Social Acceleration in the Marketplace: Three Essays Exploring the Intersection of Culture and Consumption

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Social Acceleration in the Marketplace:
Three Essays Exploring the Intersection of Culture and Consumption

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Business Administration, with a concentration in Marketing

by

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Abstract

Consumer culture is fast. Goods, services, people, ideas, and values – the material and nonmaterial aspects of culture – are moving more quickly throughout the marketing system than ever before. Such acceleration effects diverse stakeholders: people, public, and planet. This dissertation explores the phenomenon of ‘social acceleration’, and specifically, the ‘acceleration of the pace of life’ which examines the feeling that time is going faster in modern societies as a result of “the increase of action episodes per unit of time” (Rosa 2013, 80). This project develops an understanding of how meanings in marketing are socially constructed in relation to this phenomenon, focusing on the following research question: "How do consumers experience and personalize the cultural meanings of social acceleration in their everyday life?” This question requires an examination of the phenomenon from both a macro (cultural meaning) and micro (individual experience and personalization) perspective in order to create meso-level theoretical and market insights. Essay 1, “The Intermingling of Meanings in Marketing: Semiology and Phenomenology in Consumer Culture Theory”, provides a theoretical framework explaining how macro, cultural meanings and micro, individual meanings combine in order to discover how meanings in consumer culture come to constitute a sense of “normalcy” in society. Essay 2, “How Fast Became Normal: Temporal Rhetoric in Consumer Culture”, examines the macro cultural and ideological meanings associated with time and social acceleration in the context of the United States market environment. Essay 3, “Consumer Deceleration Through Market-Mediated Cultural Reflection”, serves as an exploration of micro, individualized consumer meanings created as a response to the phenomenon of social acceleration in the context of the marketization of Danish hygge in the United States. This dissertation expands both marketing
literature and theories. The findings will improve marketers’ understanding of social acceleration in both the marketplace and in the everyday life of consumers so that the meanings surrounding this phenomenon may be better managed.
Acknowledgements

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My four years at the University of Arkansas have been transformational. The kindness and scholarly excellence of the faculty, staff, and other Ph.D. students at the Walton College of Business has made the experience a pleasurable one. My growth as a thinker results from several teaching conversations with Dr. Jeff Murray. I’m thankful for his continued care and patience, and his ability to translate philosophical ideas into both personal and marketing relevance. Dr. Molly Rapert and Dr. Anastasia Thyroff have taught me “the ropes” of academia, and I’m thankful for their wisdom. Thank you also to Dr. Anna Zajicek for introducing me to the world of sociological theory.

The dedicated group of scholars in the global Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) community are also to thank, especially those who shared their research and passions at doctoral workshops in Lille, Odense, and Montreal. I’ve made lifelong friends and look forward to many more years of drinks, dancing, and discussion.

Lastly, I acknowledge my personal and familial support. My faith in God has pulled me through the more difficult parts of the program; I am reminded that the pursuit of understanding
the world around us is enhanced with an understanding of His love for the world. Patrick has always provided a soft place to land. My parents and brother, Stephen, cheer for me continuously. And of course, Sherman, for laying dutifully at my feet as I read and wrote for hours upon hours.
Dedication

To my son, Louie, who joined me for the back half of this academic journey on February 23, 2020. Having completed data collection just 24 hours before giving birth, I anticipated a year of writing with you by my side, sprinkled with intermittent breaks for Baby Bookworms at the public library. However, in the early days of March, just as the postpartum fog began to lift, the world seemingly shut down in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Consequently, much of this dissertation was composed under quarantine during this unique historical and social period. While the pandemic and its impacts resulted in difficult times for many, the joy of a single new life, yours, softened these effects for me. Louie, I am forever thankful for our special time together and for your ability to teach me a new dimension of selflessness, importance, and wonder. You fuel my personal endeavors to better understand and discover meaning in the world.
“If dost thou love life, then Do not squander time, for that is the stuff life is made of.”
—Benjamin Franklin, *The Way to Wealth*, 1758
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Chapter 1 – The Intermingling of Meanings in Marketing: Semiology and Phenomenology in Consumer Culture Theory

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Introduction

When I was in high school— a defining moment for many American teenagers— I was in the marching band. That meant that on any given Friday and Saturday in the Fall, you would find me in a full wool suit adorned with sequins, a feather plume atop my head, roll stepping my way in formations across a football field in a manner that I perceived to be musical and artistic expression in the finest form. My last two years of marching band, I served as drum major, the conductor of the ensemble.

The drum major is essentially a glorified metronome. A time-keeping device. A continuously ticking, visual reminder to stay “in time” with everyone else. It was my job to make sure that everyone was at the correct tempo.

One of the most crucial and challenging tasks of being drum major was to visually communicate this correct tempo to band members spread over 40,000 square feet. (When modern scholars discuss the realities of time-space compression and expansion, I always wonder if they have experience conducting a high school marching band…) For me, this entailed a series of elaborate, exaggerated hand motions while standing atop a 6-foot podium on the fifty-yard line.

Meanwhile on the field, each individual person had their own interpretations of tempo: when to hit the downbeat of the next measure, the cadence of each step, the timing of the next sixteenth-note run, and most importantly, the unified pause of the all-exquisite “rest”. Everyone was—ahem—marching to their own beat.

It was during this experience that I learned that in music and in life, there tends to be contradictions between the “correct” tempo and the internalized tempo. And in many ways, the
drum major is much like the norms of our culture, working fervently to keep everyone—from the tubas to the snare drums—in line.

Somehow, I strayed from musical passion into educational endeavors and a career focusing on economics, marketing, and sociology. But I would never forget how frustrating it was to try to “keep tempo” in a world of many different temporal expressions. Time, rhythm, and cadence remained in my consciousness. So, when I began the Ph.D. program in marketing, it was natural to combine several of my past life experiences to consider the phenomenon of temporality in the context of the market environment.

This brings me to my dissertation, “Social Acceleration in the Marketplace: Three Essays Exploring the Intersection of Culture and Consumption”. Each of the three essays will explore a unique aspect of the phenomenon of social acceleration. In preparing the dissertation in this format, the essays serve as a focused precursor to an article suitable for journal submission and publication. Such formatting allows for swift scholarly dissemination of the research contained in this dissertation. In fact, one essay (Essay 1) has already been successfully published at the journal Academy of Marketing Science (AMS) Review in February of 2021.

Essay 1 explores the construction of meaning in consumer culture through a synthesis of two scholarly streams within the Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) body of knowledge: semiology and phenomenology. Semiology represents consumer culture as a web of meanings, studying cultural meanings as socially agreed-upon structures, whereas phenomenology represents the interpretation and personalization of cultural meanings by consumers, focusing on meanings that emerge from individual lived experience. Combining these two approaches results in a framework that excavates meanings at both the cultural level and the individual level, inviting them into a figure-ground relationship. This relationship between levels of analysis
illuminates how meaning in consumer culture is constructed, and how cultural meanings come to constitute a sense of normalcy in modern societies. As all marketing activity is culturally situated, understanding meaning in consumer culture provides an alternative way to understand value in marketing.

Essay 2 defines the macro, cultural meanings of “time is money” in consumer culture. Using Roland Barthes’ theory of cultural myths, this essay explores how something becomes normalized in consumer culture over time. Specifically this essay asks, “How has time been reflected in consumer culture?” A semiological analysis of historical advertisements reveals how repeated representations of ‘time’ in advertising help naturalize the cultural myth of “time is money” in modern consumer culture, and thus the normalized belief that ‘time’ is a resource to be spent, invested, or otherwise wasted. Since consumer culture constitutes a social reality, how time is reflected in consumer culture, and thus how marketing has contributed to the phenomenon of social acceleration, lays important groundwork for both understanding how marketers can engage constructively with issues stemming from social acceleration and how consumers interact with themes of temporality in their everyday lives and consumption choices.

Essay 3 explores how individual consumers experience temporality. A unique context of cross-cultural marketing and cultural adoption highlights the phenomenon of social acceleration: Danish hygge in the United States. This essay explores how the meaning of hygge changes as it crosses from Denmark to the US, how hygge helps US consumers critically reflect on their pace of life, and what impact market-mediated cultural reflection has on consumer culture. Mixed methods, including netnography, visual analysis, and existential-phenomenological interviews are paired with theories of globalization, temporality, and consumption. Viewing Danish hygge through the lens of temporality, a lens that is oft not used in regard to this particular context,
provides novel insights about global consumer cultures and reflection on cultural myths. This research contributes to marketing literature on timeflow and consumer deceleration, extending previous findings to suggest that consumer deceleration can be achieved through cultural borrowing, and that such market-mediated global mélange may challenge cultural myths (i.e., ideologies) that dictate existing social norms. This research also develops and empirically grounds a theoretical process for how market-mediated global mélange and cultural reflection reshapes consumer subjectivity.
Chapter 1

The Intermingling of Meanings in Marketing: Semiology and Phenomenology in Consumer Culture Theory

Introduction

Consumer culture is a web of meanings. Meanings are sense-making devices that communicate and orient individuals’ interpretations of text, concepts, and actions. In marketing, meanings provide sense-making orientations in contexts of marketplace exchange and drive both firm and consumer behavior (Kadirov and Varey 2011; Pinson 1998). In modern societies, meaning can hardly be separated from marketplace activity (Slater 2015).

Given the influence of meaning in marketing, how can marketers develop an understanding of meanings in consumer culture? Where do these meanings come from, and how do meanings evolve (or not) over time? Such questions require an understanding of how cultural meaning is constructed. And questions of meaning in marketing are perfectly suited for the work of Consumer Culture Theory.

Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) “refers to a family of theoretical perspectives that address the dynamic relationship between consumer actions, the marketplace, and cultural meanings” (Arnould and Thompson 2005: 868). CCT research uniquely conceptualizes marketing meanings as contextually situated and therefore influenced by broader sociohistorical and cultural meanings (Arnould and Thompson 2018). As a result, the theoretical and methodological perspectives offered by CCT can demonstrate how meaning in consumer culture is constructed, and importantly, how cultural meanings come to define a collective sense of normalcy in modern societies.
This paper explores the construction of meaning in consumer culture through a synthesis of two scholarly streams within the CCT body of knowledge: semiology and phenomenology. In this paper, semiology represents consumer culture as a web of meanings, studying cultural meanings as socially agreed-upon structures (Barthes 1956/2015). Phenomenology represents the interpretation and personalization of cultural meanings by consumers, focusing on meanings that emerge from individual lived experiences (Thompson, Locander, and Pollio 1989). By combining these two approaches to understanding meaning into a single project, this paper presents a framework that excavates meanings at both the cultural level and the individual level, inviting them into a figure-ground relationship. This relationship between levels of analysis illuminates how meanings in consumer culture are created, maintained, and transformed over time.

This paper begins with a review of semiology and phenomenology in Consumer Culture Theory. The tenets of each perspective are addressed along with a brief history of their employment in cultural marketing research. Next, this paper presents an argument for synthesis: that semiology and phenomenology should be combined, orienting a framework that explains how meanings in consumer culture change and stay the same over time. This framework shows that the crux for determining what is “normal” in consumer culture lies in the transition between the semiotic management of meanings in consumer culture and the discovery of phenomenological responses to cultural meanings. Lastly, using the American Marketing Association definition of marketing, this paper discusses how the construction of meaning in consumer culture unlocks an alternative understanding of ‘value’ in the marketplace.
Semiology and Phenomenology in Consumer Culture Theory

Marketing scholarship reflects many epistemological avenues for developing knowledge of consumers and their interactions with the marketplace. In Consumer Culture Theory, marketing activity is culturally situated and meaning is often discovered through interpretive ontologies and techniques. The interpretive paradigm emphasizes an empathetic understanding of meanings (Hudson and Ozanne 1988). Semiology and phenomenology each study the formation of meaning from this interpretive lens. However, the level of analysis between these two orientations differs: semiology studies meaning from a macro, cultural level, whereas phenomenology studies meaning from a micro, individual level. Because of their differing vantage points, semiology and phenomenology each offer a unique perspective to understanding meanings in marketing. Semiology provides a means of excavating the meanings ascribed in consumer culture, while phenomenology reveals how individuals interpret such cultural meanings, revealing how consumers live within, adapt to, and alter meanings in consumer culture over time. This paper seizes the opportunity to combine these two separate traditions into a single project in order to show how meaning in consumer culture is constructed over time.

Semiology

Semiology is the science of signs, or the study of meanings as they are mutually understood in society. Semiology posits that meaning is a product of human experience, rather than a product of nature (Oswald 2012). Ferdinand de Saussure¹, postulated that in the process of meaning construction, a signifier (an object, or a carrier of meaning) acts upon a signified (a cognitive concept, or meaning itself) to form a sign (Barthes 1977). Saussure conceptualized signs as organized in discourse through language, however the applications of semiology extend past the
written or spoken word alone. Semiology aims to take in any system of signs: "images, gestures, musical sounds, objects, and the complex associations of all these" (ibid., 9) to create systems of shared meaning in society.

Sidney Levy’s 1959 “Symbols for Sale” laid the foundation for semiology in modern marketing thought. In this seminal work, Levy presents the notion that products are purchased and used not only for utility value but also for symbolic value; when a firm sells a product, they are actually selling the sign value the product connotes. Levy continued to develop a symbolic perspective in marketing (e.g., 1971 with Kotler; 1978), ultimately describing consumer behavior as a reflection of the meanings held by society (1981). Levy introduced the logic that sign meanings in consumer culture represent a shared sense of social structure which consumers draw upon in day-to-day life.

By the mid 1980’s, Levy was joined by a host of marketing scholars studying the symbolic dimensions of marketing. Mick (1986) documented such efforts, arguing for the broad incorporation of sign-based thinking into the marketing discipline, stating, “semiotics positions meaning at the nucleus of consumer behavior” (196) as “consumers behave based on the meanings they ascribe to marketplace stimuli” (201). Following this call, marketing scholars began to apply the science of signs to various aspects of marketing including product design, packaging, brand names and logos, advertising, retail environments, financial exchange, ecommerce, and specific consumer categories such as food, clothing, entertainment, leisure, and vehicles (Mick et al. 2004).

The use of semiology in marketing is sweeping, but for this paper, the distinguishing feature of semiology is its unique ability to conceptualize consumer culture as a system of shared meanings that become normalized over time. Semiology addresses
both *how* and *why* meaning comes about in consumer behavior and marketing with specific attention given to the structure of social meaning (Mick 2004). Indeed, interrelated sign meanings create a sense of structure in society and provide a lens of interpretation for all within a society to draw upon. Importantly, semiology as the study of social structure contributes a critical, ideological component to research in the CCT tradition. Semiology sheds light on ideological meanings by making “explicit the conditions under which these meanings (physical, financial, psychological, and social) are produced and apprehended” (Pinson 1998, 1).

French semiotician Roland Barthes became an early proponent of exposing ideological meanings in consumer culture. In his analysis of French society, Barthes interrogated how sign meanings appear repeatedly and ubiquitously through commonplace objects and occurrences such as laundry detergent and the Tour de France. Barthes referred to these as “cultural myths”, which are ideologically motivated to maintain a sense of normalcy in society by stabilizing shared beliefs to be passed down from generation to generation (1956/2015). In Barthes’ view, sign meanings are not innocent, but rather motivated by systems of power in order to keep society the same over time. Through symbolic repetition and cultural preservation, semiology becomes ideology. Barthes’ legacy is seen in contemporary CCT works interrogating the ideological forces present in today’s consumer culture (e.g., Belk and Costa 1998; Thompson 2004; Veresiu and Giesler 2018).

While semiology is useful for understanding how consumer culture exists as a system of shared meanings and for ideological dismantling of such meanings, a semiological perspective cannot stand alone. First, semiology is not a theory per se; it is a method of analysis (Askegaard 2017). Therefore, insights derived from semiology should be paired with other theories. Saussure called for such a pairing nearly a
century ago, but the call has not been completely answered in practice (Mick et al. 2004). Second, when semiology is practiced in a purely structuralist sense, it does not account for individual or unique interpretation of sign meanings. Such deterministic assumptions presume the everyday person is hopelessly stuck in a culture of reified meanings; there is no possibility to reflect on, personalize, or challenge meanings in consumer culture. Importantly, the Saussurian tradition of semiology is meant to be “grounded in the phenomenological assumption of the origin and condition of possibility of meaning in the conscious Self” (Mick and Oswald 2006, 42). As such, it has been suggested that insights deriving from semiology be paired with the theory and method of existential-phenomenology (Askegaard 2017).

**Phenomenology**

Phenomenology is the science of phenomena, or things that appear but are not yet understood. Stemming from the tradition of continental philosophy, phenomenology asserts that the world is richly meaningful and an understanding of phenomena is best accessed through the reflexive, lived experiences of individuals in the world (Critchley 2001; Wagner 1973). In this, phenomenology provides both a theoretical and methodological orientation for examining the familiar material of everyday life.

The phenomenological tradition found in psychology provided inspiration for marketing scholars looking to better understand consumer behavior (Fennel 1985). In 1989, Thompson, Locander, and Pollio introduced an explication and tutorial of existential-phenomenology for consumer research, immediately followed by an empirical paper modeling the phenomenological perspective (1990). As a result, many subsequent projects in CCT employed phenomenology to understand consumers’ lived experiences in various
consumption contexts, showing how consumers experience, interpret, and personalize meanings in consumer culture.

Askegaard and Linnet (2011) detail the rich history of existential-phenomenology as a guiding epistemology in CCT. These authors describe the widespread adoption of phenomenology in CCT as “a reaction against an overly abstract representation of consumers in consumer research, against what was seen as relatively futile attempts at operationalizing and measuring the immeasurable, and a reaction against the methodological and conceptual effort to vindicate the (in actual fact) highly implicated researcher and his or her research tools” (Askegaard and Linnet 2011, 385). Phenomenology held potential to contribute a much-needed humanistic perspective to the field of marketing, “putting consumer experience back into consumer research”, as Thompson et al.’s seminal article suggested (1989). Indeed, a phenomenological perspective is valuable to marketers because it provides “rich and detailed accounts of real-life experiences of consumers as single persons or in small groups”, which has been a unique strength of CCT research (Askegaard and Linnet 2011, 397). Mick concurs, saying, "to appreciate and approximate the tacit knowledge of consumer behavior, we must realize that it is consumer reality [emphasis added] we are studying, not our theory. How do consumers construe the consumer world?” (1986, 206).

Phenomenology paints a picture of subjectivity. Many phenomenological projects in CCT emphasize the potential of consumer agency and “free choice” (Thompson et al. 1990) to act within, personalize, and overwhelmingly, benefit from participation in market environments. For example, Thompson and Haytko (1997) use phenomenology to understand how individuals personalize public discourse within the context of the fashion system. Their findings show how individuals freely appropriate culturally held meanings in
order to resist and challenge prevailing fashion discourse. Russell and Levy (2012) use phenomenology to explore how consumers engage in hedonic re-consumption experiences of books, movies, and places to experience emotional outcomes of pleasure and increased self-understanding. Their findings show how consumer culture is an array of marketplace offerings available primarily for personal benefit. More recently, a progression in the use of phenomenology shows how the study of lived experience may highlight a more critical understanding of society’s impact on consumers. Thompson, Henry, and Bhardi (2018) show how recent divorce-es cling to the institutionalized social structure of marriage which they once benefited from in order to maintain a past, more desirable lifestyle. In other words, phenomenology has the potential to reflect on the power of normative cultural meanings.

However, a phenomenological approach alone cannot construe a complete account of meanings in the cultural world, thus the use of phenomenology in consumer research often lacks a perspective on the “forces shaping consumer lives that are not necessarily part of ordinary consumer experiences” (Askegaard and Linnet 2011, 386). Phenomenological inquiry begins from a standpoint of individual ‘being’ to understand the world, but not all individuals have access to all meanings in the world which they belong. Human experience is vast and varied. Askegaard and Linnet therefore call “for situating acts of consumption, their motivations and consequences in a world that reaches beyond the subjectivity of the agent” (ibid., 387).

Now, many CCT scholars have shifted the preferred unit of analysis away from individual and subcultural to market-level. Actor-network theory, institutional theory, and assemblage perspectives generate a more macro understanding of marketing structures in CCT research (Saatcioglu and Corus 2018). These approaches certainly examine “the underlying ideological and mythological forces producing [these] subjectivities” (Askegaard and Linnet
2011, 387); however, they risk becoming overly deterministic and overlooking the potential of reflective lived experience to hold accountable the normative meanings of culture.

This paper argues that a phenomenological perspective in marketing should not be abandoned, but also that it should not stand alone. Rather, phenomenology should be formally cast with appropriate grounding. Indeed, the use of phenomenology in marketing was always meant to be thought of in a figure-ground relationship between an individual and their social context (Thompson et al. 1989). Phenomenological concepts such as consciousness (a process taken on by individuals to give meaning to objects existing outside of oneself; Freeman 1980) and intentionality (“a basic structure of human existence that captures the fact that human beings are fundamentally related to the contexts in which they live”; Pollio, Henley, and Thompson 1997, 7) serve as reminders of this original intent. All being should be understood as being-in-the-world. In this spirit, a phenomenological perspective can explore the dynamic relationship individuals have with cultural meanings in the world: how individuals internalize cultural meanings, how individuals experience cultural meanings in day-to-day life, and how individuals externalize interpretations of cultural meanings back into the social sphere (Berger and Luckmann 1967). Such an understanding of phenomenology situates individual interpretation of meaning within a broader sociohistorical context where meaning is socially constructed.

Synthesis of Two Traditions: The Construction of Meaning in Consumer Culture

This section offers a theoretical and methodological orientation for marketing that examines the on-going relationship between cultural meanings (through the specific use of semiology) and meanings emanating from individual lived experience (through the specific use of phenomenology). The following framework shows how meanings in consumer
culture are constructed: how meanings come to be, how meanings are maintained and transformed over time, and how meanings constitute a sense of accepted normalcy in society. Ultimately, the crux for determining what is normal in consumer culture lies in the transition between the semiotic management of meanings in consumer culture and the discovery of phenomenological responses to cultural meanings.

![Diagram of the construction of meaning in consumer culture]

Figure 1.
The construction of meaning in consumer culture

This framework begins with an understanding that consumer culture, a web of cultural meanings, provides a sense of social structure that gives individuals within a culture a frame of reference for understanding everyday life. In marketing, brands and products often attach to cultural meanings in order to resonate with a given cultural mood or historical moment (Holt 2004; Thompson 2004). This strategic management of meaning ensures brand meanings are
congruent with cultural meanings and are therefore effective in connecting with consumers living within a given cultural reality.

Specifically, meanings in marketing are often managed through techniques of storytelling. Many marketers, brand marketers in particular, focus on creating meaning for consumers through value propositions and positioning that can be translated into “brand stories”. However, it has been argued that marketers don’t actually create their own meanings, but rather ride on the coattails of existing cultural meanings, acting as ideological parasites (Holt 2006). The narratives of culture can therefore be harnessed and recontextualized as marketing practices such as branding, consumer journeys, advertising, and other cultural marketing strategies (Holt and Cameron 2010). As a result of such marketing practices, cultural meanings become further naturalized and help cement what is considered “normal” in a given society.

Individuals interact with cultural meanings (which seemingly exist outside of the individual as a concrete reality) through interactions in the marketplace. Cultural beacons transmit information about what’s normal in a given culture. In the realm of consumer culture, marketing acts as this cultural beacon. Individuals interact with meanings by participating in retailscapes and servicescapes (both physical and digital), consuming products and media, and through exposure to advertising.

Individuals may find cultural meanings restrictive or liberating: restrictive in that they “impose upon individuals born and reared in a specific culture an already-fixed system of meaning” (Danesi 2018, 44) but liberating in that they provide “the means by which we can seek new meanings” (ibid.). Meanings become personalized as individuals continuously negotiate existing cultural meanings against their phenomenological experiences of being-in-the-cultural world. In CCT, such studies are referred to as “identity projects” (Arnould and Thompson
Many CCT projects fit into this category (e.g., Cherrier and Murray 2007; Mick and DeMoss 1990; Murray 2002; Schau and Gilly 2003; Thompson and Haytko 1997).

As individuals make sense of cultural meaning, they share their interpretation with others around them. This process may take place in the physical lifeworld (e.g., via word-of-mouth) or the digital lifeworld (e.g., via social media). Multiple interpretations of cultural meaning overlap as multiple consumers respond. When a group of individuals share an interpretation of a cultural meaning, they become known as a subcultural brand community (e.g., Schouten and McAlexander 1995) or a consumer tribe (e.g., Cova, Kozinets, and Shankar 2007).

Traditional market research has sought to capture meanings that consumers externalize in order to galvanize such meanings and incorporate them into future sign-ridden marketing strategies. This management of meaning results in a continued depiction of “what's normal” in consumer culture. Newer practices and technologies in market research such as netnography (Kozinets 2015) or social listening tools (i.e., services aggregating digital consumer conversations around a given topic) have further expanded this process to include a greater variety of consumer voices and experiences into the development of market insights.

Combining semiology and phenomenology illuminates how meanings are constructed throughout consumer culture and normalized over time. While not common for these two theoretical and methodological orientations to be combined, it should be noted that previous efforts toward such a pairing exist. In marketing, the issue was institutionally raised through a recent call for papers for The International Journal of Marketing Semiotics & Discourse Studies (Rossolatos 2017). However, no papers were published from this
solicitation. Literature outside of the marketing discipline has also attempted the integration of semiology and phenomenology (Bondi and La Mantia 2015; Houser 2009; Sonesson 2007; Stjernfelt 2007; Zlatev 2009). These works share a grounding in philosophy, and while they address many important ontological issues for the synthesis of the two traditions as advocated in this paper, they do not offer a specific framework useful for research in marketing.

**The Discovery and Interpretation of Meanings in Consumer Culture**

The following research process suggests steps for jointly employing existing methodologies of semiology and phenomenology to study a phenomenon, or an occurrence not fully understood, in marketing. Marketing researchers may discover and interpret normative cultural meanings while also developing an understanding of how consumers interpret cultural meanings in everyday life. This process ultimately results in enhanced knowledge of the research phenomenon, using the guiding questions: How is the phenomenon presented as “normal” in consumer culture? How do consumers interpret and respond to normalized cultural meanings? And how do cultural meanings change and stay the same as a result?
1) Phenomenon

To illustrate the research process shown above, let us consider the phenomenon of temporality, which can be understood as one’s relationship to time. Consumers’ relationship to time has been explored both in popular press (e.g., Carl Honoré’s 2005 *In Praise of Slowness*) and academic studies (e.g., Bellezza, Paharia, and Keinan 2017; Cotte, Ratneshwar, and Mick 2004; Husemann and Eckhardt 2019; Osbaldiston 2013; Woermann and Rokka 2015). Two of these projects in particular highlight an
important opportunity to better understand the phenomenon of temporality using the framework suggested here.

Woermann and Rokka (2015) study time from a “microperspective”, that is, “in action as it unfolds in consumers’ experience of concrete, lived through moments” (1488). As such, the authors maintain analysis at the individual level, focusing on a theoretical explanation for how different consumption practices evoke unique temporal experiences (“timeflow”). Woermann and Rokka view temporality as a feature of consumption.

