| 9 | Reflexive Consumption – Cultural Appropriation (cultural appreciation versus cultural appropriation)<br>**Group Project Transcripts due 11.59pm Sat 18 Oct 2025** |
| 10 | Conscious Consumption -- Over-accumulation and Decluttering (consumer relationships with things, minimalism) |
| 11 | Test |
| 12 | Group Project Presentations<br>**Group Project Slides due 11.59pm Wed 5 Nov 2025** |
| 13 | Group Project Presentations<br>**Peer Evaluations due 11.59pm Fri 14 Nov 2025** |

**Session 1: What is Consumer Culture? And What is Consumer Culture Theory? (14 August)**

Required Reading for Discussion: Arnould, E. J., & Thompson, C. J. (2005). Consumer Culture Theory (CCT): Twenty Years of Research. The Journal of Consumer Research, 31(4), 868–882. https://doi.org/10.1086/426626

Reference Articles:

MacInnis, D. J., & Folkes, V. S. (2010). The Disciplinary Status of Consumer Behavior: A Sociology of Science Perspective on Key Controversies. The Journal of Consumer Research, 36(6), 899–914. https://doi.org/10.1086/644610

Arnould, E. J., & Thompson, C. J. (2018). Introduction: What Is Consumer Culture Theory? Consumer Culture Theory (pp. 1–17). Sage.

**Session 2: Who Are the Consumers? And How Do We Understand Them? (21 August)**

Required Reading for Discussion: Schouten, J. W., & McAlexander, J. H. (1995). Subcultures of Consumption: An Ethnography of the New Bikers. The Journal of Consumer Research, 22(1), 43–61. https://doi.org/10.1086/209434

Reference Articles:

Arnould, E. J., & Thompson, C. J. (2005). Consumer Culture Theory (CCT): Twenty Years of Research. The Journal of Consumer Research, 31(4), 868–882. https://doi.org/10.1086/426626

Hudson, L. A., & Ozanne, J. L. (1988). Alternative ways of seeking knowledge in consumer research. The Journal of Consumer Research, 14(4), 508–521. https://doi.org/10.1086/209132

Supplementary Articles (for Group Project):

Kozinets, R. V. (2002). The Field behind the Screen: Using Netnography for Marketing Research in Online Communities. Journal of Marketing Research, 39 (1), 61–72. https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkr.39.1.61.18935

Arsel, Z. (2017). Asking Questions with Reflexive Focus: A Tutorial on Designing and Conducting Interviews. The Journal of Consumer Research, 44 (4), 939–948. https://doi.org/10.1093/jcr/ucx096

**Session 3: Consumer Identity Projects I: Fans (28 August)**

# Fuschillo, G. (2020). Fans, fandoms, or fanaticism? Journal of Consumer Culture, 20(3), 347–365. https://doi.org/10.1177/1469540518773822

# Seregina, A., & Schouten, J. W. (2017). Resolving identity ambiguity through transcending fandom. Consumption, Markets and Culture, 20(2), 107–130. https://doi.org/10.1080/10253866.2016.1189417

**Session 4: Consumer Identity Projects II: Productivity versus Deceleration (4 September)**

# Keinan, A., & Kivetz, R. (2011). Productivity Orientation and the Consumption of Collectable Experiences. The Journal of Consumer Research, 37(6), 935–950. https://doi.org/10.1086/657163

# Husemann, K. C., & Eckhardt, G. M. (2019). Consumer Deceleration. The Journal of Consumer Research, 45(6), 1142–1163. https://doi.org/10.1093/jcr/ucy047

**Session 5: Brand Communities (11 September)**

# Schau, H. J., Muñiz, A. M., & Arnould, E. J. (2009). How Brand Community Practices Create Value. Journal of Marketing, 73(5), 30–51. https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.73.5.30

# Kristiansen, A., Lindberg, F., & Tempelhaug, A. (2023). Trouble in virtual heaven: Origin and consequences of social conflict in online consumption communities. Journal of Consumer Culture, 23(3), 575–596. https://doi.org/10.1177/14695405221127347

**Session 6: Extraordinary Experiences (18 September)**

# Tumbat, G., & Belk, R. W. (2011). Marketplace Tensions in Extraordinary Experiences. The Journal of Consumer Research, 38(1), 42–61. https://doi.org/10.1086/658220

# Orazi, D. C., & Laer, T. (2023). There and Back Again: Bleed from Extraordinary Experiences. The Journal of Consumer Research, 49(5), 904–925. https://doi.org/10.1093/jcr/ucac022

## Session 7: Social Class and Cultural Capital (2 October)

# Bargain-Darrigues, G. (2023). Practices of thrift among high cultural capital consumers. When economic status gets in the way of ethics. Journal of Consumer Culture, 23(3), 711–730. https://doi.org/10.1177/14695405221140544

## Session 8: Status Consumption -- Luxury Consumers (9 October)

# Ho, F.-N., & Wong, J. (2023). Disassociation from the common herd: conceptualizing (in)conspicuous consumption as luxury consumer maturity. Consumption, Markets and Culture, 26(2), 139–154. https://doi.org/10.1080/10253866.2022.2066655

# Joy, A., Belk, R. W., Wang, J. J., & Sherry, J. F. (2020). Emotion and consumption: Toward a new understanding of cultural collisions between Hong Kong and PRC luxury consumers. Journal of Consumer Culture, 20(4), 578–597. https://doi.org/10.1177/1469540518764247

Reference Article: Commuri, S. (2009). The Impact of Counterfeiting on Genuine-Item Consumers' Brand Relationships. Journal of Marketing, 73(3), 86–98. https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.73.3.86

## Session 9: Reflexive Consumption -- Cultural Appropriation (16 October)

# Cruz, A. G. B., Seo, Y., & Scaraboto, D. (2024). Between Cultural Appreciation and Cultural Appropriation: Self-Authorizing the Consumption of Cultural Difference. The Journal of Consumer Research, 50(5), 962–984. https://doi.org/10.1093/jcr/ucad022

Reference Article: Lin, J. D., Kim, N. Y. J., Uduehi, E., & Keinan, A. (2024). Culture for Sale: Unpacking Consumer Perceptions of Cultural Appropriation. *The Journal of Consumer Research*, *51*(3), 571–594. https://doi.org/10.1093/jcr/ucad076

## Session 10: Conscious Consumption – Over-accumulation and Decluttering (23 October)

# Lucy, M. (2023). Divestment as investment: "Kondo-ing" selves in the context of over-accumulation. Journal of Consumer Culture, 23(4), 769–788. https://doi.org/10.1177/14695405221140545

# Gollnhofer, Johanna F; Bhatnagar, Kushagra and Manke, Birte (2025). "The Discomfort of Things! Tidying-up and Decluttering in Consumers' Homes," Journal of Consumer Research, 52 (2), August, p. 393-415. https://doi.org/10.1093/jcr/ucae034

Reference Article:
Wilson, A. V., & Bellezza, S. (2022). Consumer Minimalism. The Journal of Consumer Research, 48(5), 796–816. https://doi.org/10.1093/jcr/ucab038

**Session 11: Test (30 October)**

**Session 12: Group Project Presentations (6 November)**

**Session 13: Group Project Presentations (13 November)**