

Book Review

‘Muslim Societies in the Age of Mass Consumption: Politics, Culture and Identity between the Local and the Global’ Edited by Johanna Pink. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. 2009. 348 Pages. ISBN 978-1443814058. Hardcover. £42.74 (Amazon price)

Aliakbar Jafari

University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, UK

Tel: +44 141 5483768

Fax: +44 141 5522802

Email: Aliakbar.Jafari@strath.ac.uk

Edited by Johanna Pink, ‘Muslim Societies in the Age of Mass Consumption’ addresses a diversity of significant issues related to the policies and politics of consumer culture and identity in contemporary Muslim geographies. With a particular focus on the intersections of local and global consumptionscapes, the book offers new insights on how consumers from Muslim socio-cultural backgrounds engage with market contents and structures. The book contributes to the rising scholarship in the area of religion, globalisation, consumption, and marketing. The book comprises 16 chapters, excluding the editor’s introduction. Although Pink attempts to briefly explain the relevance of the book to contemporary scholarship on consumption, globalisation, and religion, her short account does not go beyond introducing the content of each chapter. For such an edited volume, one would expect to see an in-depth account of the conceptual foundations of the book and also the theoretical interrelatedness of its chapters.

Chapter 1 presents Johan Fischer’s anthropological analysis of the concepts of *Halal* and *Haram* in the context of food consumption amongst Muslim Malays in London, a project that he explores in further depth in his monograph ‘The Halal Frontier: Muslim Consumers in a Globalized Market’ (2011). Fischer demonstrates the multiplicity of religious orientations amongst Muslim Malays as evident from their daily life consumption practices. He also argues that the absence of *Halal* certification in the UK is somehow the result of discrepancies amongst Muslims over ‘what constitutes *Halal*’. His analysis therefore questions the simplistic assumptions of the unanimous nature of religious identity as we often see in the mainstream marketing textbooks. In Chapter 2, Banu Gökarıksel and Anna Secor explicate the politicisation of religious identity in Turkey and demonstrate how the veiling fashion becomes a site of conflict amongst different socio-cultural groups. The authors explain that in the midst of countervailing interpretations and symbolic meanings, the veiling fashion is a prosperous industry in Turkey. This discussion concurs with Sandıkcı and Ger’s (2010) analysis of the changing landscape of women’s clothing and veiling, a subject that has shifted from stigmatisation to an empowering cultural practice in Turkey.

In Chapter 3, Aksu Akçaoğlu attempts to explore the nature of shopping malls in Turkey. She starts her chapter with reference to Weber’s analysis of the relationship between religion and the market and moves on to conclude that Turks’ attitude has shifted from the Ottoman concept of asceticism to a contemporary spirit of hedonism. Although the author depicts an interesting context in which to study consumption spaces, her introductory

discussion becomes irrelevant to the rest of her text. What the author does not acknowledge is that shopping malls, or what Ritzer (2001) refers to as ‘cathedrals of consumption’, are almost alike in terms of creating magical and hyper-real spaces of consumption and production (see also Fırat and Venkatesh, 1995). Therefore, a key question that remains unanswered is: how is Turkey different from other contexts? In a similar manner, in Chapter 4, Tenfer Emin Tunç analyses the role of shopping malls in Ankara to explain how these consumption spaces contribute to the production and communication of identities and conspicuous behaviours. Tunç’s account is valuable in terms of depicting a plethora of symbolic meanings through consumption; yet, her discussion does not acknowledge the significant role of media as a key driver of consumer culture in contemporary Turkey.