In contrast, Husemann and Eckhardt (2019) view temporality as a feature of society. Here, the authors study consumer response to the predominant temporal logic of acceleration that guides many modern societies. The analysis is between the pre-existing theory of social acceleration (Rosa 2013) and the authors’ empirical data reflecting consumer experiences of deceleration. The study seeks to reveal how “consumers experience, respond to, and seek out slowness within the sped-up rhythm of contemporary consumer culture” (2).

Where one paper views temporal meanings as arising from the individual level (Woermann and Rokka 2015), the other views temporal meanings as emanating from the social, cultural, level (Husemann and Eckhardt 2019). Both papers’ findings ultimately reflect outcomes at the individual level, examining how consumers experience temporality in their day-to-day practices (Woermann and Rokka 2015) and as they immerse into or escape from the temporal logic of society (Husemann and Eckhardt 2019). However, in order to understand temporality (or any phenomenon) at a more macro level, that is, to understand its impact on consumer culture at large, we need to foster an intentional back-and-forth relationship between cultural and individual meanings, asking how these meanings change and stay the same over
time. This can be achieved by grounding phenomenological interpretations in a semiotic, socio-historical understanding.

2) What’s normal?

Before diving into a semiological or phenomenological analysis of the phenomenon, however, a researcher should first consider, “What’s normal?” in relation to the phenomenon of interest. This is accomplished by couching the phenomenon in a broader sociohistorical understanding, satisfying calls for the inclusion of the ‘context of context’ in CCT research (Askegaard and Linnet 2011). Since normalized cultural meanings are the result of historical construction (Barthes 1956/2015), it is important to understand how cultural meaning has been shaped over time.

For the phenomenon of temporality and consumption, there may be several possible answers to this question. This is especially true depending on the larger cultural context the researcher is immersed in. Following the interpretive tradition, this research process assumes the researcher is an interactive participant in uncovering aspects of history and sociality that help determine the structure of the phenomenon (Hudson and Ozanne 1988).

In the current historical moment, an important aspect of temporality is the trend of acceleration. Rosa (2013) argues that “time is going faster in modern societies” (80), suggesting that “the heightening of the pace of life should be understood as a result of time resources” (ibid., 79). Increasingly, acceleration is attached to the development of consumer culture (Cross 1993; Osbaldiston 2013). Humphery sums up this sentiment in writing, “a culture of consumerism is essentially a culture of speed” (2013, 23). In reference to the phenomenon of temporality in consumer culture, then, one aspect of normalcy is a state of acceleration.

3) How are meanings reflected as normal in consumer culture?
Next, semiotic methods reveal marketing’s role in managing and naturalizing cultural meanings in relation to the phenomenon. In this example, semiotic analysis would reveal the nuanced meanings surrounding how “consumer culture glorifies speed” and how “the bid to do things faster ... is at the heart of the consumerist dynamic” (Ryle and Soper 2013, 95). Artifacts of the marketing system (such as advertisements, consumer products, retail displays, ecommerce designs, consumer media, etc.) both embed and communicate meanings surrounding temporality in consumer culture. During a semiotic interrogation of such artifacts, the researcher would look for repeated significations that normalize an accelerated temporality in consumer culture, bringing hidden cultural meanings to light.

Semiological research methods for gathering, managing, and analyzing data have been outlined in several qualitative marketing research methods texts (e.g., Floch 2001; Oswald 2012). Semiological research methods in marketing include photo and video (visual) analysis, discourse and content analysis, and ethnography and netnography.

Previous cultural consumption studies make strides toward interrogating the meanings of temporality in consumer culture. Gottschalk (1999) examines how representations of temporality in television commercials contribute to a normalization of speed. Brewis and Jack (2005) analyze television commercials for fast food to explore Western constructions and experiences of time. Hadlaw (2011) analyzes how discourses of speed in early 20th century communications advertising shaped modern conceptions of time and space. However, these studies do not pair the resulting findings with a perspective of consumer subjectivity as allowed by the phenomenological perspective.
4) How do consumers respond to normalized cultural meanings?

Phenomenological methods reveal how individuals interpret normalized cultural meanings in everyday life. In a phenomenological analysis, researchers choose a group of individuals (referred to as a research context) who exemplify a unique response to the phenomenon. The researcher captures descriptions of individuals’ lived experiences in order to better understand the phenomenon. (CCT researchers often pay close attention to consumers’ market interactions and use of market offerings as they negotiate the accepted cultural meanings surrounding a phenomenon.) Phenomenological research methods most often take the format of the existential-phenomenological interview (as described in Thompson et al. 1989), but phenomenological studies can also employ analysis of written statements (ibid.).

Previous CCT projects explore phenomenological understandings of temporality. Cotte et al. (2004) study how American women perceive time in everyday life, developing five metaphorical timestyles to categorize orientations toward consumption behavior and negotiation of identity and self. Woermann and Rokka (2015) study temporal perceptions that arise from performing distinct consumption practices: freeskiing and paintball, bridging the gap between practices and temporal experiences. Husemann and Eckhardt (2019) study travelers on the Camino de Santiago, a series of pilgrimage routes often taken by foot, to explore how consumers can experience temporary states of perceived temporal deceleration through consumption practices. These projects all produce findings that explain how consumers respond to temporality in consumer culture, however, they do not intentionally study how temporality in consumer culture evolves as a result of consumers’ lived experiences.

5) How do meanings in consumer culture change and stay the same? What does this reveal about the phenomenon?
The process described so far employs specific academic traditions to form an understanding of meanings at first the macro, cultural level (semiology) and then the micro, individual level (phenomenology). The final step of this process is a dialectical, back-and-forth, interpretation between the two levels of analysis. It should be noted that dialectical interpretation implicitly guides many projects in CCT. Stemming from an influence of hermeneutics in cultural marketing research (e.g., Thompson, Pollio, Locander 1994 and Thompson 1997), CCT has historically emphasized the importance of facilitating a relationship between micro and macro levels of analysis. An important point of difference, however, is that many such efforts use consumer experience as a starting point for understanding cultural meanings through discourse.

The distinguishing feature of the research process suggested here is that a phenomenological interpretation of consumer experience is grounded first in an understanding of thematic cultural meanings as produced by semiotic interrogation. In other words, interpretation goes beyond the horizon of the phenomenological data set, rather than unfolding within the horizon of the contextually based data set (in reference to Askegaard and Linnet’s 2011 critique of phenomenology as a primary methodology). Themes developed from semiotic interrogation ground phenomenological investigations of how consumers respond to “what’s normal” in consumer culture. For example, when a researcher analyzes how a consumer interprets a phenomenon (step 4 of this research process), the lens of interpretation will derive from an analysis of how the phenomenon is reflected in consumer culture (step 3 of this research process). As a result, the back-and-forth analysis that unfolds between cultural and individual meanings reveals not just how consumers negotiate their identity within consumer culture but focuses on how consumer interpretations preserve and challenge meanings in consumer
culture. Thus, the understanding of the phenomenon occurs at the macro, cultural level, i.e., ‘the context of context’. Lastly, it should be noted that this research framework is not finite; while each new insight promises a novel understanding of the phenomenon, it also promises new research questions. As such, the framework should be employed iteratively and indefinitely as cultural meanings ever-evolve.

Discussion

An Alternative Understanding of Value in Marketing

A cultural approach to marketing emphasizes an understanding of cultural meanings in the marketplace. This paper shows how meanings in consumer culture can be discovered, how meanings stay the same, and how meanings change over time. Consumer culture is constructed through a dialectical dance of cultural sign meanings and phenomenological meanings of lived experience. Understanding this construction of meaning in consumer culture ultimately provides an alternative way to understand value in marketing.

Indeed, the American Marketing Association definition of marketing centers on the notion of value, presenting marketing as, “the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value [emphasis added] for customers, clients, partners, and society at large” (AMA 2017). Since all marketing activity, institutions, and processes take place in the context of culture, value throughout the marketing system derives from cultural meaning. Therefore, in order to appropriately create, communicate, deliver, or exchange offerings of value, marketers should maintain an awareness of how meaning in consumer culture comes to be and evolves over time. The concepts presented in this paper allow for a reading of the AMA definition of marketing in a new light, expanding our understanding of value in marketing.
Meanings are slippery and abstract things. Yet, semiology and phenomenology uniquely explain how meanings can be discovered and managed. Semiology allows for the strategic management of meaning. The meanings marketers embed in an offering, whether it be a product, a service, or a brand, in part determines its value in the marketplace (Levy 1959). Phenomenology aids in the discovery of meaning, helping to determine and define what meanings, and therefore value, customers, clients, partners, and society at large derive from offerings in the marketplace.

Understanding meaning as a conduit of value aligns semiology and phenomenology with mainstream functions of marketing. Marketers create value through product development and services. Marketers communicate value through promotions, sales, and storytelling. Marketers deliver value through the functions of supply chain and service encounters. Marketers exchange value through pricing strategies. As such, each aspect of the marketing mix requires a management of value and therefore meaning. Additionally, marketers must constantly conduct consumer and market research (i.e., discover meaning) to inform strategic decisions throughout the total value proposition.

Brought together, the semiology-phenomenology synthesis offers even another perspective toward value in the marketplace. A relationship exists between the management of meanings and the discovery of meanings. In marketing, the management of meaning leads to the normalization of meanings in consumer culture. However, consumers may alter meanings through phenomenological interpretations. Through the intermingling of meanings at different levels of analysis, marketers may discover how meanings stay the same and change over time. As a result, marketers may also evaluate the evolution of value: How does value change as
meanings change? What new market opportunities arise, and which ones disappear? And how should marketers respond in the quest to bring forth value in the marketplace?

**Value for Society: Critical Reflection in Consumer Culture**

Importantly, the final portion of the AMA definition of marketing indicates that marketplace offerings should hold value for multiple stakeholders: customers, clients, partners, and society at large. This definition thus invites marketers to reflect: is value indeed experienced by all parties? An understanding of meaning in marketing allows for such evaluation.

CCT researchers have long looked at consumer culture from a critical lens (Tadajewski 2010), debating the relative power between social structure and individual agency (e.g., Firat and Vankatesh 1995; Kozinets 2002; Murray and Ozanne 1991). Dominant cultural ideologies represented in consumer culture by repeated significations are negotiated against consumers’ interpretive strategies (Arnould and Thompson 2018). This paradigm highlights the ongoing tension between semiology and phenomenology. Arnould and Thompson agree that ideological meanings are “central to consumer culture” but continue, acknowledging the importance of subjectivity in that, “the perpetuation and reproduction of [consumer culture] is largely dependent upon the exercise of personal choice in the private sphere of everyday life, that is, the choice to choose among commercialized offerings” (ibid., 4).

A critical awareness awakens during the dialectical dance between cultural and individual meanings. Ideally, critical theorists in marketing can identify an ideological problem and develop an understanding of the contradictions between objective social conditions and intersubjective understandings relating to the problem (Murray and Ozanne 1994). The synthesis of semiology and phenomenology facilitates a unique way to examine the contradictions between these two sets of meanings. In beginning with semiological analysis, the framework presented in this paper
acknowledges how reified meanings in consumer culture instate a sense of unreflected normalcy. However, this framework also highlights the unique strength of phenomenology to contribute a critical, reflective character that pushes against semiotic structures. While semiology seeks to maintain consumer culture as it is, phenomenology can provide accountability to dominant meanings and has the power to help transform meanings in consumer culture.

The construction of meaning in consumer culture framework can be applied to a multiplicity of opportunities that marketers have to provide value to society. Scholars engaging in social issues deeply entrenched in consumption and cultural meaning may benefit from understanding how cultural meanings inform individual interpretations and therefore subsequent demands for value in the marketplace. Lastly, it should be noted that all research contexts are complex, and while semiology and phenomenology allow for an enhanced understanding of meaning, and therefore value, several powerful influences at the social, cultural, relational, and political level also shape the ultimate maintenance and transformation of consumer culture over time. Future research should consider these factors in addition to an understanding of meaning in consumer culture.

**Conclusion**

Semiology and phenomenology have each been instrumental to CCT’s aim of developing cultural understandings of marketing. Semiology provides a means of excavating meanings ascribed in consumer culture, while phenomenology reveals how individuals interpret, adapt to, and alter meanings in consumer culture over time. This paper synthesizes these two theoretical and methodological perspectives to explain the construction of meaning in consumer culture. Such a synthesis shows that consumer culture does not remain unchanged despite the
fervent management of meaning in the marketplace. Rather, consumer culture is maintained and transformed through the intermingling of meanings in marketing.
References


Chapter 2

How Fast Became Normal: Temporal Rhetoric in Consumer Culture

Introduction

Consumer culture is fast. Goods, services, people, ideas, and values – the material and nonmaterial aspects of culture – are moving more quickly throughout the marketing system than ever before. Such acceleration effects diverse stakeholders including people, public, and planet. Many industries and facets of everyday life illustrate this phenomenon, but perhaps some of the most telling are the categorical examples of fashion, food, and travel.

For example, fast fashion refers to a dominant fashion system driven by speed, one that encourages frequent turnover of trends and planned obsolescence (Ozdamar Ertekin and Atik 2014). Fast fashion retailers in urban areas around the globe, such as Forever 21, Primark, and Zara, quickly bring new styles to consumers, at ever condensed prices, while demanding increasing speed throughout their supply chains. Consumers, for fear of missing out on the “new” and the “what’s next” in the context of their identity management projects, are eager to comply with a hastened pace of purchase: the average American purchases 68 new pieces of clothing a year, roughly 1.3 garments every week; in contrast, the average American owned just 9 outfits in the 1930s (Cline 2013). At the same time, the relative price for clothing has continuously fallen (ibid.). In fashion, cheaper and faster reigns.

Food that is fast has become nearly synonymous with a busy lifestyle. The hallmark of fast food is that it is convenient and it saves time (Horst, Brunner, and Siegrist 2011), a tempting appeal to time-strapped consumers. And while “fast food” may conjure visions of golden arches and southern colonels, foods that are fast aren’t always delivered at a pickup window or restaurant counter. Packaged and processed foods found on grocery store shelves also offer
the time-saving and convenience benefits that attract consumers to certain food choices. “Fast foods” are foods that can be accessed easily and quickly, come prepared, can be eaten rapidly, and are absorbed quickly into the bloodstream (Fuhrman 2018). As a tradeoff for choosing fast food, consumers are able to budget less time spent cooking and building culinary skills (Horst et al. 2011). Approximately 55% of the calories in a standard American diet now come from processed convenience and fast foods (Fuhrman 2018). And similar to fast fashion, the structural conditions that allow the rapid movement of food throughout the marketing system have also made food cheaper and more accessible, even if sacrificing quality.

Even travel, once an endeavor that delivered a seeming respite from time, has experienced a startling change as a result of society’s dominant temporal logic. Of course, advancements in technology and modern transportation have allowed goods and people to travel greater distances in shorter amounts of time. However, the rate at which travel occurs has also hastened. The same faster and cheaper logic present in the fashion and food industries is also present in the travel industry. A person may choose to travel for many reasons: for pleasure (a form of hedonic consumption), for work (a form of utilitarian consumption), or for appearances and social standing (a form of conspicuous consumption). Especially when employed as a utilitarian good or a conspicuous act, travel has become fast. “Fast travel” is often preoccupied with reaching a destination, evoking a logic of means-end rationality, and “involves intensive energy consumption” (Dickinson and Lumsdon 2010). Corporate executives bounce from continent-to-continent and city-to-city negotiating and finalizing complex agreements of capital in face-to-face meetings, which are preferred over virtual meetings (Gustafson 2012). Leisure travelers, lured by Instagram geotags and budget airfares, are eager to quickly visit and share via social media their jaunts
to popular tourist spots around the globe before jet-setting to another site (e.g., Dodds and Butler 2019; Rossi, Boscaro, and Torsello 2018; Terttunen 2017).

The acceleration seen in the fashion, food, and travel industries is similarly reflected throughout many other industries and aspects of life. In short, fast has become normal. Modern society and consumer culture continue to move at an ever-hastened pace; the world we live in is accelerating. And as aspects of everyday life continue to tumble down this trajectory, physical and social constraints begin to give way.

For fast fashion, this reality was most clearly revealed in the spring of 2013 after the tragic collapse of the Rana Plaza factory outside the major capital city of Dhaka in Bangladesh. Over 2500 garment factory workers were swept in a mountain of smoke and debris as the structure of the building gave way. After three weeks of search, 1100 workers were declared lost (Siegle 2014). Chillingly, the Rana Plaza factory primarily produced goods for leading fast fashion brands. Retailers and consumers in the developed West now had to reckon with the reality that for the sake of fashion, lives had been tragically lost (Taplin 2014); the ever-quickening patterns of production and consumption proved deadly for key stakeholders within the marketing system.

Fast and convenience food also yields grave consequences, not only for end-consumers of the product, but also to the publics which they belong. Largely devoid of nutritional density and calorie efficiency, fast food consists of highly processed substances including excess meat, salt, and sugar – all of which have been linked to health risks such as obesity, diabetes, heart attacks, strokes, dementia, and cancer (Fuhrman 2018). A public health crisis arises from the popularity and accessibility of fast food as over 100 million Americans face obesity and
nutritional deficiency (ibid.). The short term and long-term effects are staggering as mental and physical wellbeing decline from consumption of fast foods.

Meanwhile, fast patterns of travel highlight another social issue entirely: degradation of planet and culture. Business travel is responsible for nearly half of a given company’s total carbon emissions, contributing to changes in climate and increased levels of pollution (Gagan 2018). On the tourism side, popular destinations such as Machu Pichu, Venice, and Iceland experience an influx of travelers, growing in ever greater numbers by the year (e.g. Hugo 2020; Rossi, Boscaro, and Torsello 2018; Thyroff 2020). “Overtourism” has been coined to describe accelerating amounts of travel that affect the planet in terms of pollution and overcrowding at natural and cultural sites (Dodds and Butler 2019). This increase in travel intertwines issues of ecology, economics, and culture (Seraphin, Sheeran, and Pilato 2018).

As these industries illustrate, the speed of our modern society – of our consumer culture – can result in negative externalities for people, public, and planet. Enormous consequences for consumer wellbeing and social systems stem from the relentless pursuit of acceleration throughout the marketing system. And as the dance between marketing production and consumer demand increases in tempo every business quarter, such consequences can be expected to continue. Undoubtedly, then, social acceleration is an important (and timely) phenomenon to understand from a macromarketing point of view. Social scientists are increasingly interested in the effects of ever-increasing speeds that mark our modern society and consumer culture (e.g. Hassan 2009; Rosa 2013). But for marketing scholars, the phenomenon of social acceleration presents an opportunity to look inward. This essay does just that, exploring marketing’s role in the normalization of fast by interrogating how time has been reflected in consumer culture. The question guiding this
pursuit is: How did fast become “normal” in modern consumer culture? (And how does something become “normal” anyway?)

The cultural myth of “time is money” serves as a starting point for this exploration. Roland Barthes’ theory of cultural myth, or repeated significations that naturalize historical constructions (1957/2015), provides the theoretical framework. By analyzing the rhetoric of advertising images in the United States throughout the 20th century, a semiological interrogation shows how the myth of “time is money” became legitimized, institutionalized, and maintained in the social imagination of the United States throughout the emergence of modern consumer culture. Several thematic meanings are uncovered during this exercise which provoke a larger discussion on temporality in US consumer culture. Temporal themes permeate not only US economic relations but also the day-to-day activities of everyday life that comprise culture in the United States. Ultimately, interrogating the cultural myth of “time is money” can help marketing scholars better understand: 1) how marketing has contributed to the phenomenon of social acceleration; 2) how to engage constructively with the phenomenon of social acceleration through the lens of cultural marketing strategy, and; 3) how consumers respond to the meanings of temporality in the marketplace through their everyday lives and consumption choices.

What’s Normal: Acceleration in Consumer Culture

Social Acceleration

The phenomenon of social acceleration is one that hides in the everyday fabric of culture. Recently, popular authors such as James Gleick (Faster, 1999; Time Travel, 2016), Carl Honoré (In Praise of Slowness, 2009), and Thomas Friedman (Thank You for Being Late, 2017) have sought to bring public attention to the increasing pace of technologies, sociality, and
everyday life. These authors provide several on-the-ground examples and stories to illustrate how a hastened social temporality has driven (perhaps less favorable) outcomes in terms of quality of life, community engagement, and environmental health.

Academic endeavors explicating the phenomenon of social acceleration are notably fewer and most strongly led by a recent work: Hartmut Rosa’s *Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity* (2013). Rosa is an academic sociologist, and thus he positions his theory against other prominent paradigms in sociology. Rosa believes that temporality is central to the sociology of everyday life and boldly claims that social acceleration lies at the very heart of modernity. While past prominent social theorists credit other phenomena as modernity’s driving force (for Marx it is production, for Weber it is rationality, for Foucault it is technologies of the self), Rosa vehemently argues that it is the phenomenon of social acceleration that drives modern life forward.

Rosa identifies three motors of social acceleration: technological advancement (e.g., the introduction of new technologies increases the temporality of the social sphere), the rate of social change (e.g., public opinion on major issues changes more quickly in the modern world than it did in the past), and the pace of life (e.g., the demands of our modern, everyday life require a more rapid cadence than before). Social acceleration depends on the constant propelling of these motors, which work together in an ever-continuing cycle: technological advancements inevitably result in changed social conditions which in turn acts to accelerate the pace of everyday life. To illustrate Rosa’s social acceleration using a historical example, consider the widespread production and distribution of Henry Ford’s Model T automobile (a technological advancement). This new invention propelled the migration of populations from urban centers to the now more accessible rural ones (a social change) which in turn created an opportunity for mass-market
retailers such as Walmart to open and operate one-stop shopping centers in rural towns, thus reducing the time spent shopping for any given American family (contributing to an accelerated pace of everyday life). Then, as the pace of everyday life quickens, the need for new technologies to “keep up” with an increased pace of life also increases, driving a collective desire for and investment in new technologies. For example, as consumer expectations for a speedy shopping trip accelerate, so too will technological advancements (e.g., advanced supply chain infrastructure that allows for in-home grocery delivery within a certain number of hours) in order to “keep up” with consumer demand. And thus, the motors of social acceleration continue to propel.

Rosa tempers the power of these motors of acceleration by identifying five types of inertia that can provide resistance to such forward motion. First, he identifies ‘islands of deceleration’. These are areas of society that exist almost entirely outside of the dominant temporal logic. For example, Amish communities and other isolated groups function within the confines of a unique temporal logic. Similarly, in their 2019 *Journal of Consumer Research* article that I will expand upon later in this essay, Husemann and Eckhardt identify that individuals walking the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage enter an “oasis of deceleration”. Second, Rosa identifies ‘slowdown as an unattended consequence of social acceleration’. An example of this would be a traffic gridlock as a result of accelerated development, or an individual experiencing a panic attack as a result of overwork. Third, Rosa identifies ‘deceleration as ideology’. The Slow Food Movement and the Voluntary Simplicity movement are examples of this type of inertia. Fourth, Rosa suggests ‘slowdown as an acceleration strategy’; for example, a busy executive may meditate before work in order to be more focused and productive later. And fifth, Rosa names ‘cultural rigidity and friction’ as a type
of inertia. This is especially pertinent in a globalized world, where business is dealt with across cultures and differing perceptions of time may provide obstacles to productivity and acceleration.

Rosa concludes that the momentum of social acceleration outweighs any potential inertia in our modern society. Thus, our modern world experiences *dynamization*, or an ever-increasing pace of life. Further, Rosa suggests that individuals in modern society operate in a state of frenetic movement. Much like a human hamster wheel, though one might feel as if they are accelerating, they are actually not going anywhere new. For example, Rosa discusses how many modern families must work harder and faster each year just to remain at their current standard of living. As a result, individuals increasingly experience extreme dissonance with and displeasure from the temporal logic of modern society.

*Temporality in Consumer Culture*

Consumer culture reflects this sense of acceleration in society. And marketing, as a socially and culturally-embedded system, further contributes to society’s orientation towards temporality. The marketing literature on temporality exhibits a broad range of considerations, from a focus on the subjective, consumer experience of time to a focus on the cultural, ideological dimensions of time. This review will highlight three main themes present in the literature that are pertinent to the goals of this essay. First, time is conceptualized as a scarce resource, giving rise to value notions of time and conspicuous consumption of time. Second, the consumer experience of time in the marketplace reveals that consumers actively attempt to manage their consumption of time in everyday life. And third, the ideological dimensions of temporality in the marketplace highlight how a logic of acceleration encapsulates all market-based activity.
Time as a scarce resource

In a modern world of plenty, the felt scarcities of time can be quite puzzling. In *Time and Money: The Making of Consumer Culture*, Cross (1993) takes a philosophical and historical journey to explore how work and free time relate to the origins of mass consumer culture in the Western world. Cross specifically analyzes capitalist democracies (the US, the UK, France) in the interwar period, as these countries during this time period lay a crucial foundation for understanding the tradeoff between leisure and consumption (which is inherently tied to time spent working and earning) in modern societies.

In the conflict between leisure and consumption, Cross considers both Thornstein Veblen’s 1899 *Theory of the Leisure Class* and the philosophical assumptions of the Enlightenment. Reviewing the work of Veblen, Cross notes that “social prowess was displayed through the ability to avoid work and to consume in a conspicuous manner” (Cross 1993, 19). This thinking was enforced by ”a dream of the Enlightenment to liberate time from the necessity of work and to force the physical world to meet consumer needs” (ibid., 17). However, Cross identifies an important paradox among Enlightenment thinkers when it comes to leisure and consumption: “For some, prosperity undermined work effort and created the anarchy of undisciplined time; for others, it multiplied need and produced a work-driven society based on ‘false needs’” (ibid.). Ultimately, society began to view the combination of general affluence and extensive freedom from work as a moral problem, and thus the latter viewpoint won out; the ever-hastening relationship between production, spending, and mass consumer culture became the desired social norm.

Cross concludes that the emergence and legacy of a mass consumer society in the US and western Europe affects “current prospects for a new balance of time and money” (1993, 4). Cross
perceives time and money existing as direct and finite substitutes, stating: “You have time or money. Those are the two choices in life” (1). Time is defined in terms of leisure, in that it “can be understood as duration free from both income-producing work and from consumption” (5), whereas money can be understood in terms of consumerism, or “as the quest for non-essential goods which requires time at work that is relatively undiminished by increased productivity and which reduces time available for non-market activities” (5).

Cross’s work shows how the unfolding history of consumption in Western democracies links consumer society to uses and meanings of time. Cross maintains that “consumerism is not only the basis of both the modern economic order and public culture, but it defines how most people organize their time around working and spending” (184). He notes that marketers have been eager to provide coping solutions in the marketplace “for the frustrated middle class” in the form of time and personal goods management, further naturalizing the idealized tradeoff between time and money. As a result, modern consumer culture can be described as “harried” and prone to frenetic movement through time and consumption.

