

MARKETIZATION, NOSTALGIA, AND SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY IN EASTERN GERMANY

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to uncover how East Germans reacted to product shortages following product abundance immediately after reunification and over time. The authors conduct in-depth interviews to document the stories of the individuals during this time period. Our data analysis reveals that East Germans experienced surprising trade-offs during this transition period. On the one hand, they now had access to an abundance of products. But on the other hand, something unexpected was lost. East Germans no longer needed extensive social networks to obtain products and services. As a result, the importance of maintaining social networks decreased leading to a lack of social connectedness and security. As their disenchantment with the new market system grew, Ostalgie - a form of nostalgia indigenous to the region characterized by a deep longing for the past -emerged. This seems to indicate that societies based on materialism can have unforeseen consequences of feelings of insecurity. Business can use these results to fundamentally reconsider their role in the well-being of consumers. As a result, marketers that focus on creating opportunities for social connection will satisfy a fundamental human need leading to more successful business models.

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KEYWORDS: Marketing, Brand, Brand Preference, Transition Economies

INTRODUCTION

Before 1989, East Germans experienced severe product shortages and a lack of choice in everyday goods. However, after reunification, East Germans encountered a veritable cornucopia of products. Surprisingly, the new found freedom to consume did not satisfy all in the east, and caused a wave of longing for past times when things were seemingly better. The events seem to contradict given that the wish for freedom of consumption was one big factor contributing to the fall of the wall in 1989. Though, unlike any other country's economic advancement, East German economic change happened literally overnight and the change agents of capitalism caused many to question their newly acquired freedom. The purpose of this paper is to uncover how East Germans reacted to this abrupt change immediately after reunification and over time. Studying the abrupt change from a systems perspective allow us to gain unique insights about the paradoxical nature of capitalism. On the one hand it appears that the transition to capitalism created a loss of social connection. On the other hand, capitalism (through the efforts of creative companies) recognizes this loss and seeks to satisfy these same needs for social connection and a sense of place.

East Germans have coped with a loss of social connection by either 1) turning to the market system to satisfy those same needs, and/or 2) indulging in an intense feeling of nostalgia which often includes purchasing Communist Era products. For example, a recent BBC program noted a complex connection

between nostalgic feelings and psychological well-being (Williams, 2013). One of the interviewees in the BBC program commented on the missing warmth in the form of equality, solidarity, and citizen support in East Germany. Even though East Germans experienced limiting economic conditions and state oppression, they also provided opportunities for interactions that often don't exist in Western consumption models (Williams, 2013). It is these interactions that are studied in this paper. This BBC program concluded that East Germans seek ways to express their sentimental yearning for lost social connection in a specific form of nostalgic consumption. This is one of the phenomena explored in more depth in this paper. Macromarketing research has contributed views on market systems and the challenges they present to the parties involved. One such challenge concerns consumers and the quality of life derived from consumption related behavior. Research suggests that consumer well-being is determined by satisfaction with acquisition, possession, consumption, maintenance, and disposition of goods and services (Lee et al., 2002, Lee and Ahn, 2016).

But it was also argued that the reduction of consumption and non-consumption can also be related to well-being (Iyer and Muncy, 2016, Kilbourne, McDonagh, and Prothero, 1997). Others articulated that frustration with hyper-consumption after the fall of the wall turned experiential consumers into reluctant consumer just to preserve ones well-being (Albinsson, Wolf, and Kopf, 2010). This paper responds to a call for more system research (Layton and Grossbart, 2006) and hopes to contribute additional insights into the forces governing a market system. Specifically, this paper is organized as follows. First, a brief background of the East German economy is offered especially as it relates to the context of this study. Next, the literature on macromarketing, nostalgia, and social connectedness are reviewed. Then the research method and the research findings are presented. Finally, the paper is concluded with a discussion of the findings and some recommendations for future research and for business managers.

BACKGROUND

Before 1989 and the fall of the Berlin Wall, East Germany (henceforth GDR for German Democratic Republic) had progressed from a post-WWII ruin to the *Jewel of the Eastern Bloc*. Per capita GDP had reached 8,100 Euros; in contrast, the per capita GDPs in Great Britain, Spain, and Greece were 9,800, 6,130, and 3,800 Euros, respectively (Wenzel, 2004). Despite this impressive gain, the GDR's planned economy often created severe shortages in many product categories. To mitigate these shortages, complex social networks evolved to support a self-regulating underground economy. Thus, the GDR's rapid marketization provides an opportunity to explore how new consumption patterns affect people's sense of connectedness and explicates the challenges to marketers.