Chapter 5 presents Reli Shechter’s in-depth analysis of the relationship between the state, citizenship, and consumer culture in Saudi Arabia. Shechter demonstrates that Saudi Arabia’s expansion of mass consumption is due to a state-oriented economic development that adheres to the tribal traditions of the country and follows its socio-cultural values and heritage. In Chapter 6, Dilek Kaya Mutlu takes the reader back to Turkey where Turka-Cola competes with Coca-Cola. The author explains the socio-cultural, ideological, and political dynamics that pave the way for the multiplicity of interpretations (e.g., nationalistic and religious) of a brand (i.e., Turka-Cola). The author also explains that the politicisation of Islamic identity is enforced by the secular system in Turkey. This kind of secularism in Soroush’s (2007) view is ‘militant’, one that makes many claims to freedom and democracy, but fails to tolerate ‘the other’ (i.e., religion). In Chapter 7, Ulrike Stohrer, takes the reader to Yemen. Stohrer argues that as a result of the globalisation of consumer culture, Yemenis are exposed to a plethora of consumer choices in terms of fashion and clothing to an extent that one cannot claim that there is ‘a Yemenite consumer’. Although the author provides an interesting analysis of ‘gender’ in the context of consumption culture, her lack of engagement with the extant sociological and feminist literature in Muslim geographies renders her text theoretically somehow weak. In Chapter 8, Katarzyna Górak-Sosnowska and Michał Łyszczarz explore Muslim consumers’ identity formation in Poland. The authors explain how two major Muslim groups (Tatars and migrants) compete over their claim to authenticity of Islam. This testifies to the fact that religion is historically (re)shaped by formal and informal institutions (see Jafari, 2012). In such a context, national/ethnic identity dominates religious identity. The authors show how through consumer culture, different Muslims demonstrate ethnocentric behaviours in the market. This aligns with Soroush’s (2000) statement that religion as ‘culture’ is different from ‘religion’ as identity (see also Jafari and Sürdem, 2012).

In Chapter 9, Ayhan Erol takes the reader back to Turkey. In a refreshing manner, Erol discusses the significant role of Alevi music in enriching cultural capital in modern Turkey. Based on a historical analysis of the Alevis position in Turkey, the author demonstrates a process of transformation of meanings and cultural appropriation. He argues that as a result of the changing dynamics of society, the revival of Alevi music has facilitated the acceptability of the music in the commercial market. Next, in Chapter 10, Petra Kuppinger takes a critical (i.e., Edward Said-ian) approach to the analysis of contemporary consumer culture in the United Arab Emirates. As such, she criticises the dichotomisation of the world into the East/West and Muslim/non-Muslim. Using the example of local dolls (e.g., Fulla and Razanne), she argues that these toys personify a diversity of socio-cultural meanings in society. These dolls, which are often juxtaposed to the Western Barbie, are not necessarily Islamic or religious. They reflect locally adapted products that cater to a variety of local tastes and are not necessarily west-centric. This is followed by Alina Kokoschka’s semiotic analysis

of advertising images in Syria (Chapter 11). Kokoschka seeks to demonstrate the paradoxical meanings the advertising industry employs in order to capture consumers' imagination. For example, the author depicts how religious figures are juxtaposed with unreligious images to construct lifestyles in the market. Such juxtapositions are extensively discussed in the literature of consumer research (see, for example, Belk et al., 1989) in which the boundaries of the sacred and the profane are blurred in the market. The author tactfully concludes that the use of religious images in advertising should be seen not as the Islamisation, but the economisation, of the market. Chapter 12 is dedicated to the role of videogames and digital media (e.g., Second Life, YouTube, and blogging) in the edutainment industry. Vít Šisler divides the existing market players into two categories: (1) those companies that use ideological concepts (i.e., *Jihadi* games vs. the USA's 'war against terror' propaganda) and foster animosity amongst societies (2) those that distance themselves from ideologies and leverage the peaceful and humorous potential of digital media to 'edutain' young consumers in Muslim geographies. For example, some videogame producers use storytelling to narrate Islamic cultural heritage.