Humphrey (2013) re-explores this critique of consumption as the thief of time in her sociological analysis of consumption temporalities. She acknowledges the connection between time and commodity culture, noting that “both in reality and expectation, consumption in the affluent world apparently moves to a dizzy beat” (19). Citing the work of Jean Baudrillard in his 1983 *Simulations*, Humphrey agrees that, “time itself is thus invented as a commodity and for a commodity system” (25). Usunier, Lee, and Lee (2005) reiterate the stance that time as a commodity, referring to the “economicity of time”. Here, time is regarded as an economic good, either “a scarce resource or, conversely, as plentiful and indefinitely available” (19).
Fernbach, Kan, and Lynch (2014) examine the consumption of scarce resources more broadly in the context of financial planning. They find that when a resource is perceived as scarce, consumers employ two distinct coping strategies: efficiency planning, which “yields savings by stretching the resource” and priority planning, which focuses on “sacrificing less important goals” (1204). Monga, May, and Bagchi (2017) explore the tradeoff between time and money as scarce resources in marketing specific contexts. The authors show that consumers construct the tradeoffs between time and money differently, ultimately placing a higher value on time than on money when faced with a decision of trading between the two.

Since time is a scarce and valued resource, the expenditure of time can be used to signal conspicuous consumption. Bellezza, Paharia, and Keinan show this in their 2016 study. Here, the authors discuss how individuals who signal their busyness (e.g., long hours of work, a lack of leisure time) benefit from the temporal logic of a modern society that values productivity. The authors explain that a busy person demonstrates certain human capital characteristics such as competence and ambition which results in the individual being perceived as a scarce, and therefore valuable commodity, on the job market. When individuals feel in-demand, they also feel more important. In this, though individuals may feel some discontent with the demands of their personal schedules, these negative feelings are outweighed by the rewards granted by society. A culture built on certain expectations of productivity thus incentivizes frenetic busyness and the expenditure of time is used to signal social status. Bellezza et al. suggest that marketing managers employ these findings to appeal to consumers through means of flattery – confirming their busyness and making them feel important. Such glorification of busyness further cements the high value placed on time scarcity as “normal”. Importantly, the authors indeed indicate that status inferences based on busyness is indeed culturally dependent; for example, the study
compares American and Italian workers and finds that Americans are more likely to infer busyness as conspicuous consumption than Italians.

The consumer experience of time

The consumer experience of time in the marketplace reveals that consumers are actively aware of and make attempts to manage their consumption of time in everyday life. The social perception of time as a resource drives individual behavior and decision making. Usunier, Lee, and Lee (2005) reiterate that the economicity of time insists that “people should try to allocate it [time] in the most economically optimal way. This results in people using their time as ‘wisely’ as possible in scheduling or establishing timetables and deadlines” (Usunier, Lee, and Lee 2005, 19).

How it is that consumers meter their time in the context of marketplace experiences has been the topic of study for a few recent studies in marketing. For example, Woermann and Rokka (2015) find that individuals can temporarily alter their experience of time when engaging in specific consumption practices. The authors develop a Bordieusian-inspired concept of “timeflow” which imagines the experience of time as a result of different practices. For example, participating in downhill skiing will result in a different experience of time perception than playing paintball. Husemann and Eckhardt (2019) are also interested in how consumers can alter temporal experience. In their study, they follow travelers on the Camino de Santiago (a series of pilgrimage routes often taken by foot) to explore how consumers experience temporary states of perceived temporal deceleration through consumption practices.

May and Monga (2013) introduce the concept of time anthropomorphism (e.g., “time has a will of its own”). The authors find that consumer relationships with time change when time is imbued with humanlike characteristics. Interestingly, the more humanized the concept of time
becomes, the less tolerant consumers are of waiting, or wasting time. In other words, when time is not purely “objective” and instead expresses subjective traits, consumers expect it to move faster.

Considering time in the context of everyday life, Cotte, Ratneshwar, and Mick (2004) study how American women without children perceive time in their day-to-day routine. The authors discover various orientations towards everyday consumption behavior and negotiation of identity and self, referring to these archetypes as consumer “timestyles”. When discussing how time is “spent” in the context of everyday life, consumers either express an orientation towards past-time, future-time, or present-time. However, the authors acknowledge a key weakness in their paper, in that “a focus on isolated facets has likely hindered the growth of more in-depth knowledge on timestyles and their interrelations with consumer behavior” (Cotte et al. 2004, 333). Other scholars have also critiqued the aforementioned paper, suggesting that the inclusion of sociohistorical context “is done in an extremely cursory manner that rarely adds societal and cultural perspectives to the analysis but merely suggestive hints” (Askegaard and Linnet 2011, 393). To remedy this, further context on the ideological dimensions of temporality in the marketplace must be drawn.

**Acceleration in the marketplace**

Temporal acceleration as an ideology has been the curious topic of many marketing scholars who have examined the broader effects of an accelerated temporality through the context of a specific industry or phenomenon in the marketing system. Denegri-Knott (2011) examines how heightened temporality in the marketplace affects consumer desires and the pleasure experienced from consumption. The ecommerce marketplace of eBay “never ceases to signal new possibilities in finding desired goods” and thus “sets in motion accelerated cycles of
revelation, characterised by unexpected surprises and opportunities where desired goods can be acquired quickly” (373). (Importantly, when consumers are able to quickly complete a purchase in this environment, they miss out on the opportunity of experiencing the pleasure associated with a state of desire; in other words, a faster pattern of consumption is less desirable.)

Hadlaw (2011) examines how in the early years of the 20th century, advertisements for the telephone—especially those created for the American Telephone and Telegraph Company (AT&T)—did far more than sell the public on telephone service. Rather, these advertisements can be seen as constituting a pedagogy of modernity that was instrumental in shaping modern conceptions of time and space in the social imagination. The author argues that the tropes of speed employed in these advertisements aligned the possibilities touted by modern technology with the acceleration of capitalism itself.

Brewis and Jack (2005) examine Western constructions and experiences of time in late modernity by visually “reading” fast food advertisements published in the UK. Through this exercise, the authors develop a critique of global capital and the consequences it poses to the consumption of time in late modernity. The authors determine that in their context of study, time is portrayed as synonymous with speed. Further, fast food appeals to Westerners for both its functional and symbolic attributes. The authors explain that the perceived utility of fast food is a derivative of a culture that promotes “fast-paced, tightly packed lifestyles” (54). In this, the desirability of certain consumption choices is partially determined by “the wider social, historical, and cultural contexts within which our notions of time have developed” (ibid.). Following this line of reasoning, the authors conclude that “our understandings of time have been discursively conditioned” (ibid.) in modern consumer culture.
How did fast become normal in consumer culture?

The previous review of literature shows that a tempo of acceleration encapsulates the whole of the marketing system and that actors within the marketing system respond accordingly to this reality. But important questions remain: How did fast become normal in consumer culture? And what is considered “normal” anyway?

As interest becomes evident for understanding the tempo of today’s modern society, the forces behind this quickened cadence become more suspect. An understanding of the construction of social acceleration is needed. As a wide-sweeping phenomenon, with consequences for both marketing’s engagement in society and for the well-being of stakeholders within the marketing system, social acceleration presents itself as a critical discussion in which marketers should engage.

A recent review of the study of time in marketing (Carlson, Ross, Coulter, and Marquardt 2019) delineates an important difference between “subjective time” and “objective time” in past marketing research, in which “subjective” refers to the individual experience of time and “objective” refers to the “straightforward existence of clock time”. Carlson et al. ultimately conclude that marketers must understand time as something both subjective and objective. This is an important point that I largely agree with, though I find the authors’ use of the term “objective” to be problematic. This is because the notion of a purely “objective time” suggests that time is something that exists outside of individual interpretation as a stand-alone, external reality. This essay will argue against that assumption.

Instead, I will argue that “objective” time is indeed culturally and historically constructed. Further, this essay will show that marketing has played a crucial role in the formulation of what appears to be a natural, or “objective”, time. Rather, what appears to be
normal, or “just the way things are”, has been promoted throughout the development of contemporary consumer culture. As such, the arguments put forth in this essay assume an interpretive stance towards time, in that time is a notion that exists within a historically constructed conception of “what’s normal” in a given culture.

**Cultural Myths Create and Maintain Normalcy**

In order to understand how fast became normal in consumer culture, we must first explore how something becomes “normal” in society over time. Roland Barthes’ theory of semiology and interrogation of cultural myths in his 1957 *Mythologies* (later re-published in full, 2015) help us understand how meanings in consumer culture help constitute a social reality that repeatedly presents itself as “normal”.

*Mythologies* is a collection of cultural stories in which author Roland Barthes interrogates the meanings present behind commonplace objects and occurrences. Barthes refers to these stories as ‘cultural myths’. Cultural myths are sense-making devices, providing a lens of interpretation for the world around us. Cultural myths provide a sense of shared cultural meaning for all within a society to draw upon. Further, cultural myths seek to maintain a sense of social structure by stabilizing shared beliefs in a manner that can be passed down from generation to generation.

At the heart of cultural myth lies cultural sign-meanings. The foundations of semiology, or the science of signs, help explain the mechanism of cultural myth as described here. In particular, this paper focuses on the lineage of Swiss linguist and father of semiology, Ferdinand de Saussure. Saussure proposed a general science of sign meanings in 1916, postulating that a signifier (an object, or a carrier of meaning) acted upon a signified (a cognitive concept, or meaning itself) to form a sign (Barthes 1977).
Saussure conceptualized signs as organized in discourse through language, however, the applications of semiology go much further than the written or spoken word alone. Semiology today is a social science discipline that extends the laws of structural linguistics to other sign systems (Oswald 2012). A semiological perspective asserts that within any form of communication (from everyday interpersonal communication to the corporate design of commercial retail environments), a process of sign exchange and interpretation of sign meaning occurs. In this, semiology takes in any system of signs: “images, gestures, musical sounds, objects, and the complex associations of all these” (Barthes 1977, 9) to create systems of shared meaning in society.

In Saussure’s semiology, two types of meaning exist: denotation and connotation. Denotation indicates a direct, literal meaning that an object may carry, whereas connotation is a higher-order, constructed meaning. Denotation is simple and straightforward; connotation is a more complex structure, a product of human experience relying upon context and societal influence. In theorizing the existence of connotative meaning, Saussure provoked the idea that meaning itself is a social construction, rather than a product of nature (Oswald 2012). This led to new streams of thought regarding sign-systems and meaning construction, ultimately influencing the work of French semiotician Roland Barthes.

Furthering Saussure’s logic of connotations, Barthes developed the notion of cultural myth. Cultural myths are an extension of structural semiotics, repeated significations which become embedded in society as “normal”. In Saussure’s semiology, the relation between a signifier and signified produces a sign. In Barthes’ semiology, the sign is the starting point for the construction of a second-order mythical meaning. On the plane of myth, the sign is reduced back to a signifier (Barthes calls this a form) which represents a signified (Barthes calls this
concept), resulting in a cultural myth. Barthes describes the form as abstract, devoid of history, and hostile to meaning, whereas the concept is decidedly not abstract and thirsty for a new meaning. The combination of form and concept implants a “whole new history” into the resulting signification, or cultural myth (Barthes 2015, 226). Cultural myths are then held in society’s shared stock of meanings by institutions and public discourse. Through this symbolic repetition and cultural preservation process, cultural myths pass from pure semiology to social ideology.

Frustrated by the numerous historically and culturally constructed phenomena that were so easily accepted as natural truth in his day (Culler 2002), Barthes developed his theory of cultural myth as both a political and cultural critique. Mythologies is both an empirical and theoretical work, a composition of fifty-three short essays followed by a concluding chapter entitled “Myth Today” in which Barthes explains the theoretical foundations of cultural myth. The individual essays each interrogate a particular phenomenon, covering topics such as the Tour de France, laundry detergent, and professional wrestling. By examining how each of these seemingly natural occurrences came to be, and how these cultural occurrences work to normalize the accepted pattern of social relations, Barthes prods at the symbolic underpinnings of social institutions and the accepted cultural meanings that work to keep these institutions in place. The unrelenting goal of cultural myth is to maintain society in its current form (Barthes 2015). Cultural myths are not passive structures, but deterministic in nature. Through the exercise of interrogating common phenomena, Barthes reveals how cultural myths are motivated by history, masking the cultural and historical ways in which society is constructed. Rather, the semiotic myth aims to assure individuals of a natural social order, providing a clear lens for interpreting their individual reality. In this, cultural myths are “certain
to participate in the making of the world” (Barthes 2015, 271). Though written over sixty years ago in the context of colonial French society, Barthes’ logic of semiotic interrogation is relevant to multiple time periods, locations, and societies.

Cultural myths provide a sense of social structure that gives individuals within a culture a frame of reference for understanding everyday life. In marketing, brands and products often attach to cultural myths in order to resonate with a given cultural mood or historical moment (Holt 2004, Thompson 2004). This strategic positioning ensures that brand meanings are congruent with cultural meanings and therefore resonate with consumers living within a given cultural reality. Many marketers (brand marketers in particular) focus large amounts of effort on creating meaning for consumers through value propositions and brand positioning. However, it has been argued that brands and products don’t actually create their own meanings, but rather, ride on the coattails of already-existing and prominent cultural meanings (Holt 2006). Therefore, it is more imperative for marketers to instead discover and then manage meanings as they exist in the cultural imagination. Strategic marketing management of such meanings then reinforces them in consumer culture, resulting in the objectification, or the normalization, of cultural meanings.

**Cultural Construct of Time**

So, what’s normal in our culture regarding time? Time (even “objective” time) is a cultural construct, one that has been normalized through frequent repetition and social agreeance. Whitrow (1988) maintains that our relationship to time is rooted in culture and language. In other words, time is culturally-embedded at the deepest level of cultural understanding. Our learning of and relationship to time manifests from a cultural socialization process (ibid., 5). This socialization process allows individuals within a culture to participate in the rhythms and rituals of a given society. According to Usunier et al. (2005), “time has a strong
influence on how we function socially” as “it provides a common framework for activities and helps to synchronize individual human behavior” (18).

A universal notion of time within a culture is further supported and perpetuated by language. Examples across cultures indicate that a given culture’s construct of time is kept alive (or not) through language-meaning systems (Whitrow 1988, 11). In addition to giving meaning to an individual’s experience of time, language itself maintains the concept of time throughout history; it “inevitably introduce[s] an element of permanence into a vanishing world” (22).

In *Metaphors We Live By*, Lakoff and Johnson (2008) explore how “metaphorical expressions in everyday language can give us insight into the metaphorical nature of the concepts that structure our everyday activities” (7). One of the foremost metaphors the authors examine is that of “time is money”. Lakoff and Johnson agree with several of the authors mentioned previously in this essay that “time in our culture is a valuable commodity”, that “it is a limited resource that we use to accomplish our goals”, and that “time is precisely quantified” (8). The authors note that such conceptions specifically refer to the features of time in modern, industrialized societies and that “there are cultures where time is none of these things” (9), emphasizing again that time is a cultural construct. Lakoff and Johnson then provide several metaphorical examples in contemporary English which conceive of time as a limited resource and a valuable commodity: “You’re *wasting* my time. This gadget will *save* you hours. I don’t *have* the time to *give* you. How do you *spend* your time these days? That flat tire *cost* me an hour. I’ve *invested* a lot of time in her. I don’t *have* enough time to *spare* for that. You’re *running out* of time. You need to *budget* your time. *Put aside* some time for ping pong. Is that *worth* your while? Do you *have* much time left? He’s living on *borrowed* time. You don’t *use* your time profitably. *I lost* a lot of time when I got sick. Thank you for your time” (7-9).
**How do Western cultures view time?**

Different cultures experience unique social and historical constructions of time. In turn this affects how different cultures relate to and operate within time. In Western cultures, time is perceived as objective, linear, and accelerating.

First, time is perceived as objective. Whitrow (1988) explains that “most of us feel intuitively that time goes on forever of its own accord, completely unaffected by anything else, so that if all activity were suddenly to cease time would still continue without any interruption” (3). Despite these feelings, Whitrow maintains that “time is not universal or absolute” (4) even though we intuitively believe there exists an objective time. Rather, “what gives rise to these phenomena is the way we choose to measure time and relate it to the way we live” (ibid.). Indeed, our timekeeping practices are socially constructed (in our keeping of calendars, or in our fervent tracking of the time of day). Therefore even “objective” measures of time are not truly objective; they are socially constructed.

Second, time is perceived as linear. In developed, Western societies, “normative time is perceived as being linear, continuous, and economic” (Usunier et al. 2005, 18). In other words, one event occurs during any single time, and is followed by another singular event. This cultural conception of time is often referred to as “monochronic” time. This is opposed to a “polychronic” understanding of time, in which time is perceived as circular and enveloping, and in which multiple events may overlap at any given time (Bluedorn and Kaufman 1982). Monochronic normative time is so pervasive throughout Western culture that it is not often questioned in marketplace contexts.

For example, the American Time Use Survey (ATUS), sponsored by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, further cements the idea that time is a resource to be scheduled and managed.
Conducted since 2003, the survey measures the amount of time that Americans spend on everyday activities, such as meal preparation, work, sleep, childcare, and leisure time (Hamermesh, Frazis, and Stewart 2005). As an institutionalized function whose results are used to inform policy decisions, the American Time Use Survey further supports the division of time into fragmentable segments (i.e., resources) and reifies the cultural appetite for time as something to be accounted for.

Lastly, time is perceived in Western culture as modern and as something that perpetuates social acceleration. Whitrow (1988) argues that the fervent time-consciousness in Western societies is the very thing that distinguishes modern man from his forebears, explaining that, “in previous ages most people worked hard but worried less about time than we do. Until the rise of modern industrial civilization, people’s lives were far less consciously dominated by time than they have been since” (17). Whitrow continues, writing, “nowadays we are governed by time-schedules and many of us carry diaries, not to record what we have done but to make sure that we are at the right place at the right time” (18). As evidenced by the American Time Use Survey referenced above, such scheduling of time now trickles into every area of modern life.

Returning to Rosa’s Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity, acceleration directly stems from a cultural norm that holds time as objective and linear, in other words, a commodity resource. Rosa writes that, “the heightening of the pace of life should be understood as a result of the scarcity of time resources” (2013, 79). This certain view of time is synonymous with acceleration, and to better understand the phenomenon of social acceleration, we must understand this certain view of time. How did fast become normal? The cultural meanings and myths surrounding time begin to provide important socio-historical context for understanding
how the Western cultural construct of time became normal over time, and thus situates our growing understanding of social acceleration.

The Cultural Myth of “Time is Money”

In his 1748 pamphlet entitled *The American Instructor*¹, Founding Father of the United States Benjamin Franklin pens his ‘Advice to a Young Tradesman’,

> Remember that *time* is *money*. He that can earn Ten Shillings a Day by his Labour, and goes abroad, or sits idle one half of that Day, tho’ he spends but Sixpence during his *diversion* or *idleness*, ought not to reckon That the only Expence; he has really spent or rather thrown away Five Shillings besides. Remember that *credit* is *money*. If a Man lets his Money lie in my Hands after it is due, he gives me the Interest, or so much as I can make of it during that Time. This amounts to a considerable Sum where a Man has good and large Credit, and makes good Use of it.

In this widely-disseminated work, Franklin explains the economic principle of opportunity cost to his young (mostly male) colonial readers. Franklin hoped to remind his readers that there was indeed a price on time; time was a finite resource, objective and linear. And though it is likely that the proverb “time is money” did not originate with Benjamin Franklin (Villers and Mieder 2018), it was the historical character of Franklin, along with the later mythologized stature of his achievements and contributions to the building of America, that propagated this quip throughout the budding culture of the United States.

Benjamin Franklin lived his own life by the principle that time was a resource. In his famous autobiographical telling of a pursuit towards a virtuous life, Benjamin Franklin purported a certain use of time as “good”, “virtuous”, and “useful” (Franklin 1957/2007). Specifically, in regard to time, he emphasized the virtues of frugality and industry. When writing of frugality, Franklin vowed to “make no expense but to do good to others or yourself; i.e., waste nothing” (ibid., 79), and when writing of industry, his self-instruction was to “lose no time; be always employ’d in something useful; cut off all unnecessary actions” (ibid.). Franklin believed
that by striving for a set of virtues, a set of moral standards, he could be a good and useful citizen. In living his life this way and widely sharing his self-regulation practices, Franklin set a cultural standard for successful living. Since Franklin was indeed himself a useful citizen, and he himself abided by the principle that time was a resource to be rigorously managed in daily life, it thus became “good sense” to follow his example.

The impact of such a strongly held cultural belief cannot be overlooked. As the "time is money" sentiment became repeated over and over again in common language, referenced to in popular culture, and transcribed in history books, the idea itself became immortalized. The repeated significations of this message are now ideology, a cultural myth. The cultural myth that “time is money” now permeates every aspect of American culture. In the social imagination of the US, most agree that time is a resource to be managed and optimized. This enduring conception of time drives many agreed-upon cultural norms, norms which are often left unquestioned.

However, such an understanding of time is indeed a result of historical construction. Whitrow reminds us that, “just as our idea of history is based on that of time, so time as we conceive it is a consequence of our history” (1988, 186). Roland Barthes agrees with this sentiment more broadly: cultural myths are the result of historical construction. Understanding the historical construction of the “time is money” cultural myth can provide a deeper understanding of how fast became normal, lending to the cultural acceptance of an ever-increasing state of social acceleration. Importantly, as purveyors of consumer culture and marketing systems, marketing scholars should be curious about marketing’s role in this historical construction. How has marketing helped normalize the cultural myth of “time is money”? We
can explore this by looking at how temporality has been reflected in consumer culture over the years.

**Interrogating “Time is Money” in Consumer Culture**

Roland Barthes believed that cultural myths remain “a delusion to be exposed” (Culler 2002). Cultural myths are exposed through processes of semiotic interrogation. This study aims to do just that. A Barthes-inspired semiotic analysis will demonstrate how the cultural myth of “time is money” has been naturalized throughout the symbolic meaning structures of modern consumer culture. By looking at how artifacts of the marketing system have legitimized, institutionalized, and reinforced the cultural myth of "time is money”, rendering it “normal”, we may better understand marketing’s role in the broader phenomenon of temporality and social acceleration.

The methodological logic guiding this study derives from Roland Barthes’ essay, “Rhetoric of the Image”, published in *Music, Image, Text* (Barthes, 1977). In this essay, Barthes maintains that advertisements may be read as cultural artifacts that work to naturalize deeper ideological cultural myths in the shared meaning systems of society through their proliferation in consumer culture. This idea is later supported by marketing scholars such as Grant McCracken (1986), John Sherry (1987), and Janet Borgerson and Jason Schroeder (2002).

For example, in the development of his 1986 Meaning Transfer Model on Advertising, McCracken maintains that advertising is an instrument of meaning transfer between the culturally constituted world and consumption of consumer goods: “Advertising works as a potential method of meaning transfer by bringing the consumer good and a representation of the culturally constituted world together within the frame of a particular advertisement” (74). In agreement with Barthes’ belief that the intentions behind advertising images are clear, as the
construction of advertising meanings are intentionally and completely thought-through in the midst of the creative process, McCracken explains that: “The creative director of an advertising agency seeks to conjoin these two elements in such a way that the viewer/reader glimpses an essential similarity between them. When this symbolic equivalence is successfully established, the viewer/reader attributes to the consumer good certain properties s/he knows exist in the culturally constituted world. The known properties of the culturally constituted world thus come to reside in the unknown properties of the consumer good and the transfer of meaning from world to good is accomplished” (74). It is this thoughtful consideration of meaning transfer from producer to consumer that renders the signs present in advertising images especially ripe for semiotic interrogation; the intentions behind advertising messages are easily made explicit once examined.

Borgerson and Schroeder push the notion of advertisements as cultural artifacts further, explaining that visual representations in marketing communication can also “create meaning within a circuit of culture that often extends beyond what may be intended by photographers, art directors, advertising agencies, and firms whose products are advertised” (2002, 570). The authors echo Sherry’s 1987 sentiment that advertising plays an important role in the sociology of knowledge in that it presents a way of construing and knowing the world around us. According to Borgerson and Schroeder, “advertising both reflects and creates social values” (574).

Lastly, it is important to consider the historical dimension of advertising in the interrogation of “time is money”. Since cultural myths are the result of historical construction, it is important to understand not just how signifiers communicate meaning in the present moment, but also how signifiers have communicated meaning in the past; how temporality has been expressed throughout the history of US consumer culture will duly affect how temporality now resides in
the contemporary social imagination. Therefore, this essay acknowledges the diachronic nature of “time is money” and analyzes the cultural meanings surrounding time in a historical fashion.

Data Collection: Excavating the Archive of Evidence

The author collected both contemporary (ranging from 2000-2019) and historical (ranging from 1900-1999) advertisements portraying temporality in the marketplace. Advertising images were selected from archives such as the Duke Ad*Access project\(^1\), The Advertising Archives\(^2\), Vintage Ad Browser\(^3\), and the UC Davis Marchand Archive\(^4\) between the months of June and October 2019. When browsing the archives, the author searched for examples of time, speed, and efficiency as concepts promoted in a variety of industries and decades.

From these source archives, where over 10,000 market objects were viewed, the author chose 498 initial objects to be included in the Archive of Evidence. These 498 objects were chosen based on their expression of time being positioned or promoted as a resource. Upon adding an object to the original Archive of Evidence, the author noted a rationale for in-the-moment selection of each object. For example, figure 3, a 1965 Swissair advertisement, showcases a bullockcarro (a traditional Madeiran bull drawn carriage) beneath the promise that “The Swiss will jet you from New York to Lisbon in 6 ½ hours. Once you get there, things slow down considerably”. This object was added for its “interesting cultural juxtaposition between fast and slow, modern and traditional” and its “escapement of fast-paced New York City” (author notes).

\(^1\) https://repository.duke.edu/dc/adaccess
\(^2\) https://www.advertisingarchives.co.uk/en/page/show_home_page.html
\(^3\) http://www.vintageadbrowser.com/
\(^4\) https://marchand.dss.ucdavis.edu/
While a variety of market objects (including video advertisements, industry trend reports, consumer media, and in-store retail displays and signage, product packaging, and products themselves) were initially collected for the Archive of Evidence, the author decided to focus the Archive solely on advertising images in pursuit of analytical consistency. Since advertising images share a consistent medium of communication, a singular and more uniform analytic method could be applied to each of the objects in the Archive of Evidence. The decision to only analyze advertisement images (inclusive of both print and digital advertisements) brought the number of objects in the Archive down from 498 to 370.
**Processing the Data**

Data for the Archive of Evidence was dually stored in Evernote, a visual note-taking software and Excel, a spreadsheet software. Evernote provided visual organization of the images and their respective properties utilizing tagging features, while Excel allowed textual organization of each advertisement’s properties and the ability to quantify certain aspects of the coding process.

An initial coding process for the 370 advertising images included in the Archive of Evidence identified basic information for each object, including notation of industry, brand, product, year, decade, and medium. Additionally, the initial coding process identified key semiotic signifiers in each image. When this initial coding process was complete, the author analyzed the data set in Excel for emerging trends.