An infrequently explored historical distinction between Eastern bloc and Western nations is the different evolutionary paths toward separating production and consumption. Since World War II, the market system and modern marketing have slowly permeated all aspects of Western life, including politics, education, and religion (Firat and Dholakia, 2006). This statement is true for the United States and Western Europe, but the marketization of East Germany happened much more quickly after reunification began in 1990. Rather than a slow permeation, the East Germans experienced rapid change. As a result, East Germans seem to be more cognizant of changes in consumption brought about by Western Capitalism. Even though rapid advances were made after 1990 and despite the vast amount of money spent in East Germany by the new German government and capital inflows from foreign direct investment, this market progress seems to have come with some drawbacks. Market progress can discourage interaction and social relationships (Firat, 1997), which in turn may increase feelings of alienation and isolation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

As one of the emergent themes, alienation and isolation (or the lack thereof) can be viewed under the concept of social connectedness. Social connectedness is the subjective awareness of interpersonal closeness with the social world (Lee and Robbins, 1998). The social world includes proximal and distal relationships with family, friends, peers, acquaintances, strangers, community, and society as a whole (Lee and Robbins, 1995, 1998, 2000). Consumers' feelings of social connectedness are quite powerful and can be used to measure one of the most fundamental higher order needs - the need of belonging (Baumeister and Leary, 1995, Kohut, 1984, Lee and Robbins, 1995, 2000, Maslow, 1970). Distilled to its essence for marketing purposes, social connectedness is the sense of belonging that requires interaction with others. The subjective nature of social connectedness is one reason why people with long-term marriages and friendships still may feel socially disconnected. In addition, feelings or desires for social connectedness are pervasive and guide thoughts and behaviors (Lee and Robbins, 1998). In fact, recent findings have found that experimentally induced nostalgia caused individuals to feel greater levels of social connectedness and self-esteem which then leads to a heightened sense of optimism (Cheung, Sedikides, and Wildschut, 2016).

Social connectedness does not often appear in the marketing literature, but nostalgia is a concept that has been extensively studied and applied by marketers. Marketers realize the draw of nostalgic feelings and offer (often only temporary) solutions to consumers. Various techniques are designed to create nostalgic feelings to offer comfort for those in need (Boyle, 2009). For example, Dodge Ram recently ran a Superbowl ad featuring Paul Harvey's voice (a conservative American Broadcaster who often told heart-warming stories of ordinary people in the Heartland of the US). The advertisement appealed to American's nostalgic view of farming. Companies use memories to create nostalgia-steeped consumer products (Havlena and Holak, 1996) and hope to connect the consumer with their brands (Foley, 2009). Others design or revive brands belonging to prior historical time periods such as retro brands. Retro brands cut across all product categories with the goal in mind to evoke strong positive emotions about the past. Generally speaking, marketing efforts eliciting nostalgia engages consumers, influences brand choice and brand loyalty, and nurtures the relationship with the brand (Merchant, Latour, Ford, and Latour, 2013). In the West, also, many subcultures and retro brands cater to nostalgic feelings and have appeared in the marketing literature. For instance, retro brands such as Star Wars and the New VW Beetle provide a sense of Arcadia through their almost utopian sense of past worlds and communities (Brown, Kozinets, and Sherry, 2003). Within the *Burning Man* subculture, an annual art community spectacle for the purpose of gifting and decommodification, some groups crave transient market-emancipatory activities - consistent with the ideal notion of *Gemeinschaft* - where individuals live in close proximity and engage in relationships based on caring and sharing" (Kozinets, 2002).

