Chapter 7
How Consumption Provides a Relational Understanding of Place

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ABSTRACT

This study positions itself within the place-as-living-entity view and within the growing body of literature on the relational views of place. This study considers how consumption acts and activities provide a relational view of place. It also acknowledges that while all kinds of consumption may involve a relationship with place at some level or the other, a relational view is distinguishable in terms of ties or kinship with place that individuals perceive as of value and valuable in their lives. More essentially, a relational view involves a contribution or participation in the construction or shaping of the nature and meaning of place and its boundaries. As Coffin and Chatzidakis observe, place-making is not confined to the simple creation and manipulation of meanings; rather, it is and must be understood in terms of claiming an area in territorial acts (as those of consumption).

INTRODUCTION

Most often, studies in marketing take an 'object' view of place. This means place is approached mainly from a functional or utilitarian and commercial perspective. Questions of meaningfulness of place and relational understandings of place are not of primary concern in these studies. As Chatzidakis, McEachern & Warnaby (2017) note, place is one of the four P's that optimizes marketing outcomes. However, the idea of showcasing place in terms of fashion has been one such context that has been probably understudied. Online consumption of fashion plays an important role in showcasing place. The chapter speaks of Durga Puja as a particular context where the online fashion bloggers influence not only fashion choices but also promote a particular physical place in a social setting.

Typically, studies that take an 'object' view of place would include literature on the influence of country-of-origin of products and brands on consumers, and depending on how consumers perceive

products from a certain country-of-origin can be marketed as such. Studies that view cities as objects consider how the city's identity or image can be marketed to target segments such as tourists or stakeholders. This has an important implication on influencing consumption of fashion from a particular place. The role of social media comes in at this juncture which allows for the fashion influencers to showcase new fashion especially through specialized social media promotion that is based and directed on a place such as Kolkata during Durga Puja. No doubt, any value of place from a consumer perspective in place-as-object oriented studies necessarily involves some connection, advantage or benefit in a place-related consumption context and therefore affirms, establishes or is reflective of a certain nature/type of relationship with place. This could be in terms of a functional benefit, as in choice of a product from a certain country that offers product superiority as in quality, or in terms of the economical as in cheap imports from a certain country. Place-identity and place-image studies may reiterate the object-value of a place from a personal, cultural or tourism perspective.

Theoretical Frameworks

The Place-as-Living Entity View and Role of Fashion

In the last two decades or so, however, marketers have turned attention to questions and issues of how places acquire value and meaning. These studies consider place-as-a-living entity that acquires meaning and significance in and through acts, activities and experiences of various stakeholders. Visconti et al. (2010, p.512) observe *"the notion of space traditionally refers to something anonymous, whereas place distinctively accounts for the meaningful experience of a given site"*. This is where the role of the place as in social media comes in. Defining fashion on the social media in terms of the local fashion is actually kind of defining a place. The place-as-living-entity views place as fluid, as a process and as one that results in territories and boundaries. Durga Puja in Kolkata defines that place when the brands, Instagram influencers and Fashion Vloggers come up The place-as-living entity approach to the understanding and construct of place offers consumers benefits and advantages of a personal, cultural and experiential nature. The place-as-living entity is essentially a relational view and understanding of place. The same is discussed in the next sub-section.

Relational Views of Place

This study positions itself within the place-as-living-entity view and within the growing body of literature on the relational views of place. A relational view of place is one of "the process and product of relation-making, with, through and in the context of the history, materiality and sociality of space" (Pendlebury et al., 2023, p.3). This study considers how consumption acts and activities provide a relational view of place. It also acknowledges that while all kinds of consumption may involve a relationship with place at some level or the other, a relational view is distinguishable in terms of ties or kinship with place that individuals perceive as of value and valuable in their lives. More essentially, a relational view involves a contribution or participation in the construction or shaping of the nature and meaning of place and its boundaries. As Coffin & Chatzidakis (2021) observe place-making is not confined to the simple creation and manipulation of meanings, rather is and must be understood in terms of claiming an area in territorial acts (such as those of consumption), then seeking how to control, interpret and appropriate the same. Visconti et al. (2010, p.512–3) write of place as "a given site", adding that "inchoate space (such

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