It was noted, for example, that 7 conglomerated industries accounted for 92% of the total Visual Archive: Health & Beauty, Transportation (including automotive, locomotive, and aeronautical), Food, Media & Communications, Business & Finance, Technology, and Home (including appliances and Consumer Packaged Goods). It was also noted that two-thirds of the collected historical advertisements came from the 1930’s-1960’s.
Lastly, an initial ranking system was used to indicate each advertisement’s strength in presenting time as a resource, as perceived by the author. According to this ranking system, 37%
of advertisements in the Archive of Evidence strongly presented time as a resource, 48% of advertisements moderately presented time as a resource, and 15% of advertisements somewhat presented time as a resource. Based on these initial observations, the author decided to focus the Archive of Evidence into a more focused Interpretive Sample for rhetorical analysis.

*Narrowing the Data: Selecting the Interpretive Sample*

A secondary selection of data became the focused sample from which the author interrogated the “time is money” cultural myth. In this second round of data selection, the number of objects was narrowed from 370 to 152. In order to select the Interpretive Sample, the author analyzed data primarily by industry while also taking into account the decade in which the advertisement was published and the strength of temporal communication present in each advertising image. This focus allowed for a breadth of marketplace representation and for the unique history of each developing industry to be factored into the overall interpretation of temporal rhetoric in the US marketplace. The Interpretive Sample was selected according to seven predominate industries present in the Archive of Evidence: Health & Beauty, Transportation, Food, Media & Communication, Business & Finance, Technology, and Home.

*Health & Beauty*

The health and beauty industry grew substantially in the 20th century as a result of several cultural factors such as women’s magazines, Hollywood notions of beauty as proliferated through color films, and television commercials promoting at-home health and beauty routines for the modern woman (Boyd 2020). The Archive of Evidence contained 36 advertisements for products, services, and companies in the health and beauty industry. Relatively, the number of total images collected for this industry was less than the number of images collected for the other six industries in the Interpretive Sample. Therefore, the author decided to include all health
and beauty advertisements that strongly portrayed time as a resource, with advertisements ranging from the 1920s to the 2000s, as well as images categorized as moderately portraying time as a resource from the 1950s to the 2000s. As a result, 16 advertisements were added to the Interpretive Sample from this industry.

Transportation

In the 20th century, physical space experienced a great “shrinkage” or “compression” as a result of a steady gain in transportation technologies and capabilities (Rosa 2013). The most notable leaps occurred in the 20’s with the mass production and consumption of the personal automobile and then again in the 40’s and 50’s with the proliferation of professional airline travel. The Archive of Evidence contained 120 images for the transportation industry (including those for automotive, locomotive, and aeronautical). Additionally, each decade in the historical time period demonstrated a number of advertisements. (Notably, the 1930s and 1940s demonstrated higher amounts of advertisements within this industry.) Because of the high total number of advertisements in this industry, the author decided to only select images that strongly portrayed time as a resource in the transportation industry from the 20s-2000s. Thirty-eight (38) images from the Transportation industry were included in the Interpretive Sample.

Food

The Archive of Evidence contained 76 advertisements coded as belonging to the food industry. A histogram of these advertisements revealed that 68% of the images were published in 5 decades: the 1930s-1970s. Further, a strong majority (76%) of the food advertisements that strongly portrayed time as a resource appeared within these same decades. Historical context can provide some insight as to why the middle of the century saw a boom a food industry advertising. First, there were increased food efficiencies during the Great Depression and during
World War II. In the decades that followed, small kitchen appliances (such as the microwave, invented in 1946) forever changed the pace of life in the kitchen and increased a demand for convenience goods in the postwar era. The author determined that 25 advertisements, those which strongly portrayed time as a resource and were published in the 1930s-70s, would be included in the Interpretive Sample.

*Media & Communications*

By the end of World War II, 95% of all homes had radios (Boyd 2020). Shortly after, television began to erode radio’s popularity (ibid.). The first email was sent in the 1960s, digital file sharing began in the 1970s, and in 1989, the world wide web was created (Roser, Ritchie, and Ortiz-Ospina 2020). By 2000, nearly half of all Americans were online (ibid.). The Media and Communications industry is marked by the continuous innovation of technologies, as well as rapid consumer adoption to these new technologies. The Archive of Evidence contained 26 advertisements for Media and Communications products and companies between the 1910s-2000s. A histogram revealed an even distribution among these years, with a slight uptick in advertisements collected from the 1920s. The author decided to include all images that strongly and adequately portrayed time as a resource in this industry in the Interpretive Sample; 24 images were included.

*Business & Finance*

The Archive of Evidence contained 42 advertisements representing the business and financial industries. By far, the most advertisements collected for this industry appeared in the 1930s-1960s. This likely reflects the jump in productivity of capital-flows that followed American manufacturing, trade, and corporate business in the inter-war period and after World War II (Cross 1993). Such industrialization of society resulted in a burgeoning business and finance
industry to effectively manage materials and resources. Therefore, the author selected all images that strongly and moderately portrayed time as a resource in this industry from the 1930s-1960s. As a result, 28 advertisements from Business and Finance were included in the Interpretive Sample.

Technology

Throughout the 20th century, steady gains were made in all areas of technology, from the Bell telephone and IBM computer calculators to the more recent Mac personal computers and Intel computer processors. The Archive of Evidence contained 58 advertisements representing the technology industry from the 1910s-2000s. The author felt it was important to capture the breadth of time period represented, and so all advertisements that strongly portrayed time as a resource during this time period were included in the Interpretive Sample. The Interpretive Sample contains 25 advertisements representing the technology industry.

Home

Home life changed significantly throughout the 20th century, and advertisements from this historical time period reflect that. The advent of time-saving home appliances and consumer packaged goods (CPG) are examples of phenomena that shifted the way of life for Americans in the home. The Archive of Evidence contained 30 advertisements representing the Home industry. By far, the greatest number of advertisements for this industry appeared in the 1920s-1960s. (Notably, the archive of evidence did not include any advertisements from the 1940s in this industry.) This perhaps reflects a response to undersupply of consumer products during World War I, an entrepreneurial lag in the 40’s resulting from the ongoing war and the Great Depression of the 30’s, and the jump in suburban home ownership that boomed in the postwar era. The author included all images from the Archive of Evidence that strongly
and moderately portrayed time as a resource in this industry from the 20s-60s. Seventeen (17) advertisements representing the Home industry (including appliances and CPG) were included in the Interpretive Sample.

**Rhetoric of the Image**

The interpretation methodology for this project derives from Barthes’ “Rhetoric of the Image” (1977). In this essay, Barthes maintains that advertising images contain three distinct messages: 1) the linguistic message, 2) the symbolic message, and 3) the literal message. For this study, each of these messages were analyzed individually, carefully pressing into the meanings of each one, before combining the three messages in order to interpret the totalizing rhetoric of the image.

The linguistic message contains three elements to consider: the denotated textual message, the connotated textual message, and anchorage between text and visual signifieds. The denotated message includes all captions, labels, brand names, and copy present on the advertisement. The first step in the analysis of each advertisement was therefore to list out all of the denotated messages present. For the below advertisement (figure 6) the denotated messages are: “Snap out of afternoon drowsy time”; “You yawn.. you’re tired… and you lag in your work”; “Refresh yourself”; “Bounce back to normal”; “Take a minute for an ice-cold Coca Cola and bounce back to normal”; “The pause that refreshes”; “Scientific”. Next, the connotated message captures what each of the aforementioned denoted messages imply. In other words, what is the second-order meaning behind the simply put denotated meaning? For example, in figure 6, the denoted messages are pressed into further, and one meaning that emerges is the implication that: “It is not acceptable to be tired and lagging in your work… snap out of it and snap back to your productive
self with Coca Cola, a formula backed by science”. The last consideration in interpreting the linguistic message is that of anchorage. Anchorage refers to the role of text in directing the reader through the various signifieds present in the image. Because any combination of image and text can lend itself to multiple interpretations, advertisers intentionally design advertisements in such a way that narrows the scope of interpretation in order to reduce consumer confusion and increase rates of ad effectiveness. In Barthes’ words, advertisers are skilled in “remote-controlling [readers] towards a meaning chosen in advance” (1977, 40). Anchorage is important to notate because it “helps me to choose the correct level of perception” and “permits me to focus not simply my gaze but also my understanding” (ibid., 39). As an interpretive researcher, analyzing anchorage helps reassure that interpretation is in a similar vein as its intended message. In the below advertisement (image 6), the text acts as an anchor to the image of the man yawning and the image of a hand holding up a coke bottle, as the text “snap out of afternoon drowsy time” informs me that coke is a modern marvel that can overcome the natural demands placed on me by my body.
The symbolic message considers the connotated sign meanings present in the visual image. For this step in reading the image, Barthes maintains that not all visual elements are important signifiers of meaning. Rather, it is up to the researcher to discern, based on their lexicons, the essential characteristics of the image that portray meaning (1977, 47). In analyzing the symbolic message of the above advertisement (image 6), the researcher noted the following significations: “Man wearing a business suit and yawning = the demands of the day are
exhausting in the corporate workplace” and “Hand holding up a Coca Cola bottle = this product is held up as the standard solution for this type of problem”. Sign meanings indeed require cultural knowledge to interpret, and it can be helpful if the researcher is familiar with the mores, traditions, and cultural values of the cultural context of which they are studying. Such is the case with this essay, in which the author was born in raised in the midwestern United States, arguably the “mass-consumer middle” for which the studied advertisements were intended.

The literal message of an image considers the straightforward, denotated meanings present in the image which work to naturalize the linguistic and symbolic messages. For this step of the analysis, all messages without a code were identified. A message without a code is one in which the signifier and the signified are the same. For example, in the above advertisement (image 6), the signifier of a hand holding a glass bottle of Coca Cola equals the signified of an actual bottle of the syrupy drink. There’s nothing more to think about here, just a refreshing afternoon drink on offer. The object is the object, nothing more. Such signs are included in the image in order to assure the reader that there no “hidden signs” (i.e., that the reader should not be overly suspicious of the connotative meanings present in the text or the image, that the reader can take the entire advertisement at face value, and that the message in its entirety can be trusted and absorbed). It is only when this image of the hand holding a Coke bottle is highlighted in a yellow circle and super-imposed onto a yawning businessman that the connotative messages emerge. Combined with the previous linguistic and symbolic messages, the literal message becomes suspect. Importantly, the literal message alone does not require cultural knowledge to interpret, rather the innate rules of visual processing are used to notate the signs present. Ultimately, it is these naturalizing messages without a code that reveal to the researcher how the cultural myth of “time is money” has been naturalized through
advertising messages. While the analysis of the linguistic message and the symbolic message are important for revealing key themes, or shades of meaning, within this cultural myth, it is the analysis of these naturalizing signs that make the mundane, everyday, “normalized” character of this cultural myth come to life.

After analyzing each of the three messages (linguistic, symbolic, and literal) for each advertisement in the Interpretive Sample, the messages were combined in order to develop an interpretive, cultural understanding of the total image. For this process, the author reviewed the analysis for each of the three messages individually and then sought to interpret the “totality of the utterances emitted” (Barthes 1977, 47). As the author considered the multiple messages present, a short description (containing 1-3 sentences) was developed to describe the emerging rhetoric of the image, or the main essence of communication transmitted by the advertisement. In reading the image and writing rhetorical descriptions, the author drew upon “different types of knowledge: practical, national, cultural, aesthetic” (ibid., 46). For example, the advertisement pictured above in image 4 garnered the following short description: “There is no time to lag at work; fatigue is bad but it can be overcome. This product can help you have more energy and get more work done. Backed by science… it works.” These short descriptions then became source material for identifying emergent rhetoric themes for each image. Rhetoric themes were given 1-3 shorthand keywords and elaborated upon with a developing definition of the thematic meaning present in each image. For example, the advertisement pictured above in image 6 garnered the three keywords: energy, modern, and triumph. Each image was assigned up to but no more than three rhetoric themes (several images were assigned two rhetoric themes and a few images were assigned a single rhetoric theme).
Discovering Rhetorical Themes

Emergent rhetoric themes were discovered iteratively throughout the process of analyzing each individual advertisement in the Interpretive Sample. Themes that emerged from the analysis of one advertisement could be assigned to a subsequent advertisement if appropriate. Likewise, each newly analyzed advertisement in the Interpretive Sample could yield a unique rhetoric theme if the meanings present in the image demanded a thematic categorization not previously developed during an analysis of a preceding object in the Interpretive Sample. In this way, the rhetoric themes deriving from each object were constantly compared to the rhetoric themes that emerged throughout the interpretive sample. Therefore, themes across each of the advertisements became apparent, and thematic stories, or definitions of each rhetoric theme, were discovered. These definitions were adjusted throughout the analysis process to most appropriately reflect the essence of the thematic meaning as represented by all of the advertisements conveying that theme. For example, the rhetoric theme of ‘Modern’ (which in its final definitional form indicates that "Fastness is synonymous with modernization; the result of scientific progress") did not originally include the second portion about scientific progress. However, multiple images implied that scientific progress had moved society into a more modern state, and so this additional qualifier was added to the final definition. Since these thematic definitions evolved throughout the analysis process, the researcher reviewed each of the images again upon completion of the initial analysis to ensure that the definitions assigned to each rhetoric theme still captured the essence of each image categorized into that rhetoric theme.

The researcher began with a blank slate of zero rhetoric themes, and after analyzing the 152 images in the Interpretive Sample, identified 21 unique rhetoric themes. Each rhetoric theme
is a unique translation of the ideology surrounding temporality. These themes, their definitions, and illustrative examples follow in the next section.

Findings

The goal of this semiotic interrogation is to discover the various meanings that arise from the portrayal of temporality in consumer culture. Rhetorical analysis of the Interpretive Sample yielded 21 unique rhetorical themes. Those themes and their definitions are presented in the table below and expanded upon with examples and explanations following the table.

Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rhetoric Theme</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American</td>
<td>“Fastness is patriotic, democratic, and American. We as a society benefit when we all go fast.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competitive</td>
<td>“Fast is a competitive advantage (in war, in corporate competition, in keeping up with personal affairs, etc.)”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convenience</td>
<td>&quot;Today's pace of life demands convenience; solutions promising speed can ease your burden.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desirable</td>
<td>“Fastness is desirable, an aspirational trait.” (This includes the equation of ‘fast’ with other aspirational traits like ‘sexy’, ‘youthful’, ‘fashionable’, and ‘happy’.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic</td>
<td>&quot;Our economy requires fast and efficient consumption of inputs in order to quickly produce outputs; we're always driving for growth.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escape time</td>
<td>&quot;If you (earn) and spend enough money, you can escape time.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fast is Better</td>
<td>&quot;Fast is better than not fast. (Conversely, slow is bad.)&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glorification</td>
<td>“Fast is something religious; an idol to be worshiped and glorified.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modern</td>
<td>&quot;Fastness is synonymous with modernization; the result of continuous scientific progress and innovation, engineering.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More energy</td>
<td>&quot;Today's pace of life requires more energy in order to keep up with everyday demands.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More efficient</td>
<td>&quot;Today's pace of life requires greater productivity (more accomplishments in the same amount of time) in order to keep up with everyday demands.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multitasking</td>
<td>&quot;Today's pace of life requires multitasking; you must blend together one or more activities (such as work and play, walking and talking, etc.) to keep up with everyday demands.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New technologies</td>
<td>&quot;New technologies allow you to maximize your time.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normal</td>
<td>&quot;Fast is normal; the social standard; the expectation.&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1. (Cont.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rhetoric Theme</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>&quot;You don't have to sacrifice quality in order to go faster; the fast version is on par with the traditional, slow version.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource</td>
<td>&quot;Time is a finite resource to be invested, spent, etc. for a certain return.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Round the clock</td>
<td>&quot;Non-stop, around the clock expectations demand higher frequency of activity.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scheduled</td>
<td>&quot;Time should be scheduled, regulated, measured, and managed.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time saving</td>
<td>&quot;Save time so that you can redirect time towards more work, leisure, etc.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triumph over time</td>
<td>&quot;There are no limits that cannot be broken; with enough speed It is possible to triumph over time, nature, the body, and social demands.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Way to success</td>
<td>&quot;Going faster is the way to be more successful in this society.&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**American**

“Fastness is patriotic, democratic, and American. We as a society benefit when we all go fast.”

Example advertisement in the American theme:

![Image](source: Vintage Ad Browser)

Figure 7.  
1943 advertisement for Kellogg’s cereal variety pack (Source: Vintage Ad Browser)
The rhetoric of this image communicates that, “Yes, this is a difficult time for our country when we must make many choices about where and how to expend resources… all Americans can do their small part by picking up one of these handy variety cereal packs... it saves time and other resources while giving you the energy you need to keep wartime efforts going strong.” Similarly, another advertisement in the American theme from the same year (figure 8) more strongly communicates that Americans should, “Be productive at all costs. Efficiency is patriotic. You know if you are actually maximizing the return on your time, and you must regulate yourself. Roll up your sleeves and let’s get to work.”

Figure 8.
1943 Acme Visible Records advertisement (Source: Vintage Ad Browser)
Competitive

“Fast is a competitive advantage (in war, in corporate competition, in keeping up with personal affairs, etc.)”

Example advertisement in the Competitive theme:

![Image of Teletype advertisement](Source: Vintage Ad Browser)

Figure 9.
1939 Teletype advertisement (Source: Vintage Ad Browser)

The rhetoric of this advertisement reassures business owners that the teletype (a precursor to the modern fax machine) allows for written messages to be sent across long distances. The rhetoric implies that, “When managing a complex shipping/freight business, this capability is crucial to streamlining operations and making your company more efficient. You can get ahead of wasted resources with prompt communication. If you use the teletype to your advantage, it can help you
beat your competition.” While it makes sense that business owners might be concerned with making choices that compress time in the management of their businesses, a similar logic of decision-making influences consumer choice in the marketplace as well. For example, when consumers are choosing between two brands, the promise of speed tips the scale. A 1957 advertisement for Bufferin pain reliever (figure 10) seems to say, “Your body is a well-understood machine, the modern technology harnessed in our product can make your body better faster - and that makes our product better than our competitor.”

![Bufferin Ad Image](image)

**Figure 10.**
1957 advertisement for Bufferin pain reliever (Source: Vintage Ad Browser)

*Convenience*

“Today’s pace of life demands convenience; solutions promising speed can ease your burden.”
Example advertisement in the Convenience theme:

![Swanson's fixed it for You! Complete Turkey Dinner on a Tray](image)

Figure 11.
1950 advertisement for Swanson’s frozen dinners (Source: Vintage Ad Browser)

Perhaps one of the industries that portrays the proliferation of modern “convenience” is that of prepared and semi-prepared food. In the above 1950 advertisement for Swanson’s frozen “TV tray” dinners (figure 11), consumers are assured that they, “no longer have to make choices: between watching TV and eating dinner; between quality meals and quick preparation”. Rather, the brand reminds the consumer that, “we’ve made it so you can have it all; this is a convenience to ease the burden of modern life.”
In the below advertisement from 1968 (figure 12), Morton’s assures consumers that the brand understands just how busy day-to-day life is. The brand also acknowledges that a day’s hard work is deserving of a quality, hearty dinner. The advertisement teases the consumer with an image of a savory meal before seeming to say, “Oh wait, you don’t have time to prepare this classic, home cooked meal” (thus creating a consumer desire and a problem) before offering themselves as a solution: “But we do! Instead of spending time in the kitchen, buy our frozen product instead; it’s more convenient, and it’s just as good as if you made it from scratch.”

Figure 12.
1968 advertisement for Morton’s frozen dinners (Source: Vintage Ad Browser)
Desirable

“Fastness is desirable, an aspirational trait.” (This includes the equation of ‘fast’ with other aspirational traits like ‘sexy’, ‘youthful’, ‘fashionable’, and ‘happy’.)

Example advertisement in the Desirable theme:

Figure 13.
1939 advertisement for U.S. Royal Master Tires (Source: Vintage Ad Browser)

Here, the tempo of American life is portrayed by young, smiling, thrill-seeking car passengers. A fast tempo is youthful, and in America, youthfulness is to be desired. This thrill-seeking is not completely care-free however, as the advertisement promises safety to complement the discovery of new speeds. The technical drawing of tire indicates that the tires on offer are well-engineered and of high quality. In addition, the clothing choice of the young adults (dresses, driving gloves,
and sports jackets) still reaffirms the calculated risk taking of driving on the open road. Acknowledging the desire for both speed and safety, the brand seems to say, “You live a fast, thrilling, and youthful life… our quality product can keep up with the demands stemming from this (and keep you safe on your thrill seeking!)” This is juxtaposed with a later advertisement in the same rhetorical category, a 1983 Honda motorcycle advertisement (figure 14). Here, the advertisement promises risk and a brief foray with trouble and consequences to provoke desire. “Faster than a speeding ticket,” the copy reads, provoking the reader to: “Break past speed limits” because “a thrilling life is a fast life.”

Figure 14.
1983 Honda motorcycle advertisement (Source: Vintage Ad Browser)

Economic

"Our economy requires fast and efficient consumption of inputs in order to quickly produce outputs; we're always driving for growth."
Advertisements in the Economic theme tend to position their value offering as something that can fuel economic endeavors. The above advertisement (figure 15) shows that, “America is a country built on budding capitalism and industry; to service the country by delivering oil quickly keeps the machine running for all of us.” Fast delivery of inputs sustains a continued output. A similar message is present in figure 16 below, in which an hourglass with just a bit of sand left makes the viewer feel nervous that they are constantly running out of time to take action; there is no room for missed opportunities in a competitive economy. The advertisement thus sends the rhetorical message that readers should, “maximize future profits by investing today in our fleet.
We are ready to work and take your business challenges head-on.” These advertisements suggest that there will be financial growth/return if resources are invested wisely.

Figure 16.
1932 advertisement for Lima Locomotive Works (Source: Vintage Ad Browser)

Other advertisements in the Economic rhetorical theme suggest a certain work ethic as a key input in a capitalist system. Figure 17 shows a Coca Cola advertisement in which both an office worker and a factory worker drink a Coke in order to continue with their day. This advertisement seems to say that, “No matter where you work, you are a part of the larger American project of capitalism. We can all come together and benefit from Coca Cola, the product that (in just a minute!) wipes away fatigue and keeps us all going.” and “Yes, tireless work is expected from you in this country, but there’s a simple solution for work-related fatigue: Coca Cola!” A similar
message is present in a 2007 advertisement for Intel computer processors (figure 18) in which Employees at cubicles are hunched over in sprinting starting position, awaiting a direction from their manager, who purportedly makes the decision about office computer purchases. The advertisement speaks to business managers to suggest that, “Everyday employees are essentially racers on starting blocks… unleash their power with this product, so they can maximize their productivity within their time constraints. This in turn allows them to maximize the return for your company.”

Figure 17.
1948 Coca Cola advertisement (Source: Vintage Ad Browser)
Escape Time

“If you earn (and spend) enough money, you can escape time.”

In a world where both time and money are resources, these two methods of payment can be used to disengage from the dominant temporal logic of society. Perhaps one of the most interesting illustrations of ‘escaping time’ is one that employs binary opposition to highlight cultural differences in relation to time. Below, a Japan Airlines advertisement (figure 19) draws a direct comparison between Japanese and American culture. The advertisement promotes an escape to Japan where life follows a more unhurried pace, and people are permitted to take their time. This

Figure 18.
2007 Intel advertisement for computer processors (Source: Vintage Ad Browser)
is in direct opposition to what is not said, however, which is that in the US, things are not allowed to be slow and unhurried. By escaping time for a brief period, the consumer may return to their culture of origin refreshed and ready to contribute once again to the dominant temporal logic of speed.

Figure 19.
1979 Japan Airlines advertisement (Source: Vintage Ad Browser)
Conversely, a similar message of ‘escaping time’ is conveyed in the following advertisement (figure 20) while remaining within the geographic confines of the United States. This 1976 advertisement for a Plymouth Fury automobile reads as: “an invitation to escape the already-paved roads of (a fast-paced) society and find adventure by exploring what lies outside these norms… without being too un-normal… you are tapping into the All-American spirit, after all.”

Figure 20.
1976 advertisement for the Chrysler Plymouth Fury (Source: Vintage Ad Browser)
**Fast is Better**

“Fast is better than not fast. (Conversely, slow is bad.)”

Example advertisement in the Fast is Better theme:

![Ozalid copier advertisement](image)

**Figure 21.**
1950 Ozalid copier advertisement (Source: Vintage Ad Browser)

In this advertisement, the repetition of ’60 times faster’ naturalizes the rhetorical theme that “fast is better” (than not fast). The consumer walks away understanding that this particular product is 60 times faster than others on the marketplace, but the human brain can’t register how fast 60
times faster really is, so it just sounds catastrophically more significant without much further thought. The message is continually repeated, the faster option is the better option.

**Glorification**

“Fast is something religious; an idol to be worshiped and glorified.”

Example advertisement in the Glorification theme:

![1932 General Electric advertisement for the Hotpoint electric range stove](image)

Figure 22.
1932 General Electric advertisement for the Hotpoint electric range stove (Source: The Advertising Archives)
In this advertisement (figure 22), women (acting in their expected gender roles of the time) stand around the new appliance with adoring looks on their faces, indicating that speed is captivating and meant to be adored. It’s as if the image says, “Stop whatever you are doing, and come over to your neighbor’s kitchen to see her new electric stove in action… it is an appliance so speedy that it is deserving of worship and praise. Thanks to the new technology of electricity (generated by our scientific labs) in this everyday product (stove), we (the brand, General Electric) are helping you in your day-to-day life.” The multiple women and their adoring gazes cement that fast is a cornerstone of awe. Glorification of fast is seen more explicitly in the below advertisement (figure 23) in which men stop in their tracks to salute and praise the newest form “swift” transportation.

Figure 23.
1932 Alcoa Aluminum advertisement (Source: Vintage Ad Browser)
**Modern**

“Fastness is synonymous with modernization; the result of continuous scientific progress and innovation, engineering.”

Example advertisement in the Modern theme:

![Image of 1959 advertisement for Philco Transac S-2000 computer system](image)

Figure 24.
1959 advertisement for Philco Transac S-2000 computer system (Source: Vintage Ad Browser)
“The World of Tomorrow is Now” is a bold statement that marks the Modern rhetoric theme. Modernity delivers the future through mastery of time and other resources. The advertising rhetoric of figure 24 seems to say, “This machine is the epitome of modern scientific progress; conquering over data processing to continue launching our society into the future.” Advertisements in the modern theme look to the future, to what’s next, and image what progress can be made. This message is reiterated in figure 25 below, in which modern art deco motifs showcase the idea that society has been built (and will continue to be built) by forward progress. Sketches of once-novel inventions fade away in the past behind a glass sand clock with sand running out, indicating that time is of the essence and society must quickly come up with the next, new thing before the existing thing becomes obsolete.

Figure 25.
1937 advertisement for Moly steel (Source: Vintage Ad Browser)
More Energy

“Today’s pace of life requires more energy in order to keep up with everyday demands.”