The importance of social connections, social networks and the longing for someone, someplace or something is strongly related to feelings of nostalgia. Sime (2011) for example found that children who have migrated from Eastern Europe to Scotland miss their friends and relatives the most. These children and their parents find that they connect to their past social networks through the use of technology (e.g. skypeing and emailing friends), buy Eastern products through online marketplaces and engage in the use of transnational services (e.g., visits doctors and dentists in homeland when possible). Sime's (2011) findings illustrate that nostalgia is not only temporal but spatial as well, and that one can long for something that is not completely lost but in essence is still present. Nostalgia can be a powerful emotion directing choices and behaviors. The word nostalgia comes from the Greek words *nostos* (i.e., to return home) and *algia* (i.e., a painful condition); thus, a painful desire to return home (Davis, 1979). Consumer research scholars define nostalgia as a desire to return to the past prompted by objects, pictures, smells, music, or movies (Hirsch, 1992, Holbrook and Schindler, 2003). The meaning of nostalgia has shifted slightly since the 17th century. Social science transitioned from a classical definition where nostalgia was used to explain a spatial nostalgia, a form of disease (e.g., classical nostalgia in terms of melancholia,

homesickness, a painful longing for home) or what Hofer (1688/1934) referred to as a pathological condition to more modern and post-modern definitions. Some researchers have recently posited that modern nostalgia is a coexistence of two types of nostalgia; temporal nostalgia (e.g., in terms of reflectiveness, a longing for an irrevocable past, a time that once was) (Higson, 2010) and a-temporal nostalgia, (e.g., a post-modern celebratory nostalgia for the past that still exists) (Higson, 2010).

There are a few studies on nostalgia in transition communities. In their study of post-socialist Russia and how the transition has impacted advertising strategies for Eastern versus Western brands, Holak, Matveev and Havlena (2007) find that four types of nostalgia (e.g., personal, interpersonal, cultural and virtual) (Havlena and Holak, 1996) are present within their participants. Their study illustrates how certain Russian brands use nostalgia in their advertising strategies to create emotional connections to consumers. These brands play on the historical bond and experiences between consumers and the past itself reminding consumers of Russian past times.

Nostalgia in the former GDR is called Ostalgie, a combination of the German words Ost (East) and nostalgie (nostalgia). The term, coined in the early 1990s, permeates contemporary German culture in general and German consumer culture in particular (Cooke, 2005). Prior research has explored Ostalgie from three perspectives: (1) as glamorized resistance to a new market system; (2) as insecurity fomented by migrating from a familiar planned economy to an unfamiliar market economy; and (3) as the abrupt disappearance of longtime national brands (Berdahl, 1999a, 1999b, Betts, 2000, Blum, 2000, Moran, 2004). This research will explore further the ignored role of a loss of social connection and how it contributes to Ostalgie.

METHODS

The authors conducted eighteen face-to-face, in-depth interviews with long-time residents of several small-to-medium-sized towns near former East Berlin in Germany. We conducted 12 informal interviews prior to collecting 20 formal interviews in 2005. We used purposive sampling when selecting informants (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Participants' ages ranged from 33 to 78 years (pseudonyms are used to protect the informants' real identities). The participants' occupations varied and included a physician; self-employed, government employees, teachers, retirees, and currently unemployed. Participants volunteered their time and insights willingly and shared family photo albums and offered tours of their homes without request.

Insights into themes also emerged from one of the author's participation in the East German community over the course of many years prior to reunification in 1989. These experiences sensitized the authors to the current issue of social interruption and its effect on consumption. The interviews, which lasted from 60 to 150 minutes, were conducted in German, digitally recorded, and immediately translated and transcribed into English. This process yielded several hundred typed pages. Analysis and review of the data were first performed independently by the three researchers through iterative readings in search for emergent and persistent themes. After independent coding of the data, the authors discussed the meaning of the themes. This synergistic cross-examination procedure allowed categories and emergent themes to be compared and refined (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The rapidity of market and structural change described in the earlier section resulted in a data set with unique dimensions and advantages. See Table 1 for a list of informant descriptions.

Table 1: Participant Profiles

	Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Profession
1	Heinz	M	69	Retired
2	Andy	M	31	Manufacturing
3	Wolfgang	M	52	Self Employed
4	Jan	M	45	Store manager
5	Iris	F	44	Store Clerk
6	Birgit	F	53	Insurance
7	Rainer	M	55	Physician
8	Armin	M	78	Retired Teacher
9	Detlef	M	53	Self Employed
10	Helmut	M	66	Retired Manufacturing
11	Michael	M	46	Teacher
12	Norbert	M	51	School Administration
13	Peter	M	55	Forrest Service
14	Bertram	M	46	Repair service
15	Theo	M	59	Retired Military
16	Margot	F	48	Social Work
17	Mandy	F	31	Administration
18	Ulla	F	45	Insurance
19	Sieghard	M	52	Mechanic
20	Sören	M	27	Military

This table shows all interview participants' profiles including gender, age, and professional background. All names are pseudonyms.