In Chapter 13 Firly Annisa presents an interesting semiotic analysis of women's fashion magazines in Indonesia. She argues that the so-called 'Islamic' magazines are very similar to Western magazines which promote sexuality. Such magazines, the author stresses, reproduce a male dominated world in which women must serve men in all areas of private and social life. Annisa's tactful analysis seriously questions the often naïve assumptions about media images in Muslim geographies (i.e., what looks Islamic is not necessarily Islamic). In Chapter 14, and in the context of Indonesia, Ragnar K. Willer uses Unilever's Sunsilk shampoo as a case to explain how the brand appeals to Muslim women. This case clearly demonstrates that in order to appeal to a group of consumers, brands do not necessarily have to change their names or undergo aesthetic surgeries. What really matters is what true value(s) brands offer to consumers. Willer's narrative provides valuable lessons for those who think that by adopting Arabic names or religious images they can win Muslim consumers.

In Chapter 15, Michael Hastings-Black focuses on the potential of new digital media in changing people's perceptions of self and others. He argues that whilst traditional media representations in the United States have demonised Muslims and shaped the society's perception of Muslims, new digital media break the boundaries of the media images and present new spaces and opportunities for people to understand each other. New media empower people to show their true identity without the fear of being stereotyped. Chapter 16 serves the book as an overarching conclusion in which Patrick Haenni reflects on previous chapters of the volume to argue that the globalisation of consumer culture has caused both commercialisation of religion and Islamisation of commerce in Muslim societies. With reference to Roy's (2004) analysis of the deterritorialisation power of globalisation, he also contends that these two processes (commercialisation of religion and Islamisation of commerce) accelerate conflicts between *Salafists* (who seek to re-Islamise modernity) and a growing population of Muslims who seek hedonism. Haenni's fine analysis compensates for the lack of a theoretically rich introduction to the book; yet, his use of the term 're-Islamisation' is problematic and exaggerative. The fact that Muslims show interest in the products and services that appeal to their lifestyles and beliefs should not be exaggerated as an ideological process of 're-Islamisation'. One may simply ask why is that tailoring products/services for Muslims is interpreted as (re)Islamisation whereas doing the same for non-Muslims is called adaptation strategy?

Overall, the book provides marketing academics and practitioners with a rich source of knowledge. The following audience can particularly benefit from the book: (1) marketing educators can selectively use the chapters as supplementary case studies to teach different subjects such as international marketing, cross-cultural consumer behaviour, branding, advertising, and strategic marketing management (2) similarly, marketing practitioners can benefit from the book in the above areas as the volume provides hands-on examples for new product development, marketing communications and adaptation strategies, understanding macro environments, and so forth (3) doctoral students whose research falls within the general contexts of interpretive consumer research, critical marketing, and international marketing can find the book full of new ideas.

References

- Belk, R.W., Wallendorf, M. and Sherry, J.F., Jr (1989) The Sacred and the Profane in Consumer Behaviour: Theodicy on the Odyssey. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 16(1): 1–38.
- Fischer, J. (2011) The Halal Frontier: Muslim Consumers in a Globalized Market. New York: Palgrave MACMillan.
- Firat, F. A. and Venkatesh, A. (1995) Liberatory postmodernism and the re-enchantment of consumption, *Journal of Consumer Research*, 22 (3), 239-268.
- Jafari, A. and Süerdem, A. (2012) An Analysis of Material Consumption Culture in the Muslim World. *Marketing Theory*, 12(1), 59-77.
- Jafari, A. (2012) Islamic Marketing: insights from a critical perspective. *Journal of Islamic Marketing*, 3(1), 22-34.
- Ritzer, G. (2001) *Explorations in the Sociology of Consumption: Fast Food, Credit Cards and Casinos*, London: Sage.
- Roy, O. (2004) *Globalised Islam: The Search for a New Ummah*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Sandıkçı, Ö. and Ger, G. (2010) Veiling in Style: How Does a Stigmatized Practice Become Fashionable?, *Journal of Consumer Research* 37 (1), 15–36.
- Soroush, A. (2000) *Reason, Freedom, and Democracy in Islam*, ed. M. Sadri and A. Sadri. Oxford: Oxford University Press.