Example advertisement in the More Energy theme:

![Advertisement Image](image_url)

Figure 26.
1930 Battle Creek Food Co advertisement for cereal (Source: Vintage Ad Browser)

In the above advertisement (figure 26), Battle Creek Health Foods makes the compelling claim that special attention to nutrition can overcome the demands of everyday life and add “hours of
pep” to the day. “Buoyant energy”, “vim”, and “stamina” are all promoted side effects of the product on offer. Alka-Seltzer provides a similar rhetoric in the below advertisement (figure 27) as if to say, “You’ve had a long day in your modern office job that has worn you down physically and emotionally. Our product combats this and helps you cope with the demands of the pace of everyday life so that you can maintain your performance at work.” Of course, the product itself works quickly in its promise to help you “freshen up and feel better fast!”

Figure 27.
1960 Alka-Seltzer advertisement (Source: Vintage Ad Browser)
More Efficient

"Today's pace of life requires greater productivity (more accomplishments in the same amount of time) in order to keep up with everyday demands."

Example advertisement in the More Efficient theme:

Figure 28.
1920 advertisement by the American Telephone and Telegraph Company (Source: Vintage Ad Browser)

Advertisements in the More Efficient theme differ from rhetorical promises present in the other themes to “save time” or “go faster” in that they focus on maximizing the units of activity, or productivity, within a static period of time. The above advertisement (figure 28) showcases how the telephone “is the most effective agency for making minutes more useful, more efficient.”
Superimposed over past, less efficient means of connecting people and information (a steamboat, a locomotive, a trolley, an automobile), the telephone is the predominant choice for maximizing the use of a minute. In the below advertisement (figure 29), a clock denotes “5:00 pm”, indicating the end of the workday; time allotted to work here is finite. Yet, the Clary calculator allows its users to maximize their productivity within these bounds of time.

Figure 29.
1948 advertisement for the Clary calculator (Source: Vintage Ad Browser)
**Multitasking**

"Today's pace of life requires multitasking; you must blend together one or more activities (such as work and play, walking and talking, etc.) to keep up with everyday demands."

Example advertisement in the Multitasking theme:

![Multitasking Advertisement](image)

In the above advertisement (figure 30), the Car-Phone appeals to the person who realizes they can’t afford to budget their time to a single activity at a time: in this case, driving or talking on the phone. In order to accomplish what they desire, and to stay ahead of the quickening competition, multitasking is required. It’s as if the rhetoric of this advertisement says, “Sitting in traffic on the way to work is wasted time… make better use of this sunk cost (time) by connecting up with a car-phone so that you can conduct business on the go! This will give you a
head start, a competitive advantage, over your peers and help you on your way to corporate success.” The signifiers work to blend the boundaries between home and office while highlighting the dichotomy between success and failure; with the recipe for success being multitasking.

**New Technologies**

"New technologies allow you to maximize your time."

Example advertisement in the New Technologies theme:

![Figure 31. 1930 advertisement for Royal Typewriters (Source: Vintage Ad Browser)](image)

One can hardly miss the largely denoted promise of ‘SPEED’ in the above advertisement (figure 31). Complemented by a colorful illustration of a meteor crashing onto the earth, it is as if to say, “this typewriter is a futuristic phenomenon landing into our modern world... and nothing will be the same again.” The product delivers speed, and this hastened pace indeed changes everything.
A similar message is echoed in a later advertisement for an Apple personal laptop (figure 32, below). Here, the shiny, new product asserts its superior performance while challenging the very speed of light. New technologies in personal computing promise to connect users faster than ever and help consumers do more than ever before. The sheen on the apple logo and across the open lid of the laptop further reinforces this rhetoric.

Figure 32.
1999 advertisement for an Apple Power Mac G4 Computer (Source: Vintage Ad Browser)

*Normal*

"Fast is normal; the social standard; the expectation."

Example advertisement in the Normal theme:
Fastness represented as normalcy in advertising reassures consumers that everyone else is also adopting practices that increase their pace of life. In the above advertisement (figure 33), Quaker, once a brand known for slow-cooking oats over the stove, introduces its new Instant oatmeal variety, anchoring it to another newly adopted “instant” product: coffee. Quaker makes the argument that once you have one instant product, you might as well have another... and now your whole breakfast can keep up with your pace of life! The below advertisement (figure 34) also employs anchorage to suggest that the novel offer is becoming the new normal. In this Burger King advertisement, “60-second service” creates a new temporal expectation for consumers in the marketplace. A smiling employee, a happy customer, modern architecture, and proclamation
that Burger King is “America’s fastest growing chain” all suggest that, “Fast service is ‘of the times’” and that “everyone wins in this new normal”.

Figure 34.
1966 advertisement for Burger King (Source: The Advertising Archives)

**Quality**

"You don't have to sacrifice quality in order to go faster; the fast version is on par with the traditional, slow version."

Example advertisement in the Quality theme:
This Campbell’s vegetable soup advertisement suggests that, “there’s no reason anymore to partake in time-consuming activities such as chopping vegetables.” Rather, the brand urges consumers to, “let us take that burden from you,” while reassuring them that, “our product is just as good as if you made it yourself.” Advertisements in this rhetorical theme make quality claims, reassuring consumers that there is no tradeoff when choosing between an old, traditional version and a new, faster option. Often seen in the convenience foods category, such rhetoric creates new consumer expectations around how much time should be expected to achieve a specified level of quality. Whereas typically, more time invested in the creation of something is perceived to yield a higher quality, these advertisements reassure consumers that this isn’t necessarily true. Similarly in figure 36, Bisquick assures consumers that they can: “Enjoy the real thing, but
without the time investment. The old way of making shortcake is indeed delicious, but laborious... using our product delivers a quality shortcake in less time.”

Figure 36.
1954 advertisement for Bisquick Baking Mix (Source: Vintage Ad Browser)

Resource

"Time is a finite resource to be invested, spent, etc. for a certain return.”

Example advertisement in the Resource theme:
This Microsoft Excel advertisement (figure 37) employs a direct use of the phrase “time is money” as if to say, “time is a resource, equitable to and just as finite as money, and our product offering can help keep you from losing it all…” The trickling away of time is equated with a waste of resources, in other words, mismanaged time results in financial loss. A similar consumer fear of mismanaged resources is played upon more optimistically in the below Delta Airlines advertisement (figure 38) in which the brand assures, “We acknowledge that you don’t have a lot of this precious resource, and we are here to help you maximize your efficiency.”
You’ll love that Delta flies fast and efficiently, so as to not waste your time.”

Figure 38.
1994 advertisement for Delta Airlines (Source: Vintage Ad Browser)

**Round the Clock**

"Non-stop, around the clock expectations demand higher frequency of activity."

Example advertisement in the Round the Clock theme:
After the war, globalization efforts were rampant (such as the Bretton Woods agreement, which argued that countries that are economically linked won’t want to go to war with each other). Global communications compressing space and time were one way to ensure that the world become more connected and that peace was kept. In the case of the above advertisement (figure 39), international telephone and telegraph services allowed for manufactures to take advantage of the different capabilities and time zones throughout the world to keep their production, people, and ideas running around-the-clock.
This advertisement and the following one both draw upon images of globes to suggest that the natural earth revolves around human-constructed notions of mechanical time. As the earth spins, so too do the hands around a clock face, and it is in human’s best interest to constantly keep up with this natural cycle. In figure 40, American Airlines assures that, “We work around the clock because that is what is expected of our nation, its citizens, and its resources. America is a country of citizens working hard around the clock; not wasting any time. We work around the clock, too, to support you in the pursuits which make this nation the best.”

Figure 40.
1944 advertisement for American Airlines (Source: Vintage Ad Browser)
"Time should be scheduled, regulated, measured, and managed."

Example advertisement in the Scheduled theme:

![Figure 41. 1920 advertisement for Radiolite watches (Source: The Advertising Archives)](image)

This advertisement (figure 41) draws attention to man’s various activities throughout the day and draws upon the biblical principle that there is a “time for all times”. The rhetoric of this advertisement says that, “The typical day is filled with many different activities; and the timing of each of these activities should be regulated and scheduled. If you have a Radiolite watch, you can effectively manage your time throughout the day.” This message is reinforced by images of personal watch devices triangulating the text, reminding the reader that timekeeping anchors
daily activities. The next advertisement (figure 42) draws upon the wartime tension of the early 1940’s to position effective management of time as a matter of life and death. Dramatic copy such as “It all happens in an infinitesimal fraction of time, so fast you wouldn’t think a few millionths of a second would make any difference” suggests that every unit of time, even a second, must be precisely broken down and managed in order to survive. Scientific advancement allows such precision, and as such, allows the continuance of life.

Figure 42.
1943 DuMont advertisement (Source: Duke Ad*Access)
**Time Saving**

"Save time so that you can redirect time towards more work, leisure, etc."

Example advertisement in the Time Saving theme:

![Image of 1931 advertisement for Dole canned pineapple](image)

**Figure 43.**
1931 advertisement for Dole canned pineapple (Source: Vintage Ad Browser)

The promise of saving time guarantees a deposit back into a consumer’s “time budget”. Such appeals are present in advertisements selling both mundane, household tasks and products to existential life choices and directions. In figure 43, Dole presents “time-saving tidbits”, a pleasant alliteration to sum up the true value of its canned pineapple product: it saves you the time it would have taken to procure a whole pineapple and meticulously peel, de-core, and slice it into presentable cubes. As a result, you now can spend more time setting a beautiful place setting, or adding delicate cookies to your dinner spread. Advertisements like the one
below (figure 44) further encourage consumers to reinvest the time that the brand’s offering saves them. Here, Lanier suggests that, “Truly important and successful people in society almost have it all… but they don’t have time. This Christmas season of charity, give a product that can help the busy people in your life save time in their work life so that those time savings can be reinvested elsewhere.” This is most clearly denoted in the appeal to “give a busy executive more time to spend at home.”

Figure 44.
1978 Lanier Dictaphone advertisement featuring Arnold Palmer (Source: Vintage Ad Browser)
**Triumph Over Time**

"There are no limits that cannot be broken; with enough speed It is possible to triumph over time, nature, the body, and social demands."

Example advertisement in the Triumph Over Time theme:

![Figure 45. 1946 advertisement for Till Master (Source: Vintage Ad Browser)](image)

Time is perceived as both a physical and social boundary. Advertisements in the Triumph Over Time theme seek to dissolve that boundary and suggest a certain triumph over the limits placed on our life by a finite amount of time. In the above advertisement (figure 45), Till Master wrestles with the physical amount of time it takes to rebuilt fertile soil in order to keep up with agricultural practices which support a growing population. The ad flouts that their product is ‘Like nature... but fast!’ to suggest that the natural way is slow (too slow) to keep up with
modern day demands and that their product can overcome this limit. It’s as if the rhetoric reads, “Why wait for nature to take its sweet time? Modern machinery can get the same results, but faster! Master over the heartland soil, master over your destiny.” The below advertisements (figures 46 and 47) suggests a similar mastery over time but speaks about time as a socially constructed concept rather than a naturally occurring one. The rhetoric of this advertisement reads, “Our new technologies are breaking barriers in what humans thought was possible; we can go faster than our self-imposed limits.”

Figure 46. 1961 advertisement for Douglas aircraft (Source: Vintage Ad Browser)
Way to Success

"Going faster is the way to be more successful in this society."

Example advertisement in the Way to Success theme:
Advertisements in the Way to Success theme assert that efficient management of time as a resource, e.g., to be productive, energetic, and otherwise swift in the use of time, is the way to a successful standing in society. The above advertisement for Collier’s Books recommends that just 15 minutes a day of time well invested can result in a vastly more rewarding (and rewarded) life. For example, the rhetoric of the advertisement above (figure 48) reads, “You have a busy day, but surely you have fifteen minutes to read. But it’s not just enough that you read… but that you read the right things. Invest your downtown more efficiently, and this will improve your social standing in society.” The below advertisement (figure 49) suggests that, “Outstanding, truly successful people, are not standing still… they are not dormant, they are always moving and always pushing forward, always accelerating… this is the way to success and they are...”
having fun on their way there.” The following two advertisements (figures 50 and 51) also present versions of what it takes to ‘get up in the world’ or model one's life after past successful people. In an advertisement for 7-up, the text reminds us that to be successful in American society, you have to tap into the energy of youth displayed in the imagery; “If you are going places, this product gives you the energy to keep going and keep pursuing your goals.” An advertisement for Apple personal computers maintains that, “computers are no longer just for connecting businesses and making them more efficient… it is the new normal for the everyday person. The picture of Ben Franklin in a modern context using the personal computer reinforces the notion that time should be used efficiently as a resource, and that by using this product, you can continue in this spirit of American ethos.”

Figure 49.
1993 advertisement for IBM careers (Source: Vintage Ad Browser)
Figure 50.
1961 advertisement for 7-up soda (Source: Vintage Ad Browser)

Figure 51.
1980 advertisement for Apple personal computers (Source: Vintage Ad Browser)
Contribution: The Historical Construction of “Time is Money” In Marketing

Interrogating the cultural myth of “time is money” helps us better understand the historical construction and reification of acceleration in society, and marketing’s contribution to the normalization of a hastened temporal perspective. By analyzing the rhetoric of historical advertising images in the United States, it is clear that repeated significations perpetuate the cultural myth of “time is money”. This ideology that time is a resource to be managed and maximized has thus become omnipresent, if only perceived yet nearly unnoticeable, in the marketing environment and society at large.

Returning to Rosa’s theory of Social Acceleration, “acceleration can be defined as an increase in quantity per unit of time” or “as a reduction of the amount of time per fixed quantity” (2013, 65). Various things may serve here as the quantity measured: distance traveled, total number of communicated messages, amount of goods produced (all examples of technological advancement); the number of jobs per working lifetime or change in intimate partners per year (examples of the rate of social change); or action episodes per unit of time (as is the case for an increasing pace of life) (ibid.). As such accelerating events are ubiquitous, Rosa maintains that “acceleration has become a general social norm” (ibid., 64). But given modern society’s access to the greatest time-saving devices of the world’s history, “the fact that time becomes scarce is actually in itself a paradox that requires explanation” (ibid.).

The normalization of cultural myths through repeated representation in consumer culture helps explain the persistence of time scarcity (and thus continued acceleration) in modern societies. Returning to McCracken (1986) and Sherry (1987), advertisements may be viewed as cultural artifacts and advertising helps discern, discover, and construe cultural meaning in the world. In other words, advertising captures, presents, and promotes cultural myths.
The rhetoric of advertising images attempts to render such ideologies as “normal” and naturally occurring. However, interrogating such rhetoric proves otherwise. The interrogation of “time is money” undertaken by this essay helps substantiate and clarify marketing’s role in the normalization of social acceleration. The cultural myth of “time is money” has indeed been historically constructed in consumer culture. Repeated representations of time in advertising have naturalized the cultural myth of “time is money”, and thus the normalized belief in society that time is a resource to be spent, invested, or otherwise wasted.

In addition to providing evidence that marketing has contributed to social acceleration, the findings presented in this essay also help clarify how marketing has contributed to this phenomenon. This research reveals that various social meanings (i.e., rhetorical themes) have splintered from the predominant attitude towards temporality. Roland Barthes maintains that this is exactly how cultural myths work, and why cultural myths are so effective: “Myth hides nothing and flaunts nothing: it distorts; myth is neither a lie nor a confession: it is an inflexion” (Barthes 2015, 240).

That there are multiple rhetorical themes comprising the “time is money” myth is telling in itself. A nuanced message is a naturalizing message. In straying from both directness and singularity, a cultural myth becomes "anonymous and slippery, fragmented and garrulous” (Barthes 1977, 166). The cultural myth is pre-discursive, leaving one with a feeling rather than an evidence of its existence. This paper provides the “ideological criticism and semiological dismantling” (ibid.) required to illuminate the pre-discursive to a level of discursivity. By rigorously bringing the multiple latent meanings of “time is money” to focus, this essay reveals the normalized narratives structuring society’s interpretations and experiences of temporal acceleration.
Reflecting on “Normal”: An Opportunity for Marketers, Consumers, and Society

The naturalization of the “time is money” cultural myth has several lasting implications for not only consumer culture, but society at large. In dismantling the cultural myth of “time is money”, this research provides a foundation for reflecting on what indeed is “normal” (and by consequence, what is not “normal”) in relation to temporality. These reflections can then prompt marketers to engage constructively with the phenomenon of acceleration by managing the myth of “time is money” in the marketplace.

At the turn of the millennium, marketing scholars took the time (metaphor intended) to reflect upon how the discipline had evolved over the course of a century: from the instrumental functions of product manufacturing and distribution, to a social behemoth wielding influential power in society. In the 1999 article, “Marketing’s Contributions to Society”, Wilkie and Moore document how the marketing discipline flourished into a body of practitioners and researchers who significantly impact the course of society. Wilkie and Moore explain that the contributions of marketing diffuse throughout society over time and generally have increased the quality of life for those residing in countries with vibrant marketing systems. Contributions of marketing to society include: the development of infrastructure, efficiency gains in transportation, the creation of jobs, increased consumer freedom (through product choice), and time saving.

Now, twenty years later, it is important to revisit these contributions, especially the last one, time saving, in light of emerging topics such as social acceleration.

Wilkie and Moore view marketing as an aggregate marketing system that is embedded throughout multiple points of modern society. The marketing system follows a product end-to-end throughout its lifecycle: the sourcing of raw material, manufacturing, transportation, purchase, use, and ultimate disposal. This broad view of the marketing system acknowledges that
the various actions relating to marketing are situated socially, crossing many disciplines and many diverse facets of society. As a result of this social embeddedness, while the benefits of marketing may be experienced broadly, so too might the externalities, or social costs.

Furthering this discussion of marketing’s role within and contributions to society is Shultz’s 2007 proposal that marketing should take on a role of “constructive engagement”. Given marketing’s prominent and influential social position, Shultz argues that all marketers should consider marketing systems as things both situated and related to the societies in which they operate. Further, marketers should use their privileged position in society to embed prosocial behaviors into their actions and value chains. Shultz proposes a new definition of marketing that situates marketing firmly within a social context, with both social consequence and responsibility: “Marketing is a form of constructive engagement—a societal function and a systemic set of processes for creating, communicating, and delivering value to customers and for managing customer and societal relationships in ways that benefit local and global stakeholders of these processes” (Shultz 2007, 293).

Social acceleration contributes to a wide variety of social problems in the marketing system. In many areas of the marketing system, time is maximized at the expense of consumer well-being, community well-being, and environmental well-being. In other words, acceleration effects the domains of people, public, and planet. Examples of this are given in the introduction. But how can marketing constructively engage in the social problems caused by acceleration? As both a scholarly discipline and a business function, marketing’s orientation towards providing stakeholder value through networks of exchange uniquely positions the field to both theorize and deliver solutions. Earlier, this paper mentioned Benjamin Franklin’s pamphlet, Advice to a Young Tradesman, when describing the
origins of the “time is money” cultural myth. At this point in the project, it is important to note that Franklin’s prolific advice concludes with: “Waste neither Time nor Money, but make the best Use of both” (Advice to a Young Tradesman 1748). For marketers, making the best use of both time and money means employing a perspective of longevity and frugal creativity to respond to complex social challenges. While the quip may have problematic consequences, the original text may provide some guidance in dealing with today’s phenomenon of social acceleration.

Managing Mythologies

Marketers can use the findings presented in this paper to better understand and manage the “time is money” cultural myth. From a cultural marketing strategy perspective, this (or any) cultural myth can be managed through techniques of storytelling. Cultural myths are merely stories that have been told and retold throughout the history of a society, and societies are built upon multiple cultural myths working together to create a sense of “what’s normal”. These stories are important to understand because they fundamentally affect how phenomena are perceived in a society as cultural myths provide a lens of interpretation that allows people to make sense of the world around them and their place within it.

When marketers take on a role of “constructive engagement”, they often develop a preference towards action. Questions such as, “How can we change society?” and, “How can a situation be improved through the functions of marketing?” follow. While these are important questions to consider, marketing scholars should first begin with a baseline, descriptive understanding (informed by history) and consider a preceding question: “How is that society remains the same?” It is this question that considers the deep, prediscursive forces which contribute to society’s current trajectories, the forces that
actively work to keep society the same, and marketing’s role in maintaining normalcy over time.

Society remains the same when its stories continue to be told without being interrupted. Roland Barthes’ shows us how powerful these stories can be in *Mythologies*. By interrogating cultural myths, marketers can better understand the cultural forces that keep society the same and prohibit social transformation from occurring. In the case of social acceleration, if the rhetoric of temporality in consumer culture is what helps keep the norm of acceleration in place, then perhaps new stories surrounding temporality can challenge the predominant norm. Marketers who wish to constructively engage in complex social issues must craft a compelling story that resonates with culture. An understanding of the cultural myths presently at play in society is a necessary precursor to this task.

*Future Research*

Interrogation of the “time is money” cultural myth helps us understand marketing’s role in normalizing an accelerated pace of life. This project lays the crucial foundation of understanding marketing’s contribution to the very construction of the phenomenon of social acceleration. However, Barthes’ theory of cultural myth maintains analysis at a structural level and does not adequately delve into the relationship that individuals have with cultural meanings. Barthes assumes a deterministic system, in which the everyday person is hopelessly stuck in a system of significations, bound to reify cultural meanings. And it is true that many people do not interrogate cultural myths in their everyday lives, they simply accept them (Berger and Luckmann 1967). This is because what appears to be “normal” is not often reflected upon, and thus cultural myths are oft taken as social fact: internalized, lived, preserved, externalized, and continuously reified. Consistent then with many structural approaches, Barthes’ theory does
not consider individual interpretations of sign meanings or unique experiences of cultural myths. As a result, this research does not address how consumers may cope with living and consuming in a fast-paced society or how they may contribute to the construction of this cultural myth.

Previous research in marketing has examined consumer interpretations of temporality (e.g., Cotte et al. 2004; Husemann and Eckhardt 2019; Woermann and Rokka 2015), however these past attempts have all used an understanding of consumer experiences as a starting point. As such, the findings of previous studies are limited from a macromarketing point of view. Reflecting on their phenomenological research on consumer time use, Cotte et al. note that, “a focus on isolated facets has likely hindered the growth of more in-depth knowledge on time styles and their interrelations with consumer behavior” (2004, 333). Askegaard and Linnet also provide a critique of Cotte et al.’s findings, suggesting that the inclusion of sociohistorical context “is done in an extremely cursory manner that rarely adds societal and cultural perspectives to the analysis but merely suggestive hints” (2011, 393). To alleviate such concerns in future research, Askegaard and Linnet suggest an epistemology “that explicitly connects the structuring of macro-social explanatory frameworks with the phenomenology of lived experiences, thereby inscribing the micro-social context accounted for by the consumer in a larger socio-historical context based on the researcher’s theoretical insights” (ibid., 381).

The findings of this research provide a macro-social explanatory framework for future research on consumer experiences of temporality. Future research can examine how consumers experience and respond to the structural notions of acceleration in society by using the temporal rhetorical themes discovered in this paper. Askegaard and Linnet suggest employing phenomenology for such endeavors, with careful attention to “situat[e] acts of
consumption, their motivations and consequences in a world that reaches beyond the subjectivity of the agent. What we need to include is a better understanding of the underlying ideological and mythological forces producing these subjectivities” (ibid., 387). The findings of this paper thus provide an understanding of the ideological and mythological forces surrounding temporality. By grounding phenomenological explorations in these findings, consumer experience is extended past the limits of self, while also illuminating the interpretive agency potential of consumers in the marketplace.

Conclusion

Understanding the phenomenon of social acceleration and its impacts on today’s modern marketplace and society is critical to the future wellbeing of people, publics, and planet. As a socially-embedded discipline concerned with networks of value exchange, marketing can constructively engage with the drivers and consequences of social acceleration. This essay lays an important foundation for such endeavors.

By asking how temporality has been reflected in consumer culture, the findings presented in this paper begin to show marketing’s role in normalizing the cultural myth of “time is money”. Drawing upon Roland Barthes’ theory of cultural myth, and a methodology inspired by Barthes’ “Rhetoric of the Image”, this research employed a visual analysis of historical advertisements in the United States to understand how fast became normal in consumer culture. This interrogation of meaning yielded the discovery of several rhetoric themes, revealing the nuanced and slippery nature of the meanings surrounding temporality. As a result of these findings, marketers may better understand marketing’s contribution to the temporal rhetoric of social acceleration and how these cultural meanings may be managed.
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Chapter 3

Consumer Deceleration Through Market-Mediated Cultural Reflection

Introduction

“I was late for work. Even though my studio was in the same borough as our apartment, there wasn’t a direct way from here-to-there. So my commute took me across three different subway lines. On the platform, through the people, in through the set of doors that were whooshing close behind me. Movement. Out the doors. Again. Again. I stopped at a bodega for coffee; a nondescript cup filled with nondescript liquid. I didn’t drink it for the taste; I never really enjoyed the act, if that makes sense. It was about the effect. Caffeine. Energy. Go, go, go.

Now, in the mornings, I wake up a little earlier before work and before my boys wake up. I shuffle to the kitchen. And I warm water on the stove for a French press of coffee. Our kitchen looks out into the backyard which is heavily wooded. I take a moment and observe: the plant that has grown since the morning before, the animals scurrying about, any new snowfall that occurred overnight. I pour a cup of coffee, and it is a pure, sweet little moment. A ritual that anchors my day.” - Allyson, age 34

Allyson, quoted above, made a significant lifestyle shift by moving from Brooklyn, New York to Portland, Maine. While several factors influenced this intentional change, one factor stands out for its interestingness: A Danish concept coined hygge, which Allyson read about in 2016 New York Times article and then later researched on Pinterest. Consequently, learning about hygge played an instrumental role in Allyson’s quest to design a new way of life for herself and her family. Hygge informed her philosophy on child-rearing, working, vacationing, nutrition, family traditions, and leisure activities. But the main interest of this essay is how hygge ultimately invited a slower pace of events in each of these spheres of everyday life. Which begs the question first: What is hygge, this odd-sounding-to-the-English-ear word that could possibly spark such an existential shift?

Hygge is a Danish tradition that eludes direct English translation, but may be understood as “a quality of coziness that comes from doing simple things such as lighting candles, baking, or spending time at home with your family” (Cambridge Dictionary). Hygge is quintessentially
Danish and permeates several aspects of Danish culture, from home-life, to social interactions, marketplace behaviors, and even foreign policy. Hygge plays a strong role in preserving aspects of Danish society and is a deeply held cultural tradition. The hygge concept originally exploded onto the US marketplace in the winter of 2016-2017, heavily promoted by book publishers, business-to-consumer media, and trend agencies (Mintel 2016; NPD 2017). Danish hygge has continued to permeate US market channels through social media, consumer products, and advertisements, typically peaking in winter months thanks to the commonly used signifiers of fireplaces, cups of tea, and wooly socks (Google Trends 2020; McCartney 2016).