Findings

Unexpected Trade-Offs

Immediately after unification, East Germans were excited about product availability. For instance, after applying for a new car, the Trabant (often affectionately called the Trabi), Peter, 55, noted that the usual wait time was between 14 and 18 years. Consumers did not have a choice of color, often the cars came in bright yellow. Later, the deluxe version, Trabant Hycomat, was available with an automatic transmission. Consumer choice was limited among consumer durables such as automobiles, appliances, and staple items such as coffee or chocolate. East Germans also knew that these products were more widely available across the border in West Germany. Advanced marketing methods as typically employed by western promotion practices caused a promotional gap and made West German products stand out and appear more sophisticated. For instance, Armin (78) noted,

Packages were a big deal. For birthdays and Christmas, packages sent from relatives from the West (Germany) got bigger and more abundant every year. In those packages, there were multiple chocolates, sweets, and cacao. Sometimes coffee; Good coffee was very expensive here [in the East] so that you could not afford it very often. I remember that 125 grams would cost 40 marks. There were three brands; Rondo, Costa (which was the cheapest) and then I don't know. (Armin)

To put the price of coffee in perspective, 40 marks compared to a typical income of 750 marks meant that coffee was indeed a luxury item. Armin remembers spending 7 marks (or 1% of his income) for chocolate for his wife's birthday. Because communication did not stop between relatives across the German border, East Germans knew about the product abundance and low prices through stories and West German TV advertisement. Colorful and novel product promotions of western products triggered the perception for these products to be of higher quality despite limited product experience. Contrary to the abundance of products in the west, purchasing durable goods in the east often required filling out an application form similar to a waiting list. Armin (interview participant) remembers filling out an application for a freezer and having to wait until notified that his freezer was available for purchase. Refrigerators, in the same product category as freezers, on the other hand were widely available. The centrally planned distribution also caused regional differences in product availability. For instance, freezers were available in Berlin,

but they were only available to residents of East Berlin. As a result of the limited availability, when exceptional items did become available, people would think of their close ones and purchase for them or stockpile items until useful in the future. Sieghard elaborated on stockpiling of car parts below:

One knew people and money was there, so that when car parts became available, we bought more than just one. Either you need one soon again or somebody you knew could need that extra part. (Sieghard)

Parts were not only in short supply, but also the associated expertise in areas of repair and maintenance was lacking. Strangely enough, TV and refrigerator repair services would do home visits but car repair services were costly and limited. One would expect that finding individuals who can help with one's problem would create a hassle and negative consumer experiences, but Sieghard describes how finding people with car expertise was not such a bad experience after all.

I needed an electrical specialist for my car. I could put the wiring in myself, but needed someone with knowledge for connecting all the parts. The 12 Volt system is a little bit more advanced than old the system [6Volts]. Then we would have a case of beer and the "ball" started to roll. Seriously, we didn't give any money; he helped me and I'd help him. Money was not really that important. The comradeship was great. (Sieghard)

From Sieghard's statement, an interesting phenomenon comes to light. Scarcity and comradeship seem to go together. Scarcity led to individuals enjoying new friends and connections and scarce products would provide the bond. After the transition to the market economy, goods were no longer in short supply, and connections lost their unifying bond. East Germans unexpectedly traded comradeship for product abundance not realizing that social connectedness would become the new scarce resource.

Social Connectedness

All of our informants mentioned the loss of social connection at various levels and integrated ways to cope with this loss. For example, many are still purchasing former East German products to remind them that in some ways, times were better. People such as Theo indulge in Ostalgie, a form of reminiscing about the past by purchasing East German made goods.

