

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

In a broad sense consumer research is bounded and guided by, both in theory and method, principal '*dialectical*' (Marsden and Littler 1999) concepts of materialism and change, and totality and contradiction. The concept of materialism is centred on the notion that material environment shapes consumer behaviour. Our belief in change maintains that, because consumption is a malleable entity, consumer behaviour is a process of continuous motion and transformation. When we take totality into account we appreciate the fact that consumption is interconnected with other forms of human behaviour. And finally, our acceptance of contradiction allows us to view changes in consumer behaviour as arising from its internal contradictions.

Such conceptual framing of consumer research is essential in establishing which elements of behaviour need be focused on to understand consumption in mediated environments. Because much of consumer research is centred on objects (as well as object-associations) as consumables, subject-object interactions and relationships lie at the heart of understanding consumer behaviour. Contemporary simulation technologies in CME allow dematerialization of consumables and consumption spaces, which challenges traditional notions of subject-object interactions and relationships.

In a wider sociological / anthropological perspective, consumption in CME is both cause and effect of the dynamism that results from interactions between technology and society. Appadurai (1986, 1996) foregrounds this symbiotic relationship between consumption of technology and societal change by arguing that social and technological orders exist and evolve in accordance with each other. While the order of production affects consumption directly, the social order dictates what may be produced. Societies create technologies; technologies define the direction societies take by shaping lifestyles

and cultures. Technological evolution creates new commodities that integrate together and become embedded as components in larger systems or ecologies of consumables. Once embedded, many of these technological commodities define consumption needs.

Many technological innovations may start out as novelties but may end up as necessities; within a few decades technological marvels like automobiles, televisions or mobile telephones have become everyday necessities. Consumption of technology challenges and alters existing cultural norms and creates new ones; it is thus a destructive, devouring process by definition which acts as an essential precondition for the regeneration of both society and individual.

Cyberspace and Consumer Research: Cyberspace captured the imagination of social scientists in the early 1990s. Early romanticization of cyberspace resulted in commentaries highlighting themes such as identity creation, erosion of geographic propinquity, social aggregation and virtual communities, disembodiment, representation and hyperreality, as well as utopian quests in this ethereal mode of consumption. Around the same time, consumer research itself was undergoing a major transformation. Scientific enquiry along the lines of positivist orthodoxy was being challenged (and marginalized?) by a post-structuralist / post-modern focus on elaborate and creative etic narratives, that were at times, only partially supported by emic substantiations. Although much of our current understanding of consumption in mediated environments has direct connections to post-modern orientations in consumer research, this literature review will cast a wider net to embrace many other sociological, anthropological and psychological viewpoints as well.

This literature review provides a framework for my research. My ethnographic study was aimed at exploring how consumers adapt and incorporate simulations and digital media technologies into their everyday lives. The theoretical framework established

through this section helps explain how and why changes in the technological order mould the contemporary social milieu, and guides my research. This study used an evolving ethnographic approach to data collection, guided by emic-etic interplay. Data were periodically analysed and interpreted to detect patterns of behaviour or identify themes. When a strong theme or pattern was identified, the emic view was placed against the etic and new lines of enquiry were established. This evolving ethnographic approach using the emic-etic interplay to guide the process of data collection (Kozinets et.al. 2004), made reference and review of literature a permanent part of the study.

This literature review began with some very broad fundamental questions: How are new media technologies shaping our behaviour, society and culture? Will this cyberspace become an ultimate hyperreality, an independent non-referential world where an individual can assume an entirely new self and exist as an entirely independent entity? Can we discern how and where the real and virtual permeate, each having the potential for enriching and expanding one another? However, much of it was written after the field study and analysis, and thus reflects not only the viewpoints from the literature itself, but also insights from the study. The rest of this chapter is divided into fifteen parts, each following on from the previous, but each discussing a fresh dimension. I set off with the larger theme of consumption of technology, follow it with philosophical viewpoints on simulation technologies, and then present the literature that interprets the philosophy and applies it to consumers' lifeworlds. In general a funnelling down approach is followed in this review, and each new section is used to frame focused literary contexts on impacts of consumption of simulations on consumers' lifeworlds. It is important to note that although this is an expansive literature review, much of it used to establish a context in which the concept of consumers' lifeworlds is framed, and thus all of the references are not revisited in either analysis or in concluding chapters.

2.2 Philosophy and definition of Technology.

Dictionaries and encyclopaedias variously define *Technology* as, (1) the science that deals with the study, elaboration and determination of the processes, methods and procedures of material transformation; (2) the set of processes, methods, procedures, rules, operations, phases, technical conditions applied or executed with the aim of obtaining (producing) a certain product, and (3) application of knowledge to the practical aims of human life or to changing and manipulating the human environment. (Random House Dictionary 1999, The American Heritage Science Dictionary 2006, Encyclopaedia Britannica 2005).

