

Marketing in Food, Hospitality, Tourism and Events

A Critical Approach

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6 Habitus, Distinction, Identity and Cultural Capital

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Habitus, Distinction, Identity and Cultural Capital

■ Introduction

This book revolves around two assumptions, the first is that marketing is a cultural activity that is both informed and part of contemporary culture and that secondly that marketing needs to understand the relationship between the individual consumer and the product or experience. This chapter outlines the significance of consumption and how we use our consumption patterns to both reinforce our identity and position within society. This chapter also challenges the dominance of certain marketing practices such as segmentation in targeting consumers. We all think carefully before we purchase something whether it be a holiday or a meal, we go through a complex decision-making process taking into account many different factors, one of the major aspects will be to think about what additional benefits will we get from purchasing the item: 'What will my family, friends or even strangers think?'. As such, we try to identify the additional benefits from purchasing the item, for example if I buy a designer coat I will get the benefit of being kept warm, but also I will get the benefit of people thinking I am affluent and trendy, and as such they may look up to me or give me respect. This process also informs the things we drink, the places we holiday at, the events we attend, the wine we

choose or the restaurants we eat at, it can be argued that we go through this process every time we purchase an item or experience. Consumption identifies to the rest of the world the type of person we are and identifies the groups, class or tribe we belong to. This chapter examines how we reinforce or create our identity through consumption, how and why we join consumption groups and the impact this may have on contemporary marketing practices.

■ The restructuring of society and the consumer

As we moved from an economy dominated by industrial production to one dominated by services and experiences, such as banking, insurance, entertainment and even events, hospitality, catering and tourism or in other words from industrialisation to post-industrialisation, both culture and society adapted with it. The changes in working patterns, the destruction of regionally dominant industries such as coal mining or steel production saw the breakdown of communities and increased migration by workers looking to access the new service industries. This is significant for a number of reasons, firstly the community groups that help us form our identities and informed our view of the world disappeared and was replaced by a more powerful and persuasive media that generated ways of living through cable or satellite television, or the freedom of information that accompanied the Internet. What we have witnessed is a restructuring of society in which workers have become consumers and as such a society that is dominated by consumerism and has led to a world in which:

...the meaning of life is to be found in buying things and repackaging experiences supplanting 'religion', work, and politics as the mechanism by which social and status distinctions may be established.

(Izberk-Bilgin 2010: 302)