I buy a lot of East German products that recently came back in the stores. Kaufland has many products; Solander Fruits and Lausitzer cherries or strawberries; we buy those relatively often. When East and West products are available I preferred to buy Eastern products. But I think I buy these products more as a sign of protest. But it also tastes good. (Theo)

Theo buys traditional East German brands to show his solidarity with other East Germans, retain his national identity, and maintain elements of an earlier time. For him, *Ostalgie* "tastes good," which means he associated these old national brands with pleasurable tastes and smells. His laughter had an ironic ring because he disliked many aspects of the communist era yet was compelled to indulge in brands that triggered fond memories. His life was paradoxical because he enjoyed Western brands—a new BMW sat in the garage—yet he openly wished for the social connectedness and social security of the former economic system. Interviewees alluded repeatedly to the rich consumption experiences provided by the GDR's informal economy. Rainer, a 55-year-old physician, stated that the shopping experience in the east felt somewhat enriching. It brought people together by considering others when desirable goods became available but also signaled success and status to others when achieving to find a particularly rare goods. He further states;

It [shopping] was a little like hunting and gathering. If you were able to get something that was hardly available, either buying it or exchanging it for something else or through good connections, that was great. Radeberger Pilsner for example; wasn't that great to have that for your birthday party? Or Rosentahler Kardarker (red wine), back then that was the hottest Bückware. It was a sign that you had accomplished something. (Rainer)

Oftentimes, interviewees answered questions about sources for hard-to-get possessions with one word: *Beziehungen* (connections). *Bückware* roughly translated means *bend-over-backwards merchandise* - typically refers to non-essentials such as red wine and beer. Almost daily, East Germans exercised their social ties in pursuing goods that are taken for granted by most Westerners. More valuable *Bückware* often were acquired through bartering, but more everyday *Bückware* was exchanged as gifts. *Bückware's* strong social overtones of wealth and power through social connections support observations that material objects function as dynamic elements of an extended self (Belk, 1988). The dynamics in the chain of exchanges is exposed in Detlef's quote below. Goods were not just exchanged one for one, but seem to serve as enticement for future exchanges.

Once in Berlin they had peaches. I told my boys to line up at the queue and get a bucketful of peaches. Then we gave some to the neighbor who then thought of us next time...To get a velvet sweater in the Exquisite store you had to give a little bag (present) to the sales clerk; otherwise you would have not been able to get anything. My sister manages a youth fashion store and she has taken new arrivals to the butcher daily in order to get a special meat cut. The situation was terrible. (Detlef)

Gift-giving was common in socialist countries as a way to maintain a network for the acquisition of *Bückware*. Offering small gifts to neighbors had the advantage of maintaining a close network of people that may be able to help out when aid was needed. The function of gifts have been found to promote remembrance (Otnes, Lowrey and Kim, 1993) thus increasing feelings of belonging. Andy (quote below) shared how small gifts were exchanged on a routine basis fostering cohesiveness between neighbors.

Even as a child, when I was walking home from school, my neighbors would have fresh tomatoes or strawberries and would give me a basketful to take home to my mother. Things were exchanged over the backyard fence. I can remember when my dad came home from work, the neighbor would come over just to say hello. This is how we maintained friendly relationships. (Andy)

According to bartering theory the dominant bartering strategy is to know or get to know the people with whom a person bargains (Grabher 1993, Guerin, 2003). As a result of this investment in social capital, one-time barter transactions are therefore rare. Bartering theory pertains to the underground economy of the GDR, which cut across of most goods and services categories. This system allowed barterers either to defer reimbursement of goods or to swap labor, materials, services, or hard-to-find parts. The flexibility and social nature of bartering activities, including establishment of interpersonal trust, meant that transactions tended to please network members (Guerin, 2003). Recent consumer culture research supports bartering and non-monetary exchange as a way to foster social relationships and networks (Albinsson and Perera, 2012). While induced by economic circumstances in East Germany, consumer oriented cultures have picked up on this trend and created events where non-monetary transactions can take place between parties who place high value on social interactions (Kozinets, 2002).

In addition to building relationships through gift giving and bartering, interviewees shared stories about their eagerness to offer simple favors to other network members. These simple exchanges sometimes resulted in long-term cooperation, built a sense of caring and sharing, and enhanced feelings of equality. Subject of these exchanges were not only tangible goods but also preferential treatment as Helmut's excerpt states below. Detlef's excerpt takes it further by hinting towards an unspoken solidarity where

people in need helped each other. He then draws a conclusion that the relationships one once knew have turned into a struggle.

Connectedness was even stronger. You had to exchange this for that....and when I went up there [store] in order to buy cement, there was a long line and you simply had to wait. But a person there knew me already. When I stood in line he came and said "it's about time that you pick up your cement." It was his way of signaling that I could bypass the line. (Helmut) There was always help without giving anything. All they said was the next time you help me. The solidarity among the 'little' people was great. Now, relationships among people are so that you have to put your elbows out. (Detlef)

From these social connections a general sense of place-based community developed. This was not a limited-liability community as in brand community, but a community where people felt a genuine sense of obligation.