This research seeks to understand the phenomenon of consumer deceleration in the context of the marketization and consumer adoption of Danish hygge in the United States. In this socio-historical context, the pace of life is partially driven by the cultural myth of “time is money” (Grace, second essay of this dissertation). Drawing upon the theories of social acceleration (Rosa 2013) and global mélange (Pieterse 2004), this research shows how consumers, when introduced to new ideas through a globalized marketplace, critically reflect on their current way of life and challenge cultural myths. The findings contribute to literature in consumer temporality, specifically the notions of consumer deceleration (Husemann and Eckhardt 2019) and timeflow (Woermann and Rokka 2015), showing how the cultural myth of “time is money” is challenged through a dismantling of social norms and an agentic consumption of time. This research also contributes to our understanding of globalization and consumer culture by presenting a process of ‘market-mediated cultural reflection’, which may be used in future research endeavors to understand how cultural myths are reflected upon in an increasingly globalized consumer culture.
The research in this essay examines three main questions. First, assuming that local interpretations of hygge have altered the original meaning as it crossed cultural borders, what is the meaning of Danish hygge in the United States? Second, how do individual consumers in the US personalize this meaning of hygge in everyday life? More specifically, how does hygge help consumers critically reflect on social temporality and their consequential pace of everyday life? And third, what impact does Danish hygge potentially have on US consumer culture?

**Consumer Deceleration in an Accelerated World**

US culture can be understood as a collection of various cultural myths, each of which influence certain aspects of society and civility. Various significations and ideologies co-exist within the symbolic universe of the United States. In the consumption literature, the Mountain Man myth (Belk and Costa 1998), the myth of the American West (Peñaloza 2001), and the gunfighter myth (Holt 2006) have each been used to examine aspects of American consumer culture.

This dissertation examines another prevalent cultural myth in the United States, the myth of “time is money”. This quippy phrase was initially popularized by Benjamin Franklin in his 1748 pamphlet entitled, ‘Advice to a Young Tradesman’ (Jacoby, Szybillo, and Berning 1976). In this widely-disseminated work, Franklin explained the elementary economic principle of opportunity cost to the budding capitalist society of the United States. Increasingly over the economic history of the US, the idea that time is a commodity to be managed, optimized, and objectified has resided in the substructure of US society and driving many agreed-upon cultural norms. Essay 2 of this dissertation interrogates this cultural myth in detail, showing how advertisements throughout US history have normalized cultural meanings regarding temporality, specifically meanings that promote social acceleration.
In *Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity* (2013), Rosa explores how “acceleration has become a general social norm” (64) in modern societies. Rosa defines acceleration as “an increase in quantity per unit of time or, logically equivalent, as a reduction of the amount of time per fixed quantity” (65). Various things may serve as the quantity measured in this equation: distance traveled, the total number of communicated messages, the amount of goods produced (all examples of technological advancement); the number of jobs per working lifetime or change in intimate partners per year (examples of the rate of social change); or action episodes per unit of time (in measuring the accelerated pace of life). Technological advancement, the rate of social change, and an increasing pace of everyday life are distinct yet interrelated dimensions of acceleration. Each of these forces are structurally and culturally linked, with technological advancement serving as the engine of acceleration in modern societies.

This paper specifically explores the accelerating pace of everyday life which results in both real (objective) and perceived (subjective) time scarcity in modern societies. Objectively, the accelerating pace of life may be measured by means such as quantitative time budget studies (Rosa 2013). Such data reveal how individuals manage increasing time pressures through diligent planning: “attempts to reduce the total duration of events, attempts to increase the speed of action, and attempts to decrease the amount of rests and empty times” in any given day (ibid., 78). However, what is harder to measure is the subjective expression of everyday life feeling as if it is constantly accelerating. In general, individuals may convey a “growing sense that one

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5 It is important to note that technical acceleration does not directly result in an accelerated pace of life (Rosa 2013). Rather, the pace of life in modern societies has accelerated “not because but rather even though enormous gains in time through acceleration have been registered in almost all areas of social life” (67). Additionally, the acceleration of the pace of life “is a consequence of a quantitative increase that has to be logically independent from the processes of technical acceleration: we produce, communicate, and transport not just faster but also more than earlier social epochs” (67-68).
lacks time”, “a stressful compulsion to accelerate”, or “anxiety about ‘not keeping up’” (ibid., 79). This subjective expression is thus marked by “the feeling that time itself is going by faster” (ibid.). How consumers experience and manage subjective perceptions of temporality has been the topic of recent research in consumer culture studies.

Several authors working in the fields of philosophy, political economy, and sociology investigate consumer responses to the phenomenon of acceleration in *Culture of the Slow: Consumer Deceleration in an Accelerated World* (edited by Nick Osbaldiston 2013). Contextual examples such as the slow consumption of transportation (e.g., riding bicycles), space and place (e.g., architectural design) and commodities (e.g., fashion) critically explore the politics of time and consumption. Heavily influenced by Ben Agger’s beliefs on ‘Fast Capitalism’, this book takes the stance that “consumption is a thief of time” (p. 19) and therefore advocates for alternative forms of consumption behavior.

Woermann and Rokka (2015) study time in consumer culture from a “microperspective”, that is, “in action as it unfolds in consumers’ experience of concrete, lived through moments” (1488). In other words, the authors intend to study the phenomenological experience of time, focusing on a theoretical explanation for how different consumption practices evoke unique temporal experiences (“timeflow”). The authors compare the timeflow of two very different activities: paintball and freeskiing, in order to understand how perception of time differs in relation to practice. However, the authors do not comment on the broader temporal logics of society or culture in which certain consumption practices take place.

Husemann and Eckhardt (2019) draw upon Rosa’s theory of social acceleration while studying time in consumer culture. Such theoretical framing allows the authors to view temporality as a feature of society, providing important socio-historical context to the
phenomenon. Husemann and Eckhardt are interested in understanding how individuals respond to dominant temporal logics by altering consumption behaviors, specifically exploring how consumers experience and achieve deceleration in a sped-up world. Studying travelers on the Camino de Santiago, a pilgrimage typically taken by foot, the authors discover an “oasis of deceleration”.

Husemann and Eckhardt find that in the context of oasis, time is experienced as passing more slowly and as being a more abundant resource. Their argument follows that consumers’ temporal experiences result “from immersing into, or escaping from, the broader societal temporal logics that emphasize slowness or fastness” (2019, 1143) and that consumer deceleration can be defined as: “a perception of a slowed-down temporal experience achieved via a decrease in certain quantities (traveled distance, use of technologies, experienced episodes) per unit of time through altering, adopting, or eschewing forms of consumption” (ibid.).

However, this notion of consumer deceleration is limited as the findings hinge on an “oasis of deceleration” that exists away from the everyday lifeworld. In an oasis of deceleration, the objective social conditions surrounding consumer subjectivity certainly change, though the lasting impact on consumer subjectivity is unknown once the consumer exits the oasis. As a result, Husemann and Eckhardt’s findings suggest that consumers may only temporarily reject dominant logic to alter experiences of temporality and experience a brief respite from social acceleration.

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6 ‘Oasis of deceleration’ is derived from Rosa’s second (out of five) type of inertia to ever-perpetuating acceleration in society: an ‘island of deceleration’, or an escape from society’s dominant temporal logic. Other types of inertia also include natural limits to speed, slowdown as a dysfunctional side effect of speed, structural and cultural rigidity, and two forms of intentional deceleration: deceleration as ideology and deceleration as a strategy for future acceleration.
The purpose of this research is therefore to extend Husemann and Eckhardt’s findings by exploring how consumers can more permanently reshape subjective experiences of temporality in a sped-up world. Additionally, this research will consider the role of both cultural myths and critical reflection in consumers’ temporal experiences. The context in which we will study the phenomenon of consumer deceleration is the marketization and adoption of Danish Hygge in the United States.

Research Context: Hygge

Hygge is a word that lends little interpretation to its definition or the sign-laden cultural meanings it carries. Hygge is an evolution of the Old Norse word, hugr, which means “the soul, mind, consciousness” (Falk and Torp 1903). Hygge’s etymology derives from the eighteenth-century Scandanavian ideals of a reliable, safe habit; comfort and joy; caring orientations; and trusting behavior (Astrup, Brand-Miller, and Bitz 2017). Despite its Norse roots, hygge is a more prominent feature of contemporary Danish culture than contemporary Norwegian culture. In fact, hygge is officially part of the 'Danmarkskanon', or Denmark canon, a collection of values that describes what it means to be Danish (Jensen 2017). Hygge is integrated into daily lifestyles as a part of a proud national identity (Wiking 2017) and the tradition of hygge permeates several aspects of Danish culture. In Denmark, hygge facilitates the way in which many social interactions take place and how social atmospheres are constructed (Linnet 2011), providing an avenue for indulging in temporally-unbound experiences and meaningful relationships with others while encompassing all that is informal and relaxed (Wiking 2017). For example, interior designers and lighting specialists aim to create designs that echo the ideals of hygge, orchestrating a sense of community, solitude, and security (Bille 2015). The cultural values
embedded by hygge have even been said to influence Denmark's 'soft power' stance on international relations (Howell and Sundberg 2015).

Hygge's impact on the pattern of everyday consumption in Denmark is also well documented. Hygge is antithetical to luxury and intensity, but rather a quality that Danes attach to the consumption of 'ordinary' goods; affordability, spontaneity, and authenticity are valued traits of hygge (Linnet 2011). For this reason, a tensioned relationship exists between the tradition of hygge and today's consumer culture: authenticity often contrasts with the “commercial interests and forces that one faces as a consumer” (ibid., 11). However, it is undeniable that consumer products play a distinct role in the materialization of hygge in Denmark – whether in the form of candles, food, furniture, clothing, books, or blankets – objects help create a hyggeligt atmosphere (Bean 2011; Bille 2015). Popular press likes to tout that certain products enjoy banner success in Denmark thanks to the hygge tradition. For example, candle consumption in Denmark leads that of any other country in Europe, with each Dane consuming 13 pounds of candle wax per year, and bacon consumption not far behind with each Dane consuming 6.5 pounds annually (Wiking 2017).

It is important to note that several underlying mechanisms, including economic, political, cultural, and geographic conditions, make the practice of hygge attainable in Denmark. In Denmark, the welfare model acts to reduce risk, uncertainty, and anxiety among citizens (Wiking 2017). Danish culture is also highly homogenous, with a restrictive immigration system (Stokes-DuPass 2015) that acts to preserve cultural sameness. Furthermore, in Denmark, equality is interpreted as sameness, and this key cultural underpinning affects Danes' individual relationships with the concept of community (Gullestad 1992); sameness and similarity are valued above diversity or difference of opinion. According to Bruun, Jakobsen,
and Krøijer (2011, 1), Danes thus “develop an interactional style that emphasizes similarity and under-communicates difference in order to feel equal and to establish a sense of community.” Linnet describes this sense of community as emotional protection, with hygge ultimately being an “expression of the basic human motivation to seek and construct a sense of interiority” (2011, 61). Additional factors, such as weather and geography, also have an impact on Danes’ relationship with hygge. Winters in Denmark are especially long, cold, and dark, lending the season to a special time of interior hibernation and quest for coziness.

**The Marketization and Adoption of Danish Hygge in the United States**

Book publishers were early movers in the marketization of hygge abroad, noting two primary reasons for the perceived attraction of the Danish concept. First, US trends such as mindfulness, the slow food movement, and decluttering paved the way for the similar-yet-different concept of hygge. Second, publishers anticipated a growing interest from Americans in Scandinavian culture and lifestyles (McCartney 2016). There was a general sense that US consumers grappled with existential questions in the midst of a troubled culture stemming from problems of modernity, cultural and political polarizations, and questions of welfare; hygge was perceived as a potential salve in the marketplace to such cultural unease.

In early 2017, HarperCollins publishers released *The Little Book of Hygge* by Meik Wiking (the title had been previously released months earlier in the UK by Penguin Random House). Wiking, the CEO of the Happiness Research Institute in Copenhagen, writes in a friendly yet authoritative manner as he divulges the “Danish Secrets to Happy Living” (the book’s American subtitle). The hardcovered, 5x7 inch book is filled with whimsical illustrations, recipes, and stories – all to elucidate the hard-to-explain hygge concept. *The Little Book of Hygge* sold two million copies and became a New York Times Bestseller. In its wake, a flood of
hygge-themed books flowed into the US marketplace: *The Book of Hygge* by Louisa Thomsen Brits (Plume, 2017), *How to Hygge* by Signe Johansen (St. Martin’s Griffin, 2017), and *Hygge: Discovering the Danish Art of Happiness* by Oliva Telford (CreateSpace Independent, 2017) to name a few.

With new hygge-themed books came press releases, editorials, blog posts, and podcasts. Culture writers distilled the myth of hygge to the American public, pointing them to large retailers like Amazon and Barnes and Noble. Meanwhile, hashtags and Pinterest searches provided wayfinding for consumers hoping to grasp a more material understanding of hygge. Tutorials, infographics, and gift guides for “how to hygge” provided concrete, consumerist examples.

At the same time, trend forecasters packaged up the hygge phenomenon and sold it to industry actors such as retailers, manufacturers, and consumer media conglomerates, further perpetuating the ideal of hygge into the US marketplace. A 2017 NPD report equated the hygge trend with “staying at home”. The retail insights firm collected data across several industries – home, beauty, food, office, tech, gaming, toys, sports, apparel, and video – to deliver “cocooning-specific retail insights” and concluded that “staying in is the new going out”. NPD takes a near-historical view to explain that, “After the 2008 recession, younger generations spent more time at home. Watching movies, playing video games, and crafting home-cooked meals, they did everything they could to keep things affordable and convenient in the comforts of their cocoons. Turns out, they liked it—and decided to stay. Today, not much has changed. People still want to create a sanctuary amid the hectic dance called life” (NPD, 2017). In 2018, WGSN reported on the collective impacts and future directions of hygge, touting the importance of hygge-inspired events (“celebrate togetherness and revolve around the sharing of design, food
and drink”), hygge-inspired products (“highly tactile design products”), and comforting food and drink (“seasonal, homemade recipes that are comforting and nutritious”) (WGSN, 2018). Danish hygge was now permeating throughout multiple channels of the marketing system as retailers, brands, and manufacturers followed the hygge trend. The use of hygge in marketing ranged from sophisticated lifestyle inspiration to primitive attempt to benefit from the hygge name (as in Ikea’s 2019 doormat which simply stated ‘HYGGE’ in all upper-case print). Of course, several examples fall somewhere in-between.

Consumer products embraced the hygge concept in design, manufacturing, and distribution. Red Heart hygge yarn became a favorite amongst knitters for its soft and cozy texture, with distribution at major craft and hobby retailers. Hygge scented candles (both mass-produced and artisan made) and hygge inspired beauty products benefited from the “hygge” name on product packaging, whether hygge had inspired the contents or the formula itself. WildBird Baby slings promoted hygge as a reminder to slow down and savor the simple, warming moments of parenthood, to quite literally hold your loved ones tight (or, if they’re a baby, wear them in a hygge-inspired ring sling baby carrier). A new subscription service launched, “HyggeBox”, promising to “bring the Danish lifestyle of cozy happiness into your home with monthly handpicked goods from around the world” for as little as $35/month. Several brands also used hygge to position existing product offerings. US department store JCPenney showed patrons “How to hygge” in a 46-second commercial spot. The retailer briefly defined the concept (“hygge/hue:guh/noun, A quality of coziness and simple comforts with people you love that creates a feeling of well-being.”) before prescribing a 3-step process: First, “warm things up” with new rugs, blankets, and pillows; second, “get cozy” with knitted cardigans, jogger pajama pants, socks, and hats; and lastly, “be together” with board games and
snowman-inspired ceramic mugs. Alo Yoga promoted a hygge yoga playlist on its streaming workout portal, featuring videos of sound baths and guided meditations along with slow yoga practices. Alo maintained that hygge is “all about the feels” and encouraged yogis to gather “a blanket, candle, and your favorite cozy socks” for “this chill yoga playlist”. Freckled Hen Farmhouse, a boutique in Fayetteville, Arkansas, promoted hygge throughout the month of January with images of dishware set around a small table, candles flickering, snowy shop windows, and reusable shopping bags.

Though hygge was initially marketed to the United States in the winter of 2016-2017, data from Google Trends shows that hygge has become a persistent consumer interest. Unsurprisingly, interest in hygge peaked in the winter months, while ebbing in the summer months. Social media was instrumental for continuing to diffuse the trend as a lifestyle.

**Research Questions**

The research in this essay examines three main questions. First, assuming that local interpretations of hygge have altered the original meaning as it crossed cultural borders, what is the meaning of Danish hygge in the United States? Second, how do individual consumers in the US personalize this meaning of hygge in everyday life? More specifically, how does hygge help consumers critically reflect on social temporality? And third, what impact does Danish hygge potentially have on US consumer culture?

**Methodology and Analysis**

This project employs a netnographic approach (Kozinets 2015) to understand how a particular group of US consumers critically reflect on the social meanings surrounding temporality (i.e., the cultural myth of “time is money”) and their pace of everyday life through the adoption of Danish hygge. Multiple interpretive methods including participant-observation, visual analysis,
existential-phenomenological interviews, and theoretical analysis all provide meaningful responses to the research questions. Data was collected and analyzed iteratively over four years of immersion in a specific research field site as described below.

The researcher first heard about “hygge” from an industry trend forecast while working for a large greeting card company in the United States. It was a personally intriguing topic, as the researcher held special interest in global consumer cultures and the manner in which people live (and consume) differently around the world. After hearing about the hygge concept, the researcher went on a personal journey of hygge exploration to learn more about the Danish philosophy of living. During this initial period of interest and introspection, the researcher read several popular press articles on hygge, joined relevant special interest groups on facebook, searched for visual representation of the concept on Google and Pinterest, and followed the hygge hashtag on instagram. Additionally, the researcher bought and read Meik Wiking’s *The Little Book of Hygge*.

During this initial investigation of hygge, the researcher was able to orient a budding understanding of what hygge was and how it was practiced in the United States. The researcher began to take casual field notes based on observations and personal reflections, and soon realized that many interesting phenomena were reflected in the cross-cultural borrowing, marketing, and adoption of hygge. These early observations resulted in several guiding questions: Why were people from around the world enamored with this Danish concept? Why did hygge resonate with US consumers in particular? What cultural myths were involved? What consumer need did hygge solve? And what was the impact on the cross-cultural diffusion of this idea through marketing channels, a decidedly consumerist interpretation of the original Danish tradition?
As the researcher began to incorporate elements of hygge into her own life, she actively participated in a Facebook group called *Cultivating Hygge*. When the author joined the private group on Facebook in January of 2017, there were 3,000 members. At the time of writing in December 2020, the *Cultivating Hygge* Facebook group has over 19,000 members. The *Cultivating Hygge* Facebook group consists of mainly women, although male members are also present, and a multitude of economic backgrounds, ages, and tastes are demonstrated. Typical conversation in the group includes sharing of personal objects associated with hygge and how to incorporate hygge into daily lifestyles. Personal sharing of individual experience is highly encouraged and although there are aesthetic differences in the expressions of hygge shared, themes do arise from the various practices of hygge in the United States.

In this field site interview phase, the *Cultivating Hygge* Facebook group was noted for its prominence of US-based membership and inclusive sharing culture. Other hygge-themed Facebook groups tend to feature a more prominent UK-based membership. Ultimately, the *Cultivating Hygge* Facebook group was deemed an attractive site for data collection. Immediately after selecting the formal field site for research, the researcher took into account ethical considerations regarding research practices and more formal data collection while participating and observing in this group. On the one hand, a unique benefit of netnography is that group members act more naturally than in other types of research such as interviews, focus groups, surveys, and experiments as their behavior is not interrupted or manipulated by the researcher, only observed (Kozinets 2015). On the other hand, the data site in question is a private Facebook group and therefore not visible to the public. The group members may behave differently in the group than they would in a more public sphere and there is a level of trust among group members. Therefore, when soliciting specific data for analysis, the author posted a
request in the group, clearly stating the intention for scholarly research. Verbal and nonverbal confirmation was granted for the data recorded and analyzed for this research project, following IRB recommendations and procedures of the associated university.

In the immersion phase of a netnographic project, the researcher organically develops a depth of understanding as the researcher experiences the unfolding of the phenomenon in ‘human’ time (Kozinets 2015). Repeated immersion in the research topic through regular visits to, and engaged participation in, the Cultivating Hygge group allowed for a deep understanding of the hygge phenomenon to emerge. At the same time, various advertisements, trend reports, blogs, and other media sites were instrumental in conceptualizing hygge as it was marketed throughout the US cultural context. The immersion phase took place over a period of fifteen months before formally collecting data for the initial visual analysis.

*Visual analysis: What is the meaning of hygge?*

The first research question: “What is the meaning of hygge in the United States?” serves as an indexing phase for this research project. Its findings influence the subsequent research questions and methodological design. The aim therefore of this visual analysis is to first discover the meaning for hygge in the United States so that hygge’s impact on the US culture might be understood.

A data set of 100 member-generated facebook posts from the Cultivating Hygge facebook groups were collected for visual analysis. Posts contained both a photograph and a textual caption describing the photo. Posts were selected based on their ability to express: “this is what hygge means to me [the member].” All data collected was posted by US residents in the contiguous 48 states. Only one post was collected per person. Posts were collected between January and February of 2018.
In order to discover the meaning of hygge in the United States, a Barthesian-inspired analysis was conducted in order to discover the code for hygge. Barthes claims that a “code is discovered when various signifiers represent the same idea or concept” (2012, 230). Barthes notes that events, objects, and cultural artifacts can be analyzed for their code and subsequent relation to cultural myths. Interpreting Facebook posts as cultural artifacts, Barthes’ photo and text analysis as outlined in The Rhetoric of the Image (as found in Music-Image-Text, 1978) provides the methodological structure for this endeavor.

Facebook posts generally contain several signifiers of meaning through a combination of image and text. Barthes explains that to analyze this unique composition of meaning, “the analysis must first of all bear on each separate structure; it is only when the study of each structure has been exhausted that it will be possible to understand the manner in which they complement one another” (1978, 16). Barthes recommends a 3-part analysis in deciphering a single artifact. First, analyze the photograph for both denotative (first order) and connotative (second-order) meanings. Second, analyze the linguistic text of the caption for meaning. Third, analyze both the photograph and the caption together.

These three steps were carried out for each of the individual posts. For step 1, all objects present and denotative meanings observed in the photograph were listed. For example, in figure 52, the initial list would include: SNOW, CABIN, TREE, CANDLE, LIGHT, WINDOW, NATURE. Next, connotative meanings were observed. Questions such as, “What does a CANDLE signify here?” drew upon contextual clues to decipher connotative meanings the image. In figure 52, this list might include: WARMTH, HOPE, REFUGE, PEACE. In step 2, the linguistic text of the caption was analyzed for both denotative and connotative meanings. In figure 52, the denotative list would include key words from the text such as: CABIN, SNOW,
WARM, COFFEE, CANDLE, WORK FROM HOME, while the connotative insight might be that “hygge is calm and unhurried”, the opposite of the buzzing and crazy film festival that the poster describes. In step 3, the signified (that is, connotative) meanings for both the image and text were combined, and a singular meaning was assigned to each post.

Figure 52.
Post collected for visual analysis of hygge in the United States (Source: Cultivating Hygge facebook group)

“Today I’m feeling VERY excited and making sure the cabin and I are ready to be Hygge because....drum roll.... a huge storm is finally coming this afternoon and should snow 16 inches at my altitude. The Sundance Film festival at those mountains in the distance is buzzing and crazy. My husband has to go there for work. No thank you. The candles are burning and the coffee is warm and my work-from-home workload is very do-able today. Bring on the snow and the Hygge!”

Shortly after the analysis of each post began, the author decided to introduce an additional step to Barthes’ 3-step analysis to better interrogate the meanings of each image/text
combination. Drawing upon Lèvi-Strauss’ concept of binary opposition, this fourth step identified what the meaning of the facebook post was not, in order to better understand what the meaning indeed was. Analysis began again, including all four steps to determine the meaning of each post.

After a meaning was determined for each of the 100 facebook posts, an inter-analysis between individual posts helped discover the coded meaning for hygge in the United States. During this fifth and final step, analysis focused on searching for evidence of repeated concepts through different forms in order to discover the code (in regard to Barthes 2015).

Figure 53.
First four steps of the five-step visual analysis used to discover the meaning of hygge in the United States (Source: Cultivating Hygge facebook group)

“Had a fantastically hyggé day today! Woke up and had a PJ dance party with my toddler and husband while we made breakfast. Took a midday nap. Bundled up and went to our local Nature Center to explore, climb rocks, roll down hills, and make mud pies.”

Photo: open space; play; togetherness
Text: rest; unrestrained; memories
Combined Photo + Text: temporally unbound; embracing the moment; balanced
Hygge is not: hurried; demanding; commercial
**Existential-phenomenological interviews: How is hygge personalized?**

After establishing an understanding of what hygge means in the US context, the next research question aims to develop a greater depth of understanding, interpreting how individual consumers personalize both the meaning of hygge and the broader meanings of US culture. Existential-phenomenological interviews (Thompson, Pollio, and Locander 1989) are used here for their ability to provide in-depth descriptions of lived experience and describe the meaning of a phenomenon from an individual perspective.

Participants for interviews were recruited from the Cultivating Hygge Facebook group. Prior to recruiting participants, permission was granted from the two group administrators who act as the official gatekeepers of the group. On January 22, 2020, the following solicitation was posted in the Facebook group:

> All communication with interested volunteers occurred on the Facebook platform. Volunteers were informed that the aims of the research were to “better understand individuals’ experiences of practicing Danish hygge in everyday life” and “if (and how) hygge has helped you slow down your rhythm of life in the midst of a fast-paced American culture”. Additionally, it was communicated that the aim for the interview was to “form an understanding of your lived experience of hygge”. Interviews were scheduled and conducted via Facebook messenger utilizing the audio/video call feature. All interviews took place between January 24, 2020-February 22, 2020.

Participants agreed to an informed verbal consent prior to the commence of each interview. Each interview began with the following questions: 1) When/how did you first find

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7 Importantly, the timeframe for interviews immediately preceded widespread reactions to the global Covid-19 pandemic. Covid-19 did not come up as a topic of interest during interviews, and the author does not suspect that participants were factoring the virus into their experiences of hygge or temporality at this point in time.
out about hygge? And 2) What was going on in your life during the time you first learned about hygge? These questions helped identify each participant’s current chapter of life and provided a starting point for conversation. Interviews were unstructured and maintained an aim of evoking rich, detailed description of lived experience in regard to the pace of everyday life and the adoption of hygge practices. Topics of conversation included descriptions of daily routines, past cross-cultural experiences, means and methods for learning about hygge, participation in the Cultivating Hygge facebook group, life changes as a result of learning about and adopting elements of hygge, products that participants buy and use to practice hygge, and moments that felt especially hygge, as well as descriptions of moments that felt especially un-hygge.

Fourteen interviews were conducted in total. Two interviews were discarded from the final data set as the textual responses reflected more general cultural speculations rather than personal experiences and meanings. Participants were geographically dispersed throughout the contiguous United States and a multitude of life stages were represented: single, newly married, married with children at home, empty nesters, and married for many years without children. All participants were female. Pseudonyms were given to participants to protect anonymity.