I didn't have anything to offer as a teacher. I did not possess the value other people would see as important or something they can use. But I had a lot of help. A lot of teacher colleagues came here to help. People from the soccer club and relatives showed up. My cousin did the heating, my dad the water. But at the end everything was working out. Nothing worked without connection. (Michael) Stories such as Michael's about homebuilding projects were striking examples of the obligations that existed as well as the needs that were filled through social connections. East Germans like Armin (quote below), now mourn the loss of inter-personal closeness in the community. Such place-based communities were also fostered and encouraged by the strong and influential communist state.

The collective feeling we had in the GDR is not as strong anymore. Something about the social side of the GDR. My wife was not a member of the LPG (agricultural co-op) but had helped many times when they needed people. They were happy if other people supported them. There were 10 to 12 women that weren't employed there but who went there to work with them. That was one side. The other was the LPG took a trip every year. Busses were ordered and then they drove to the Baltic Sea or the Spree Forest. On these trips the women who helped were invited. Another example is celebrations. Once a year the LPG had a harvesting fest where everyone was invited, but unfortunately this does not exist anymore today....But the stories about the LPG shows togetherness. (Armin)

The state organization, LPG, facilitated place-based social interaction and fostered the value of community togetherness and security (*Gemeinschaft*). After marketization, consumption patterns changed rapidly. East Germans began to enjoy the benefits of a demand economy, including a wide array of product choices. However, these benefits were obtained at a cost: a loss of social connectedness. This loss may be partial, because old place-based communities were replaced by place-liberated communities. Heinz mitigated this cost by purchasing a BMW motorcycle and joining a motorcycle (place-liberated) community as well as holding on to at least a few of the connections that he established during the socialist era.

Today it [social connection] is not so strong anymore. Now we are only close with our next-door neighbors. We are still doing stuff for each other, whenever they need something fixed. From what we hear, contacts are not as strong anywhere. But through our motorcycle community (Gemeinschaft) we have met many new acquaintances right after the wall came down, with whom we are still friends today. We take little trips together several times a year. This is a great friendship. (Heinz)

When a consumer's need for belonging becomes critical, that person is compelled to solve this problem. Ironically, that solution often is searched for and found within the marketplace that caused the problem. Finding a brand community, as Heinz did after acquiring a BMW motorcycle, is typical of many Western consumers (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001). Heinz struggles to build a new social world consisting of both

place-based and place-liberated relationships. His purchase of a BMW motorcycle symbolizes his unconscious acceptance of the modern world and his willingness to add distal relationships based on a Western brand. As economic conditions improved over a decade after 1989, general levels of social connectedness decreased. With this change, the downside of market capitalism became apparent to East Germans.

We had to deal with people from the West such as insurance agents. Some of them said “we find it great how you guys are with each other, friendliness and solidarism. Enjoy it while it lasts.” Back then I did not want to believe it and did not really understand it, but already 5 years after the change I knew what they were talking about. (Rainer)

Concomitant with these changes was increased alienation (Firat, 1997). Alienation extended not only to the loss of social connections but also to the loss of connection between individuals and certain homemade products. Due to shortages, East Germans often built their own goods, ranging from tools (i.e., cement mixers, toolboxes, and lawnmowers) to household accessories (i.e., lamps and candleholders). People even felt more connected to their possessions through productive consumption activities, such as cooking from scratch, construction, washing and mending, and home agriculture. As more goods became available many productive consumption activities ceased. Yet, we find that many chose to hold onto homemade goods, struggling to maintain at least some of the pride and connection that they had with these hard-won items.

Ostalgie

Another theme emerging from the data is the high levels of nostalgia that respondents felt, a phenomenon that describes the emotional involvement of individuals with their past and re-negotiates it with the individual’s present. We find some similarities in our findings to the results in Holak et al.’s (2007) study of Russian consumers. They found that their respondents “feel a nostalgia for a society that is seen as safer and more caring” and “the feeling of support and security among people that has been lost with the transition to a new society” (Holak et al., 2007: 652). Some respondents felt so strongly about their experiences in the GDR, that they would be willing to make a sacrifice to return to past times. Sieghard, when remembering a road trip he took with his family in the Trabant said,

Today it is unimaginable that the four of us drove in this little car with a trunk full of stuff. But I tell you something, I would drive that car today. The GDR can come back and I would drive the Trabi again. I don’t need a car from the West. All really we want is security, which you don’t find anymore today. I would still drive it, it was a good vehicle. (Sieghard)

Feelings of nostalgia are not only limited to the past, but can tell us about the present (Berdahl, 1999b). Ostalgie is as much about resistance to the market based economy as it is about remembering the past. Positive feelings toward the past have gained momentum and many East German brands are thriving (The Economist, 2003). Online retailers such as Ossiversand.de, Kaufhalle-des-Ostens.de, or Ostprodukteversand.de have soared from a few hundred (a few years ago) to more than 3,000 products. What looked like a short lived episode for those that didn’t seem to be able to separate from communist structures now has spread to the generation born after 1989, and even into parts of Western Germany. But ironically this resistance itself is in the market-based form of purchasing former East German Brands (which do not appear to be in shortage any longer). Many East German Brands (Ost-Produkte) and production facilities have been purchased by Western companies but brand preference for East German products returned after a trial period of products from the west.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Changing consumption patterns in post-industrial market economies causes increased feelings of alienation and isolation. Ironically, these feelings create a strong, often unconscious attraction to consumption experiences where social interaction, both proximal and distal, can occur. We find that East Germans tend to place a premium on place-based social networks and Eastern products precisely because greater feelings of social connectedness are created as each individual seeks to strike a balance in this self-adjusting discourse. In the West, and particularly the U.S., cultural convictions about individualism may suppress the need for social connectedness (Lasch, 1984). As need for belonging is a higher order need (Maslow, 1970), and community involvement often is low in the West (see Putnam [2000] for a representative example of a U.S. experience), Westerners may sublimate this need through consumption experiences that increase feelings of social connectedness. As a result, Western respondents may require coaxing - perhaps through less direct projective techniques - to reveal their need for social connectedness. In practice, marketers have found ways to embed social connectedness in which an entire customer experience is built around it. For example, the equity of the Starbucks brand includes the humanity and intimacy as a snapshot of what happens in the larger community. Starbucks' intention to offer a micro-image of the larger community it operates in has become a base for its success; important enough to communicate that Starbucks is not in the coffee business serving people, but rather in the people business serving coffee (Starbucks.com).

For example, Gainer (1995) finds that live performing arts attendance is driven in part by a need for social interaction. Individuals attend these events to pursue interpersonal goals and build bridges to socially distant acquaintances, and manage individual and community identities (Gainer, 1995). Similarly, in the GDR, consumers sought out interaction through their effortful and sometimes cumbersome marketplace experiences. The GDR's rapid shift from a planned economy to a demand economy was reflected in interviewees' responses. The pre- and post-1989 consumption patterns of East Germans reveal the power of social connectedness and nostalgia in consumption behavior. The radical economic transition in the former GDR sensitized its people to their motivations and feelings more so than individuals in non-transitional societies. Currently, all former Eastern Bloc countries, as well as parts of Southeast Asia and China, are in various stages of transitioning to a market economy. The study of transitioning consumers in macromarketing should be encouraged, because cross-cultural comparisons can yield insights into marketing's effect on society.

Social connectedness and Ostalgie represent promising domains for future research. Clearly, social connectedness can help consumer researchers and practitioners understand when and where social interaction is critical to consumption experiences. Social connectedness does not require a brand as a mediator; rather, when people's search for social connectedness, the marketplace provides an opportunity for marketers to create value. Success will require creative partnerships between consumers and producers that yield richer and more meaningful consumption experiences much like reflected in recent consumer driven shared consumption (Albinsson and Perera, 2012).

Other themes that emerged but not further explored within the context of this paper that may prove interesting for future research include: The possibility that a time lag may exist between the occurrence of nostalgia and the resultant demand for former East German products. For example, immediately after reunification, East German products were not available. Certainly the rise of Ostalgie triggered resurgence in demand of East German products, yet to some extent the products (and the marketers of these products) themselves may help to keep Ostalgie as a relevant force in Eastern Germany. Research focusing on this aspect may help to envision similar phenomena in other transitional countries and possible opportunities for marketers.

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