Interviews lasted from 45 minutes to 90 minutes.
Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Geographic region in US</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Northeast</td>
<td>Sales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Savannah</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>South Central</td>
<td>Government aid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allyson</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>Marketing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruth</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Southeast</td>
<td>Counselor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhoda</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>South Central</td>
<td>Social worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Layla</td>
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<td>Midwest</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margaret</td>
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<td>Northeast</td>
<td>Social worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Pacific Northwest</td>
<td>Artist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danielle</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica</td>
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<td>Stay at home mom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rita</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Female</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Sienna</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>Fundraising</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interviews were audio recorded utilizing Otter Voice Meeting Notes (otter.ai), a live transcription note-taking application. Each transcription was uploaded into a separate word document immediately following each interview. Within 24 hours of the interview, the researcher re-listened to the audio recording to ensure that the transcription text matched the recording verbatim. While the AI-powered transcription service was fairly accurate (about 97%), several corrections were required to ensure integrity.

Next, the researcher used verbatim interview data to write existential stories, constructing a snapshot of each participant’s current being in their journey of life. The stories are anchored upon events, emotions, and reflections as described in the transcripts, oftentimes using direct quotes. In these stories, interview topics were re-ordered and synthesized for logical storytelling clarity. Importantly though, in the writing of the stories, the researcher was careful to not include sentiment that was not included in the original interview; rather these stories sought to capture the essence of each participant’s life as it was on the day of the interview. These existential stories are herein referred to as the ‘text’.
The twelve stories individually serve as the intra-analysis, answering: how did each individual personalize the meanings of temporality and hygge in their everyday life? At the same time the intra-analysis took place, an inter-analysis between stories began to occur. What common themes appeared in multiple stories? The researcher began to note emerging themes after writing each story, gaining a deeper understanding of the meaning of the theme with each new story written. Themes from the earlier-analyzed stories served as guideposts for meanings found in later-analyzed stories, but new themes emerged all the way throughout the data set. When a new theme did emerge in a latter story, the researcher revisited previously analyzed stories to look for instances of the theme in those stories as well. In this way, the emergent themes among stories were hermetically analyzed as each new story was written and analyzed. Twelve preliminary themes emerged as common threads of meaning in the initial inter-analysis of stories. To better understand the primary meanings emerging from the text, a new master document brought together the textual representations of each preliminary theme. In this document, it became more clear where convergences and redundancies of meaning existed and the twelve themes collapsed into four primary themes, the findings of which will be shared below.

**Emic-Etic Analysis: How does Danish hygge interact with US culture?**

The last research question is concerned with understanding the meaning and impact of the research findings from both the visual analysis and the existential-phenomenological interviews as grounded in the cultural meanings of temporality in the United States. Therefore, using the findings from the previous two research questions in this essay as the emic understanding, and the meanings of “time is money” from essay 2 as the etic understanding, an iterative, hermeneutic analysis (e.g., Thompson 1997) between individual meanings of hygge and cultural
meanings of temporality reveal what impact Danish hygge potentially has on US culture. In the
analysis of this final research question, the researcher continuously interpreted the data gathered
in this essay in the context of the data gathered in the second essay.

Findings

Findings reveal that in the fast-paced environment of US culture, the temporal aspect of Danish
hygge is emphasized. A thorough interrogation of the visual data reveals that in the context of
the United States, hygge means “unhurried moment”. This finding is elaborated upon in the
analysis of the interview data, which reveals a process for how consumers alter temporality, or
desired timeflow, through a process of market-mediated cultural reflection.

The visual data show that once introduced to the Danish tradition of hygge, US
consumers resourcefully tinker with available materials to create their own expressions of hygge.
Everyday objects, which might have once carried other meanings, became symbols and conduits
of “hygge”. For example: a manual French press coffee maker was deemed more hygge than an
automated Keurig single-serve coffee maker (‘I’m trying to slow down a little. And coffee out of
a French press rather than a Keurig helps that happen ... and makes it taste so much
better!’); bread became hygge when it was homemade rather than store bought (“Sunday
morning.....coffee and reading while bone broth is cooking for dinner tonight and bread dough is
rising.....total peace”); and a home office felt hygge when it was adorned with string lights or a
salt lamp (“If you’ve got to work on the weekend, make it hygge with dim lighting, soft music,
and a scented candle”).
Figures 54-55.
Hygge as “unhurried moment” in the United States context (Source: Cultivating Hygge facebook group)

With this new meaning for hygge in the United States, we may now explore the subsequent research questions. How do US consumers personalize hygge and its meaning of “unhurried moment” in everyday life? And what impact might hygge have on the rest of US culture?
Market-Mediated Cultural Reflection

The existential-phenomenological text reveals four main themes: cultural reflection; inspiration to downshift; existential curation; and desired timeflow. Importantly, these four themes reveal how the adoption of hygge helps to reshape consumer subjectivity through a process of dismantling layers of structural, cultural meanings surrounding temporality. US consumers use the borrowed philosophy of Danish hygge to experience a new, desired timeflow in everyday life.

Figure 56.
The adoption of Danish hygge in the US provokes a four-step phenomenological process that reshapes consumer subjectivity
Cultural reflection

Learning about another culture and its traditions gives individuals something to which individuals can compare their own culture. Learning about Scandinavian cultures through hygge prompts individuals to reflect, both critically and appreciatively, on their own culture of origin. In the words of Holly, “Hygge lends itself to being more self-aware, you know, you’re supposed to sort of stop and think and be quiet and reflect a little bit.”

Such reflection prompts individuals to consider: “How should I live?” in the US cultural context, while simultaneously drawing upon influences from another culture. In this way, the structures of US culture are illuminated as individuals consider what these structures mean to them in their everyday lives.

Meaning is often discovered through difference. Several instances in the text illustrate how hygge prompts individuals to reflect on the differences between US culture and their unique cross-cultural heritages and experiences:

“My father is a first-generation American who immigrated from Sweden in the 1920s. And I wish I knew more about my specific cultural heritage, but my grandfather felt as if he needed to assimilate quickly into American culture. And so he actively erased many of his Swedish traditions from his and my grandmother’s life. A lot of elements of their Swedish identity were muted, and it broke my heart, you know, because I really take a lot of pride in this cultural heritage and I am frustrated sometimes that I don’t have more of a wellspring of knowledge or experience to draw from and celebrate in my everyday life.” -Allyson

“Studying abroad in Sweden was so different from my experience as a teenager in the US. At home in America, we’d go out to eat – a lot. Never in Sweden. Not because my host family couldn’t afford it, but it just wasn’t in the ethos. Nobody went to McDonald’s because they were short on time... it was an extreme treat, a novelty.” -Margaret

“When I heard about hygge, it reminded me of some of the things I love about the European mindset. I love Europe (I even lived abroad shortly), and hygge made me feel more connected to the ethos there. There aren’t just winners and losers. People care for each other. You work with the space and resources you have. You don’t need a million dollars to be successful or happy.” -Danielle
“I’m from a big Italian family, and there is a huge emphasis on long, lazy Sunday dinners and time together. I’m closer with my family because of that time we’ve carved out continually over the years.” -Holly

“Five years ago I moved from sunny South Carolina to blustery Green Bay, Michigan. I thought, ‘Oh my God I’m going to die.’ There was no sun... it was dark... At about that same time, I learned of my family’s Norwegian roots. And I was very curious to learn more about my Scandinavian heritage. So I was looking for books on Amazon and came upon The Little Book of Hygge. And after I read the book, I was sold... 100%. Learning about hygge helped me connect with my Norwegian heritage, especially the idea of making do with what you have and making the best out of any situation.” -Jessica

Such cultural reflection gives way to understanding the cultural context of the United States in novel ways. In many instances, cultural reflections contained elements of criticism for the US cultural context. Common critiques include those questioning American standards in regard to temporality and productivity:

“In the US, it’s all about fast, fast, fast... eat in your car... busy, busy, busy... The work ‘busy’ irritates the heck out of me... it’s a four-letter word that I just feel like it’s kind of taken over our dialogue... that instead of when you ask somebody how they’re doing... it’s not, ‘I’m doing well; I feel poorly; etc’... it’s: ‘I’m so busy. And that doesn’t really tell me anything about the person. I’m curious... what are they doing that has them so busy? And oftentimes I think it’s out of obligation; people are not conscious of what they are doing... they are just on the treadmill of life and they are just doing, not thinking... I used to be like that. I used to think that the more I had or the more I did that that somehow elevated me.” -Margaret

“The typical American lifestyle is ‘go big, go bigger, go bigger...’. And I certainly grew up that way. I was incredibly busy. Growing up, my mom kept me so so, so, so busy... I never had a meal at home, I was always gone... I was always doing something.” -Jessica

“I definitely take pride in the things that I accomplish, like in my career... Which is great, but it also... I feel like... leaves this kind of emptiness of... Ok, well... am I doing this because these are things I enjoy and I’m getting a positive experience out of? Or am I doing this because it looks great on a resume or it sounds good to another future employer? It’s hard to choose myself; because there is a strong external perception in America when it comes to time management. And it’s something I struggle with... the time management piece... even if I do have the time, I feel pressure to ensure I’m using it wisely.” -Rita

Several instances in the data also specifically critique Western consumerist tendencies, commenting on how these tendencies feel distinctively counter to the ideals of Danish hygge:
“I began to reflect on my own consumerist tendencies... I began to really consider the financial implications of buying things. Just because something popped up in an ad, did that mean I really needed it? Did it bring joy and value to my life? Hygge helped me reflect on my consumer habits. It helped me consider what it is that I truly value. Hygge helped me make some changes in this sense.”

“The antithesis of hygge to me now is being in the ultimate throws of consumerism: the shopping mall. The minute I walk into a mall, I want to walk out. I had been putting it off, I’d been avoiding it, because my aunt bought me something for Christmas, that I already really fundamentally had... and so I was taking it back to see if I could exchange it for something else. And it was too hot. It was too busy. It was chaotic – there was sensory overload with noise and light and lack of space. It was all of the things that I just found to be very uncomfortable and un-hygge.” -Layla

Importantly, while hygge helps individuals reflect on their culture, learning about hygge alone is often not enough to validate a true lifestyle adjustment, as illustrated by Margaret’s experience:

"Again, there are times that I end up having that sort of inner dialogue of, ‘Is this normal, or is there something wrong with me?’ You know, when I see my friends and their focus is on all the things that they’re doing and how busy they are and how stressed they are because they’ve got all these different obligations... And I’m sort of like... ‘Hm, I’ve got, you know, all of this white space and I’m not really doing anything...’ And it just sometimes can really make you question, you know, ‘Am I doing this right?’” -Margaret

As such, the next stage of the cultural reflection process speaks to the power of community validation in the American adoption of Danish hygge.

**Inspiration to downshift**

Individuals become more familiar with hygge through various products, promotions, and stories diffused throughout the marketing system. This research studies the specific online community of “Cultivating Hygge”, a private facebook group with nearly 20,000 members. Through community engagement, individuals see how other individuals live differently from, or even in opposition to, generally accepted cultural norms. One of the cultural norms that is highlighted in the context of hygge is that of temporality.

Through repeated engagement with the Cultivating Hygge community, a certain social permission is granted to alter one’s lifestyle. Individuals see evidence of others living differently
and are inspired to also make decisions to live differently. In this, the individual becomes
coupled from the dominant cultural structure and moves toward a greater ability to practice
agency.

First, the text shows that the very act of naming “hygge” gives an amorphous sensibility a
concrete word with which to refer, giving the idea immense power for individuals searching for
an alternative lifestyle:

“I think when I found hygge, it was like, ‘Oh my gosh – this is what I have always
wanted’. I just didn’t know there was a word for it. The word was so comforting to me, to
find out this was actually a thing. I was fascinated that there was an idea that legitimated
my feelings. And once I found it, I wanted more of it in my life.” - Sienna

“This really speaks to me. There’s a lot about this ideology that I can really get behind.”
-Allyson

Even if individuals were already trying to live in all of the ways that hygge might facilitate,
naming the concept gave such a lifestyle more legitimacy:

“So really, when I found out about hygge, nothing on the surface had to change. I just
had to recognize that... this is what I’m doing... that that these are exactly the calm
moments I’ve been looking for. I mean, I sit and read all the time, but after finding out
about hygge, I became more intentional with it and telling myself: Okay, THESE are your
little cozy moments. There is power in recognizing that.” - Rita

“I think in a way, hygge has been inside of me all along but I didn’t know exactly to call
it that.” - Sienna

Additionally, the validation of others practicing hygge emboldened the actions of individuals:

“When I found something that validated that type of existence and I found out that I
wasn’t alone... I just grasped on it and I wouldn’t let go.” - Holly

“...Which is why finding the hygge facebook groups has been comforting. Because the
people I have in my real, physical life are not like me. And on the internet, I’ve found a
group of likeminded people. And I love to watch and see how they live their lives; I
observe and learn a lot from them.” - Kate

Further, the Cultivating Hygge community inspires living in-the-moment and permits a slower
pace of life:
“Hygge has broadened my appreciation for being able to have downtime. It has encouraged me to start sewing again, to try baking... and these are activities that are very helpful for dealing with my anxiety. They force me to slow down and think about what I’m doing in the moment, I don’t think as much about the future or replaying scenes from my past.” -Holly

“I’m loving this slower pace of life. I have time read books. I have time to cross stitch. I have time to walk my little dogs in the sunshine. Even enjoying a good cup of coffee can bring me immense joy. With hygge, I am looking for moments where my heart swells, where time just kind of stands still. And I am just absolutely engaged in that experience. A wonderful thing.” -Savannah

“Now, in the mornings, I wake up a little earlier before work and before my boys wake up. I shuffle to the kitchen. And I warm water on the stove for a French press of coffee. Our kitchen looks out into the backyard which is heavily wooded. I take a moment and observe: the plant that has grown since the morning before, the animals scurrying about, any new snowfall that occurred overnight. I pour a cup of coffee, and it is a pure, sweet little moment to anchor my day.” -Allyson

And it is not lost on individuals that downshifting is a unique lifestyle choice in the US cultural context:

“I don’t subscribe to the American way of super-fast living. It is just absolutely crazy making. I choose to not get consumed in that.” -Sienna

“Our pace of life is so slow... it’s just incredibly slow... I think especially compared to everyone else.” -Jessica

Existential curation

In the process of adopting hygge, individuals ask themselves, “How do I design the life that I want to live?”. In the context of temporality this translates to, “How do I decide what remains and what changes in my life so that I can achieve a certain desired experience of time?”

Individuals begin to experiment with hygge, playing with the tempo of everyday life. In this, individuals assign new meanings to temporality, replacing and redefining structural meanings of time with individual meanings of time.
Sometimes existential curation results in a significant lifestyle shift, whereas other times, a mindset shift within a current lifestyle is all that’s needed. First, several instances in the text suggest a qualitative change in lifestyle as a result of adopting hygge:

Savannah describes the choice to retire early: “I was able to realize that it’s the simple things that bring me joy, and I’ve really dialed my life back. I have scaled back my commitments. I am retiring early. (I tried to make my work move at a slower pace... And I made some progress towards this goal... but ultimately it wasn’t sustainable; so, I’m retiring.) And as a result of really slowing down and living much more simply, in every way... the pace of my life is much slower. In the end, it’s almost like an experiment, a very fun one. I’m going to do more of those things or I’m going to try and insert those experiences into my life more and that has led to a complete lifestyle change for me.” - Savannah

Allyson describes the choice to move from Brooklyn, NY to Portland, ME: “My husband and I were newly married, and we were living in Brooklyn, New York, and were experiencing tension around the ways that we were living our lives and the things on the horizon for us in terms of, you know, having our own family and making some life changes... Our aspirations for the way we wanted to live our life were in conflict with our current lifestyle. One weekend soon after, we visited my family in Maine. And I was sitting in this really comfortable leather chair. And I had my feet up with some really cozy socks, and I had the fireplace going... it was a perfect little hygge moment. And I knew I wanted more of this in my life. When we moved from the city to outside of Portland, Maine, we found that we were able to integrate more elements of a calm and peaceful lifestyle in our everyday. Maine is much more conducive to a hygge lifestyle than Brooklyn.” - Allyson

And Jessica talks about the day-to-day life of a single-income family: “I mean, there’s places where we cut costs that I think other people wouldn’t be willing to. For example, I cook two or three meals a day, every day, all week long. Because that’s much more affordable for us, whereas if I had chosen to go chase down the next big thing... I mean we would... (not that there’s anything wrong with eating out... but it was just something we had to give up in order to keep the slower lifestyle... Ultimately though, my boys are 15 and 16, they’re about to leave the nest. And I’m trying to soak in every moment I have with them... and for our family, it was worth the tradeoff for me to stay at home and take care of things around here and provide support for all my boys.” - Jessica

Mindset shifts often accompany significant lifestyle shifts:

“There was a fundamental tension between my philosophy on health (of mind, body, and spirit) and the demands placed on me at work. This tension, along with 50-60 hour work weeks led to burnout. I knew I had to make a change. So, 3 years ago, I made a career shift. I actually work in the same facility but I work a part-time role in nurse practitioner education. I train and support people who are doing the job that I was doing. However,
in order to embrace the idea of making this shift for my wellness, I had to let go of some of the ‘keeping up with the Joneses’ that you find yourself doing subconsciously when you’re making more money. Hygge played a big part in my acceptance of this lifestyle change. Honestly, I think that the change was going to happen anyway... But I think I was better able to make peace with the change because of hygge.” - Layla

“I’m comfortable with where I am in life. Hygge has shown me ways for my soul to be still. This makes me happy. Not striving, not climbing the ladder... but finding peace for my soul and connection with others who are also like me.” - Holly

And sometimes, hygge provokes a mindset shift without qualitative shift in lifestyle:

“At work, I struggle with feeling anxious. I even went on some medication for it last summer, which helped quite a bit. But I’ve noticed that hygge has just really helped to chill me out. I’m less frustrated by small things, but I’m able to find more joy and turn mundane tasks into something fun. At home, I feel like a better parent and spouse. I’m calmer with my children, more steady. And I feel more present with my husband. I used to be so tired at the end of the day, that I would just zone out when we were talking... but I’m able to be 100% in the moment now: at work, with my kids, and with my husband.” - Ruth

“For me, hygge is about longevity... it’s all about taking your time and fostering a mindset. For example, even a mundane task like grocery shopping can be hygge if you have the right mindset. You can listen to good music on the way, roll down the windows, enjoy the long walk through the parking lot, and view searching for ingredients as a fun way to infuse novelty into your life. (I’ve been trying my hand at baking. So now when I go grocery shopping for the week, I have something to look forward to. I have to do my grocery shopping, it is a necessity, but I’m also going to be able to go out and shop for my cake.) Or, you can be stressed in the Saturday morning traffic, angry that you didn’t get a close parking spot, and stressed trying to find every item on your list. The feeling that you have from the activity results from the mindset.” - Rhoda

“We see other people our age climbing mountains, and sometimes it feels like we are missing out. Hygge helps us feel more comfortable in our circumstance, a little less sad about our disabilities, and a little more content with what we have. It has shifted our narrative to maybe a little more like, ‘Okay, some things are a little slow paced, and, you know, we’re definitely doing things differently than most people in their late 30s/early 40s, but you know... if we change the attitude around it, we can make it work for us.’” - Danielle

In addition to the spectrum of actualized lifestyle changes versus pure mindset shifts, a similar logic of curation extends to the spectrum of materiality. An individual’s personalization of hygge may be material, immaterial, or somewhere in-between. The text shows that material
consumption, especially as it relates to creating a particular type of atmosphere or environment, can help create feelings of hygge:

“I’ve been more intentional about creating a certain type of atmosphere at home and work. At my job, I can’t burn a real candle. But now I have small battery-operated tea lights on my desk, which I really enjoy because when things do get stressful, they’re right there by my phone, by my computer, and it just kind of gives me … just a quick chance to kind of zone out and refocus and be able to move on. I’ve been incorporated more music at work, too, which is kind of nice because when I have kids come into my office … the music kind of just flows with creating that atmosphere for them, too … and I’ve never liked the overhead fluorescence either, so I’ve always had lights around my room in my office. I really, really want to make it even more hygge-like in my space for when kids come in.” -Rita

“I started to make changes around our house and make it more conducive to the concept of hygge… like blankets that people can curl up in, and seating areas where you can really face each other and talk, without the TV being the center of the most comfortable room in the house. (In fact, we moved our TV to another room now entirely.) In the living room, we’ve got the fireplace and some sofas and some blankets and some rugs… it is a place for connection and conversation.” -Layla

“When my husband recently spent time in the hospital, I decided to make it hygge for him. I ran out to Target with my mom and we bought some cozy materials, new pajamas, some string lights, and of course – a miniature Christmas tree (it was right before Christmas and we weren’t sure if we were going to miss the holiday.) The hospital felt warm and cozy… it felt like home.” -Danielle

“A year ago, I bought my own house. When I was home shopping, hygge was in the back of mind… as I toured different homes, I kept envisioning them as hygge or not… I knew there was a certain feeling I was trying to manifest in my home. I wanted to create a special space. Now, I’ve had some time to settle into my home and really make it what I want to be. I repainted and chose colors that were warm – not too dark or too light. I mix a lot of textures… Most importantly though, I incorporated some heirloom family pieces into my décor. So, I have my grandfather’s trunk from his days in the army... it’s at the foot of my bed. I have a painting from my grandparents' house. And I have little rocking chairs that my mom and dad had when they were little. Incorporating that family history into the space is very important to me.” -Sienna

However, materiality does not guarantee feelings of hygge. Hygge is ultimately an immaterial mindset:

“Right after mom died in that process [of terrible events], I noticed that I was spending a lot more money than I normally spend… and it was okay because it wasn’t a hardship. But I just said, you know, this isn’t really like me, and I’m not really feeling satisfied from
it. And it just hit me that I’m trying to fill a void. I’m trying to fill a void that I cannot fill; I’m going to have to stop. I’m going to have to feel this. So that’s what I did. And in the process of feeling... I discovered that the things that bring me joy, for the most part... they’re not material things. For example, I love my living room. But what I mean is that I love the way the sun streams through my living room. I think it’s really the sun. Or the wind through the open windows, or the dogs stretching out, or the laughter of friends... those are the intangible things that nourish my soul.” -Savannah

“As of late, we’ve been slowly, slowly, slowly redoing this old little house that we’re in. And I’ve been doing all of the work myself, which I really love to do. As we’ve remodeled, we went as cheap as possible... we took what we had and we painted and spray painted and re-upholstered... We utilized thrift stores and hand-me-downs... You don’t have to go buy things to have hygge. You can create a warm, cozy, inviting environment without the stuff. In fact, it really bothers me that the idea of having hygge is equated with having privilege, because the whole concept of hygge to me is making the best out of what you have, right?” -Jessica

“So this year, like three days before Christmas, a couple of friends brought their kids over to my house. And I had just moved in and didn’t really have time to get a tree until the stores were all sold out. So there were not very many Christmas decorations up and the house was bare bones, except for some stockings I had hung up on the mantel. But my friends came over and it was super simple... we got pizza and turned on a movie for the kids and all of a sudden I walk into the room and just see the kids sitting at the coffee table eating pizza watching Mickey Christmas... and it was hygge. Even with the meager decorations I managed to pull out of the boxes. And that was sort of this moment of like, Oh I made this happen... like this was my vision. It wasn’t about the stuff, but it was about a welcoming environment.” -Sienna

“Ultimately, for me, hygge is an idea that helps me change my mindset around circumstances that I cannot change. It is a survival tactic. And that, to me, is the biggest takeaway from hygge: that hygge helps you survive something seemingly intolerable. Whether it’s the literal cold weather, horrific politics, or – in my case – a chronic health issue.” -Danielle

**Desired timeflow**

Individuals incorporate elements of hygge into their everyday lives through consumption rhythms and rituals. These new practices help individuals achieve a certain desired timeflow. Woermann and Rokka (2015) define the timeflow of a practice as “its ability to evoke an experienced temporality”.

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The text reveals how hygge prompts individuals to emphasize a certain temporality in everyday life:

“So, in the mornings, I have a very set routine and rhythm, and that’s been an evolution over time. I find that for me ... I don’t like to feel rushed. I don’t want to have that stress of get up and go... so I get up earlier than I would necessarily have to get to work. I like to give myself a buffer. So, I get up in the morning typically around 5, and I start the water for the coffee, I take a shower, come out, I do a pour over coffee versus like a Keurig machine... so I have this ritual. I’ll make something small for breakfast. And then I’ll sit for a little bit, maybe watch something on tv, maybe read, and then start getting ready for work around 6. I usually leave my house around 7; my workday starts at 8:30... traffic can take an hour... so I prefer to get to work early; Ideally, I get there around eight and I’ll usually just park in a parking garage, so I’ll typically sit in my car until 20 after 8... reading or listening to podcasts. Like I said, I don’t like to feel rushed. I feel like I’ve learned over time that it really throws off my day... and I don’t look at it as being rigid... it’s more just that... I have this rhythm, and this rhythm works for me... this is the flow that I like and that allows me to move throughout my day as calmly as I can be.” - Margaret

“We have two little boys: ages 2 and 4. And this is a unique season of life. I work part time (from home, so that grants some flexibility.) But this season requires a special rhythm; rituals throughout the day that the whole family can connect through. For our family, the morning and evening rituals are anchors for our day. And those can be difficult times of the day for toddlers and young children. And honestly, I struggled with these parts of the day at first, especially after my second son was born and I was trying to balance being a mom to a toddler and take care of a newborn. I struggled. And so we built special routines around these times. In the morning, it’s a warm, hearty breakfast together. We slow down and I ask my sons what they dreamed about; their answers are hilarious. Those are hygge moments. In the evenings, we may light a fire (the boys love when we bring in wood from outside to begin kindling). The boys also love tubby time, reading books, and singing songs in the living room as a family. These are rituals that create peace and good vibes.” - Allyson

“Hygge is such an abstract concept. Being from an artistic mindset, I tend to think that I am open minded. I believe things are open ended. But I’ve realized that I just really thrive on routine. My hygge is having a routine; that makes me feel a peace inside. So I get up in the morning, I let the dogs out, I feed the dogs, I go make sure that the kitchen is all cleaned up, and then it’s like a ritual to make my coffee... and then I sit on the couch... and with my two cookies and my dog on my lap, I watch the morning news. Hygge has allowed me to think more deeply about how to incorporate those rhythms. How good or cozy it feels to bring those routines in. It prompted me to ask: ‘How can I do more of that?’” - Kate
Individuals describe carving out time for hygge as an intentional, conscious choice that they make, despite the circumstances around them:

“When I am at home with my family, that time is absolutely precious. Especially on weekends, we try to protect family downtime by going on hikes, skiing, riding bikes, reading books all in the same room together, going to church... togetherness is important for us.” -Ruth

“Now, every day, I’m very conscious to take some kind of time to feel hygge... to feel those cozy warm feelings. And I think since I’ve become a lot more intentional with it, it has helped me slow down and think about how I’m spending my time and work to make that time more meaningful.” -Rita

“In a given day, I get up early and make breakfast and coffee for my boys. We use real teacups and saucers, which is just a nice treat. And we sit around the table and talk and wake up together as a family. It’s just a moment to sit down and enjoy something that I think otherwise is rushed through for a lot of people. It’s not difficult... it’s a simple thing, maybe 20 minutes long... but it is a special moment.” -Kate

In the end, hygge helps to create a certain feeling in regard to time, the accumulation of which composes life itself:

“It’s the journey of determining what it is that just makes my soul sing, as opposed to ... just going through life. Life circumstances have provided very valuable life lessons in how to ... use the time that I do have, or the moments that I do have, in a way that nourishes my soul. I made a determination that I’m going to really plug in here and see what it is that is going to feed my soul. Because I’ve got to be fed, I’ve got... my soul... it’s not an option anymore. I’ve got to F-E-E-L this, not F-O-L-L this. It’s just simply being. But being and reflecting and connecting in meaningful way. These are the things that nourish my soul.” -Suzannah

“I began to ask myself, ‘How is it that I want to feel throughout the day, and especially in the mornings and evenings?’ I don’t miss living in Brooklyn. It was... a very lived experience... everything just felt really intense and expensive and time consuming and just difficult. In contrast, the hygge I’ve found in Maine is simple, calm, and filtered down. The basic happiness elements of life aren’t attached to any kind of external factors. It is grounding and centering.” -Allyson

“I felt like I needed to find something to ground myself back into reality; I needed something where it’s like... I can shut that part of my brain off and just take time to enjoy little moments for myself, or little moments together, and just be really present instead of constantly thinking about the future. I like to come back to things like hygge when things get pretty hectic in my life. So when I heard about hygge for the second time, I was like okay, this is something that makes me feel so good. And this is something that I know I
would like to incorporate into my life. Since adopting hygge, I’ve actually tried to be a little bit more intentional with this restorative time. I think hygge comes down to being intentional with your life and recognizing that what you’re doing, you’re doing because it makes you feel good and safe and calm...For me, some of those things would be reading a good book and getting completely wrapped up on it, or burning incense, or going through a guided meditation. Those kinds of things just make you feel good and connect back to yourself.” -Rita

“I’ve ultimately found that hygge is a way to be more intentional and check in with myself. To be serious about self-care (hello, bubble baths and peppermint tea!). To give myself grace and rest.” -Ruth

Critically Reflecting on “Time is Money”

The meaning and personalized expressions of hygge influence the way in which the Danish tradition interacts with the rest of US culture. As individuals practice elements of hygge in their everyday lives, they begin to exhibit an agentic consumption of time over temporal structures in society. The result is that hygge helps American consumers dismantle the ‘objective’, normalized cultural meanings surrounding temporality. In other words, structure begins to give way to agency through the individual interpretation of meanings. Specifically, the practice of hygge challenges several aspects of the “time is money” cultural myth as reflected in US consumer culture.
Danish hygge in the United States allows consumers to dismantle and challenge normalized social meanings surrounding temporality.

Previous research in this dissertation has shown that the myth of “time is money” is hyper-present in modern consumer culture and that it is comprised of various rhetoric themes. Twenty-one rhetoric themes were identified in total, and the text reveals that more than half of these themes (13) are specifically challenged by the phenomenological experiences of individuals practicing Danish hygge in the United States. The below table highlights these thirteen rhetoric themes, along with examples of how the adopted practice of hygge contradicts “time is money”.

Figure 57.
### Table 3.

<p>| Contradiction of “time is money” |  |
|----------------------------------|  |
| <strong>“Time is Money” cultural myth</strong> | <strong>Hygge cultural myth</strong> | <strong>Example from the text</strong> |
| <strong>Normalizes:</strong> | <strong>Asserts:</strong> |  |
| American: “Fastness is patriotic, democratic, and American. We as a society benefit when we all go fast.” | American ideals of temporality should be examined. | “One of the things I hope could be beneficial for the American lifestyle in regard to hygge is that maybe it would help us be more mindful of the things that really truly bring us comfort and happiness and closeness. I think that part of what is creating some problems in our culture is that we’re not listening to ourselves. We’re not listening to our bodies; we’re not listening to our minds. And if we can tune into what we really want... I think we will be far happier and healthier.” - Layla |
| Desirable: “Fastness is desirable, an aspirational trait.” | Slowness is desirable. | “The practices I’ve adopted from hygge truly make me a happier person. “Because when you have that hygge... you’re creating that cozy, comfortable environment, and you’re bringing people into your space and then you’re experiencing joy and happiness and laughter with them... it’s a natural endorphin rush; it’s that natural serotonin boost.” I wouldn’t have previously thought that hygge could make that kind of a difference, but it does.” - Layla |
| Escape time: &quot;If you (earn) and spend enough money, you can escape time.&quot; | Linger in the present time; do not wish time away. | “I felt like I needed to find something to ground myself back into reality; I needed something where it’s like... I can shut that part of my brain off and just take time to enjoy little moments for myself, or little moments together, and just be really present instead of constantly thinking about the future.” - Rita |
| Fast is better: &quot;Fast is better than not fast. (Conversely, slow is bad.)&quot; | Slowness is a valuable trait, and better than fast. | “I am looking for moments where my heart swells; where time just kind of stands still. And I am just absolutely engaged in that experience. A wonderful thing. In the end, it’s almost like an experiment, a very fun one. I’m going to do more of those things or I’m going to try and insert those experiences into my life more and that has led to a complete lifestyle change for me.” - Suzannah |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Time is Money” cultural myth</th>
<th>Hygge cultural myth</th>
<th>Example from the text</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Normalizes:</td>
<td>Asserts:</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Glorification: “Fast is something religious; an idol to be worshiped and glorified.”</td>
<td>Slow moments are to be coveted.</td>
<td>“I don’t miss living in Brooklyn. It was a very lived experience; everything just felt really intense and expensive and time consuming and just difficult. In contrast, the hygge I’ve found in Maine is simple, calm, and filtered down. The basic happiness elements of life aren’t attached to any kind of external factors. It is grounding and centering. It’s glorious.” - Allyson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multitasking: &quot;Today's pace of life requires multitasking; you must blend together one or more activities (such as work and play, walking and talking, etc.) to keep up with everyday demands.&quot;</td>
<td>Mindfulness and doing one thing at a time is a way to fully engage in the moment.</td>
<td>“In a given day, I get up early and make breakfast and coffee for my boys. We use real tea cups and saucers, which is just a nice treat. And we sit around the table and talk and wake up together as a family. It’s just a moment to sit down and enjoy something that I think otherwise is rushed through for a lot of people. It’s not difficult... it’s a simple thing, maybe 20 minutes long... but it is a special moment.” - Jessica</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normal: &quot;Fast is normal; the social standard; the expectation.&quot;</td>
<td>The “normal” pace of life should be questioned and redefined.</td>
<td>“There are times that I end up having that sort of inner dialogue of, ‘Is this normal, or is there something wrong with me?’ You know, when I see my friends and their focus is on all the things that they’re doing and how busy they are and how stressed they are because they’ve got all these different obligations... And I’m sort of like... ‘Hm, I’ve got, you know, all of this white space and I’m not really doing anything...’ And it just sometimes can really make you question, you know, ‘Am I doing this right?’” - Margaret</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Time is Money” cultural myth</td>
<td>Hygge cultural myth</td>
<td>Example from the text</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Normalizes:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Asserts:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality: &quot;You don't have to sacrifice quality in order to go faster; the fast version is on par with the traditional, slow version.&quot;</td>
<td>Speeding through an experience can sacrifice an element of quality.</td>
<td>“For me, hygge is about longevity... it’s all about taking your time and fostering a mindset. For example, even a mundane task like grocery shopping can be hygge if you have the right mindset. You can listen to good music on the way, roll down the windows, enjoy the long walk through the parking lot, and view searching for ingredients as a fun way to infuse novelty into your life. (I’ve been trying my hand at baking. So now when I go grocery shopping for the week, I have something to look forward to. I have to do my grocery shopping, it is a necessity, but I’m also going to be able to go out and shop for my cake.) Or, you can be stressed in the Saturday morning traffic, angry that you didn’t get a close parking spot, and stressed trying to find every item on your list. The feeling that you have from the activity results from the mindset.” - Rhoda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Resource:</strong> &quot;Time is a finite resource to be invested, spent, etc. for a certain return.&quot;</td>
<td>Time is the meaningful stuff that life is made of; it is something to be cherished.</td>
<td>“Ironically, I was able to realize that it’s the simple things that bring me joy, and I’ve really dialed my life back. And as a result of really slowing down and living much more simply, in every way... the pace of my life is much slower.” - Suzannah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Round the clock:</strong> &quot;Non-stop, around the clock expectations demand higher frequency of activity.&quot;</td>
<td>A lower frequency of activity and taking breaks should be permitted.</td>
<td>“Hygge has shown me ways for my soul to be still. This makes me happy. Not striving, not climbing the ladder, not ‘leading’... but finding peace for my soul and connection with others.” - Holly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3. (Cont.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Time is Money” cultural myth</th>
<th>Hygge cultural myth</th>
<th>Example from the text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Normalizes:</td>
<td>Scheduled: &quot;Time should be scheduled, regulated, measured, and managed.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Learning about hygge has helped reinforce rhythms and rituals in my life. These help me keep my time and my space open. The power is in my hands to control how I feel about my days and my life. And I think that goes with, you know, the pace of life that I live. Like I said, I don’t like to feel rushed. I feel like I’ve learned over time that it really throws off my day... and I don’t look at it as being rigid... it’s more just that... I have this rhythm, and this rhythm works for me... this is the flow that I like and that allows me to move throughout my day as calmly as I can be.” - Margaret</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asserts:</td>
<td>Organic rhythms and rituals allow time to flow.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triumph over time:</td>
<td>There are natural limits to our bodies and minds, and these should be gently respected as we restore to an embodied version of time.</td>
<td>“I would say I have an intense life. At work, I struggle with feeling anxious. I even went on some medication for it last summer, which helped quite a bit. But I’ve noticed that hygge has just really helped to chill me out. I’m less frustrated by small things, but I’m able to find more joy and turn mundane tasks into something fun. At home, I feel like a better parent and spouse. I’m calmer with my children, more steady. And I feel more present with my husband. I used to be so tired at the end of the day, that I would just zone out when we were talking... but I’m able to be 100% in the moment now: at work, with my kids, and with my husband.” - Ruth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Way to success:</td>
<td>Success is found individually in nontraditional markers.</td>
<td>“The hygge concept is about peace and comfort. And leaning into the concept has given me the confidence to fight for these things for myself – to not be swayed into what others want or what others want for me – but to be true to what I want for myself. I’m learning to stand my ground through hygge and be comfortable with being different.” - Holly</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Discussion

Interestingly, this research uncovers a case in which a market-mediated process helps challenge the myth of “time is money”, which has to do with a market-sanctioned understanding of social time in the first place. So, what does it mean that US consumers confront and question the “time is money” myth through their adoption of the cross-culturally marketed concept of hygge? This research raises important theoretical implications both for the phenomenon of temporality in consumer culture and for the notion of market-mediated cultural reflection. Managerially, the findings of this study are applicable to applying cultural marketing strategy to evolving consumer needs regarding temporality in the marketplace.

Theoretical implications: Temporality in Consumer Culture

This paper extends Husemann and Eckhardt (2019), in showing that cultural borrowing is a specific way that consumers “immerse into, or escape from, the broader societal temporal logics that emphasize slowness or fastness.” However, the adoption of Danish hygge in the United States is not an oasis per se from dominant temporal logic, but rather a more permanent challenge to the dominant temporal logic.

The findings put forth in this essay suggest that consumers may decelerate by consuming aspects of other cultures. For these consumers, deceleration is not merely a temporary change, but an enduring state resulting from a process of cultural reflection. Such reflection fundamentally alters the individual's mindset, or ideological orientation, toward temporality. While Husemann and Eckhardt’s emphasis on “oases” of deceleration addresses Rosa’s second type of inertia to social acceleration, the findings of this paper harken to Rosa’s fifth type of inertia: intentional deceleration as ideology.
This essay also echoes Woermann and Rokka (2015) in that consumers achieve a certain feeling of timeflow by engaging in certain consumption activities. For many consumers in the US, a desired timeflow is a decelerated state from the normalized acceleration promoted throughout consumer culture. While the second essay of this dissertation seeks to make explicit the “objective”, culturally-accepted meanings surrounding an accelerating temporality in the US, Rosa states that, “what is harder to measure is the subjective expression of everyday life feeling as if it is constantly accelerating.” (2013, 79). In general, individuals may convey a “growing sense that one lacks time”, “a stressful compulsion to accelerate”, or “anxiety about ‘not keeping up’” (ibid.).” This essay seeks to further understand such phenomenological experiences in the context of a globally connected consumer culture.

The findings put forth suggest that the cross-cultural marketing and resulting consumer adoption of Danish hygge in the United States initiates a reflective process that is capable of dismantling normalized temporal structures. The result is greater agency in the experience and consumption of time. In other words, Danish hygge helps US consumers achieve a desired timeflow.

Desired timeflow occurs because hygge introduces a new cultural myth into the US social imagination, which interacts with and causes reflection on existing cultural myths in the United States context. In the US cultural context, hygge presents an alternative myth to the superfast life that is normalized by the “time is money” myth. Hygge promotes the use of rituals and routines (i.e., rhythms) which can alter the pace of life and make space for unhurried moments in the everyday lives of consumers. In this way, hygge reshapes consumer subjectivity in the United States as US consumers use the Danish tradition to transform into different versions of
themselves. Importantly, hygge is not merely a trend in the marketplace, but a conduit to a new way of living.

**Theoretical implications: Market-Mediated Cultural Reflection**

Danish hygge in the United States has implications for our understanding of market-mediated cultural reflection. Specifically, this research presents another way of conceptualizing how consumers might utilize borrowed (and marketed) cultural meanings to critically reflect upon the myths of their own culture. This conceptualization has important implications for an increasingly globalized consumer culture.

Globalization has given rise to cultural exchange across borders as increased accessibility to and awareness of the global environment makes it easier to borrow attractive ideas, traditions, and aesthetics from other cultures. The consumer marketplace provides an accessible platform for such cross-cultural borrowing where objects and ideas transcend national boundaries. Marketing functions such as branding, product development, advertising, and channels of distribution help facilitate a transfer of meaning from one culture to another. Examples of cross-cultural borrowing in a globally connected consumer culture include yoga in the United States (Gokcen and Burcak 2015), Korean-pop music in Vietnam (Nguyen, Özçaglar-Toulouse, and Kjeldgaard 2018), and Christmas in Japan (Kimura and Belk 2005). In each of these instances, select superstructural symbols and practices such as cultural identities, linguistic tendencies, religious beliefs, music, cuisine, and aesthetic practices (Knepper 2006) are borrowed without adopting the deeper substructural meanings of the original traditions.

Early theories of globalization postulated that increased flows of cultural ideas, customs, and traditions would result in cultural homogenization (Frank 1967; Ritzer 2004). However, years of observing cultural diffusion in a global environment connected by
capital have shown that mixing between cultures results in an ongoing hybridization process (Neverdeen-Pieterse 2004). This is because cross-cultural diffusion often occurs as an act of bricolage, mixing, matching, and borrowing select signs from a culture of origin to a receiving culture.

Such cultural mixing allows people to “acquire objects across social divisions to create new cultural identities” (Phillmore, Klass, and Knecht 2016, 8). These cultural identities may then become subcultures that stand in direct opposition to mainstream cultural ideologies. As a result, cultural mixing can ultimately create new accepted norms and structures in society while challenging existing dominant meanings.

Hygge in Denmark is a complex and deeply rooted cultural tradition. However, hygge in the US was promoted as a consumer lifestyle, adopting superficial signifiers of hygge such as socks, candles, books, and bacon to promote a range of senses including happiness, well-being, self-care, connection, and escapism. Undoubtedly, such made-for-mass-consumption representations of hygge do not fully represent the breadth of socio-historical and political meanings that underlie the original Danish cultural tradition. This is consistent with prior knowledge that global meanings are altered through local interpretations (Askegaard and Kjeldgaard 2007; Classen and Howes 1996; Ger and Belk 1996) and explains Linnet’s argument that hygge outside of a Danish context is not really hygge (2010). The visual analysis in this essay confirms that US consumers mixed select symbols and practices of Danish hygge, while the existential-phenomenological analysis confirms that consumers personalized the meaning of

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8 Bricolage emerged as a philosophical concept when Claude Lévi-Strauss, a French structural anthropologist, described the notion of a bricoleur, or someone who creates something new with a diverse range of already-existing material (Lévi-Strauss 1962). This description extends the logic of semiotic structuralism, using the bricoleur metaphor to “illustrate the way in which societies combine and recombine different symbols and cultural elements in order to come up with reoccurring structures” (Barnard and Spencer 2009, 757).
hygge, ultimately reshaping consumer subjectivity against the specific cultural and ideological backdrop of the United States.

And perhaps this reveals the most novel insight from this study of Danish hygge in the United States: that market-mediated global mélange can help consumers critically reflect on the myths of their own culture. Pessel (2018) argues that, “The Danish society is fiercely patriotic, the Danish culture is homogenous and well-integrated, and the concept of hygge is one of the most important tools to bind the nation together culturally.” Interestingly, the cultural myth of hygge has an opposite effect in the context of US culture: it enables individuals to question its structure. Eckhardt and Mahi emphasize the importance of such consumer agency in an increasingly globalized environment, defining it as “the ability to transform and play with meaning” (2004, 137). Lévi-Strauss describes cultural mixing as an adaptive mode of ‘being in the world’ (1968). So even though cultural myths typically act as binding structures in society, new cultural myths can be liberating, providing “the means by which we can seek new meanings” (Danesi 2016, 45). The myth of Danish hygge is liberating in the US cultural context, as it illuminates the cultural myth of “time is money”, rendering it an alterable symbolic construction.

Managerial implications

The findings of this essay have specific implications for cultural marketing strategy in a changing consumer culture. The theory of cultural innovation (Holt and Cameron 2010) explicates how brands can deliver innovative cultural expressions consisting of an ideology in order to disrupt the marketplace and gain market share through a cultural marketing strategy. Against the backdrop of “cultural orthodoxy” (in this case, social acceleration perpetuated by the dominant myth of “time is money”), consumers are searching for a better way to live. An
ideological opportunity therefore exists for brands and other products of the marketing system to deliver upon the emerging consumer demand for a decelerated temporality.

Danish hygge as a subculture in the United States may provide relevant source material for cultural innovation, helping to provide a new ideology of temporality for consumers. In the realm of cultural marketing strategy, the subsequent question to the research findings presented here is: what new market opportunities or innovations might the practice of Danish hygge in the United States inspire? Specifically, can the hygge ideology inspire future consumer deceleration efforts? Such cultural innovations in the marketplace would both flow from and help provoke a larger social disruption to the dominant expressions of social acceleration as a cultural norm, demonstrating the transformative potential of market-mediated cultural reflection as described above.

**Limitations and future research**

There are inevitably an infinite number of limitations in this research, as there might be in any study. Two in particular are worth noting. First, the marketization and adoption of Danish hygge in the United States reveals a specific consumer response in the context of a West-to-West cultural diffusion. A question to consider is: how might the findings change in the context of an East-to-West, West-to-West, or East-to-East cultural diffusion? And second, the data in this research were collected during the northern hemisphere winter months (primarily January-February) over the course of multiple years. This seasonality provides an extreme context, as interest in hygge certainly surges during the winter months (Google Trends 2020). While it is possible that seasonality might affect the nuance of the findings, the author suspects that the main finding of cultural reflection would remain the same in other seasons of the year.
The contributions of this research also generate infinite potential for future scholarly explorations. Again, two in particular are worth noting. First, this research develops and empirically grounds a theoretical process that explains how cultural reflection can reshape consumer subjectivity in regard to temporality. This naturally invites the question: To what other contexts and what other phenomena may a similar process also apply? Can market-mediated mixing of cultural ideologies impact other domains pertinent to consumer and social wellbeing such as health, education, and sustainability; and how might an enhanced knowledge of market-mediated global mélange and cultural reflection help marketers constructively engage in such domains?

Second, and remaining more in line with the phenomenon of temporality and the general context of globally connected consumer cultures, this study has potential to provoke a larger discussion on social acceleration and globalization. Globalization famously re-orders temporal and geographical dimensions resulting in a time-space compression (Harvey 1999). And while globalization, interconnected economic activity, and the spread of the “time is money” ideology can be partially credited with a speeding up of social processes around the world, this research reveals a potential alternative outcome of globalization: inertia. In the case of Danish hygge in the United States, globalization of a cultural idea can actually inspire deceleration. Hygge’s meaning of ‘unhurried moment’ and the individual personalizations of this meaning may provoke future research on the relationship between globalization and temporality.

**Conclusion**

This research shows that consumer deceleration can be achieved through cultural borrowing, and that acts of market-mediated global mélange possess the potential to challenge cultural myths (ideologies) that dictate existing social norms. This research also develops and empirically
grounds a theoretical process for how market-mediated cultural reflection reshapes consumer subjectivity. As a result, we now have a better understanding of both consumer deceleration and the impact of market-mediated cultural reflection in a globally connected consumer culture. The concept of market-mediated cultural reflection has broad implications for consumer culture. Consumers in one culture can look to another culture for inspiration on ways of living and create new cultural patterns that potentially disrupt existing cultural meanings and ways of life. When cultural myths are challenged, what’s considered normal in a given society may be reconsidered and the door opens for creative destruction and reconstruction of norms. Interestingly, the marketization and adoption of Danish hygge in the United States reveals how such a process unfolds. This research shows how busy, stressed out, anxious Americans may look to other cultures for inspiration on how to slow down their pace of life and critically reflect on their place within a culture that promotes speed and productivity. Critical reflection toward the accepted pace of life in US society urges existential curation. Consumers now ask: How should I live? How do I want to experience time in daily life? In this way, the Danish cultural myth of hygge liberates consumers from the US cultural myth of “time is money”.
References


(available at https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?date=today%20y&geo=US&q=hygge)


Appendix

Occurrences of Danish hygge in the US marketplace.

The Little Book of Hygge by Meik Wiking:

(Source: HarperCollins publishers)

Examples of consumer-generated hygge content in the United States:

(Source: Pinterest)
Hygge-themed commercial for US retailer JCPenney:

![Video thumbnail](https://i.imgur.com/3G5J5QG.png)

(Source: Youtube)

Example of HyggeBox, a monthly gift box of hygge-inspired products:

![HyggeBox](https://i.imgur.com/3G5J5QG.png)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Deluxe Hygge Box</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hygge Deluxe is stuffed with coziness for those who value relaxed, happy moments and celebrating the simple things. Each box includes a selection of products to support your self-care rituals and hygge lifestyle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ 5-7 Handpicked seasonal items</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Elements of light like candles or fairy lights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Hot drinks like specialty tea or cocoa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Indulgences like biscuits or chocolate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Home decor, accessories and wellness items</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ More full-size and delightful items</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Cozy, happy moments guaranteed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Starts at $48.50/mo

(Source: shophyggebox.com)
A handcrafted candle as example of hygge-positioned product:

(Source: HighFunctioningMess on Etsy.com)

A local boutique promotes the hygge lifestyle among its products:

(Source: The Freckled Hen Farmhouse on Instagram)
Ikea doormat simply stated as “hygge”:  

(Source: The Cultivating Hygge facebook group)
Google Trends shows search interest for ‘hygge’ in the United States between 2016-2020:

(Source: google.com/trends)

Facebook post from researcher soliciting volunteer participants:
To: Sarah C Grace
   BELL 4188
From: Douglas James Adams, Chair
      IRB Committee
Date: 02/18/2020
Action: Expedited Approval
Action Date: 02/18/2020
Protocol #: 2001243594
Study Title: Danish Hygge in the United States
Expiration Date: 01/31/2021
Last Approval Date: 

The above-referenced protocol has been approved following expedited review by the IRB Committee that oversees research with human subjects.

If the research involves collaboration with another institution then the research cannot commence until the Committee receives written notification of approval from the collaborating institution's IRB.

It is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to obtain review and continued approval before the expiration date.

Protocols are approved for a maximum period of one year. You may not continue any research activity beyond the expiration date without Committee approval. Please submit continuation requests early enough to allow sufficient time for review. Failure to receive approval for continuation before the expiration date will result in the automatic suspension of the approval of this protocol. Information collected following suspension is unapproved research and cannot be reported or published as research data. If you do not wish continued approval, please notify the Committee of the study closure.

Adverse Events: Any serious or unexpected adverse event must be reported to the IRB Committee within 48 hours. All other adverse events should be reported within 10 working days.

Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of this study, such as the procedures, the consent forms, study personnel, or number of participants, please submit an amendment to the IRB. All changes must be approved by the IRB Committee before they can be initiated.

You must maintain a research file for at least 3 years after completion of the study. This file should include all correspondence with the IRB Committee, original signed consent forms, and study data.

cc: Jeff B Murray, Investigator
On the day that I completed the first draft of this dissertation, I took a lovely, snowy walk to the post office with my then 9-month-old son. This particular morning was snowy and beautiful (December 14, 2020), and I was visiting the post office to mail off a package of gifts to family who wouldn’t be able to travel for Christmas due to the Covid-19 pandemic. I was also buying stamps for the Christmas cards my husband and I had addressed the evening before.

I walked to the post office at an unhurried pace, and while I usually listened to music or a podcast during the ritual of a daily walk, I decided to forgo the extra input this day. Rather, I fully immersed in the beauty of the melting snow while taking extra care to not slip on the icy patches of the sidewalk. I intently focused on taking deep breathes as I climbed the hills, pushing the stroller ahead of me. And on the downhills, I sang and talked to my son who babbled right along.

In line at the post office, those of us waiting in line made small talk through our masks (again, Covid-19). It’s funny how a little human in a bright yellow, puffy snowsuit can lighten up the mood. Did I mention the snowsuit had cute little bear ears on the hood? That also might have been a source of such convivial conversation.

Peeling the stamps and placing each one on an envelope, I felt my heart swell with the joy that comes with remembering the friends and family to whom I was sending a greeting. Memories of times past, anticipation for memories to be made in the future… connection with those around us is a beautiful thing.

Walking back home, I couldn’t help but think: this was all especially hyggelig. It had been four years since I first heard of the Danish tradition, hygge, while working as a brand
manager for a large greeting card and gift company. I had read an industry report about this strange-to-me-then concept, stumbling over the pronunciation. Was it: High-guh… high-ghee… hug-goo…? (Soon after beginning the PhD program, a few good-natured Danes offered the correct pronunciation and I now know that you have to really force out that first syllable with your breath.) My fascination with hygge is actually what served as a starting point for my first-year paper in the doctoral program. And though I originally explored other contexts for my dissertation, I had a hunch that the marketization and adoption of Danish hygge in the United States would provide an interesting landing for my essays on the phenomenon of social acceleration.

Each of the essays in this dissertation have explored a unique aspect of social acceleration, showing its importance and relevance for the field of marketing. Temporality affects the cultural norms and patterns that embed the marketing system, the ecosystem in which all stakeholders in the marketing value proposition operate. Understanding the hastening temporality of society—social acceleration— is crucial for understanding the modern marketplace. The findings of this dissertation may be used to inform cultural marketing strategy, public policy, and situate empathetic understanding amongst individuals. Life is fast; we all feel it in some way or another. It is how we experience and respond to this phenomenon that matters.