In a larger understanding, technology is a descriptor of human activity; it is a contrivance, or, in Latin, an *Instrumentum*. In early literature the word *techne* is often linked with the word *episteme*. Both words are used to describe knowledge in the widest sense, such that together they mean to be entirely at home in something, to understand and be expert in it (Godzinski 2005). The current conception of technology is both instrumental and anthropological in nature, in that it is a means to an end, and a human activity. The relationship between technology and individual is dependent on both our definition of technology and how we define ourselves in relation to it. Mick and Fournier (1998) synthesize that '*technology is a power in its own right, fundamental to the historical trajectory of western civilization*' (p. 123). Far from being a marginal component of society and culture, the notion of technology interacts internally with epistemology and ontology in all philosophical orientations.

The social view of technology is that it '*can encompass both material and non material things (e.g., laws)*' (Mick and Fournier 1998, p.124). Technology has long been of interest to anthropologists but anthropological study of the topic has lagged behind consideration of other human institutions. Godzinski (2005) argues that this has been in part due to technology being poorly understood and incompletely defined, and because

technology's material and non-material components have been either confused or treated in isolation. Contemporary computer and simulation technologies highlight this gap by accentuating the material and non-material aspects of technology in behavioural terms. Identification of this gap has resulted in a renewed interest in anthropological study of technology (Appadurai 1986, Mieke 1989, Poster 1995).

Martin Heidegger (1977, 1987) is arguably one of the first modern philosophers to seek an understanding of philosophy of technology. In defining technology, Heidegger is motivated by Nietzsche's metaphysics, and the resulting ontotheological construction of the world. In his *Introduction to Metaphysics*, he describes technology as the aspect of being that exists as a fundamental entity in the modern age, and seeks to understand it as a 'mode of revealing of being'. The term *Instrumentum* refers to ordering of functions that need be acquired or arranged. Heidegger (1987) equates it with the noun *Einrichtung*, which is translated as 'contrivance' (Godzinski 2005), which can also mean arrangement, adjustment, furnishing, or equipment. Godzinski further elaborates how Heidegger argues that his identification of technology as an *instrumentum* and an *Einrichtung* brings out 'true' characterization of technology in terms of setting-in-place, ordering, enframing, and standing-reserve. Heidegger discusses technology as a force that motivates the (technological) construction of the world, as well as the study of that construction.

Jean Baudrillard is perhaps the most prominent post-modern philosopher to theorize interaction of technology and society. Because much of his writing examines and predicts how changes in technology, particularly as a result of increased information flows, will impact on society, he is often labelled as a techno-prophet. He emphasizes the role of a code governing both the structure and ultimate construction of meaning, and presents technology as a tool in this construction. Baudrillard interprets modernity as a process of explosion of commodification, mechanisation, technology and market

relations, in contrast to post-modern society, which he argues is the site of an implosion of all boundaries, regions and distinctions between culture, technology, appearance and reality, and just about every other binary opposition maintained by traditional philosophy and social theory.

Contemporary French philosopher Bernard Miège (1989, 1998) mellows the dramatic implosive impacts of postmodernity by proposing the notion of continuity and rupture of technology, and by arguing that new media and information technologies need to be situated in continuity with extant structures and processes of capital, rather than in a revolutionary break from them. Although he does not embrace the explosive diffusion (or implosion) predicted by postmodernists such as Baurillard, he (alongwith Arjun Appadurai) is one of the more influential founders of the 'globalisation' approach, which signifies a break from Adorno and Horkheimer's influential theorisation of the material 'Culture Industry'. Miège (1989) rejects the economic and cultural determinism approaches, and argues that the free flowing nature of contemporary technocultural revolution is far more complex. He argues that although culture and technolgy are interdependent and interrelated, they do not always act in unison in a predictable manner, and that whilst new technologies do increase commodification of culture by the introduction of industrial methods of production, they also create the possibilities for new cultural innovations.

Technologies are often manifested in products which are tangeblizations or materializations. Because modern theorists (such as Marx) argue that technnologies are represented by means or modes of production (which engender transformation at the social and political levels), their emphasis is more on material aspect of production than on social and cultural aspects of technology. Bernard Mieke (1989, 1998) and Arjun Appadurai (1986, 1990) link production to consumption, thereby treating both material and non-material aspects of technology equally and propose the idea of 'social logic' of

technology, whereby technologies are ultimately manifested as cultural commodities. To Appadurai (1986) technologies are materializations that embed and locate societies and cultures. He argues that contemporary commodities, as materialization of technologies, flow between scenes and localities, and change the way in which technologies have traditionally been understood and manifested.

Manuel Castells contributes to this debate on 'technological globalization' and continuance and rupture approach to understanding technology by proposing his *micralization* construct. Castells especially notes this micralization and geographical dispersion in his study of telecommunications (the Internet and mobile telecommunications). In his three-volume text (1996, 1998), he argues that technology is a driving force in postmodernity, as it has been in all previous eras in history. He argues that technology's forward progress, increasing rapidity, and pervasive presence in everyday life can be characterized as history's basic causal mechanisms. Presenting the Internet as a primary example, Castells (1998) argues that the basic social orientation of the global age is between '*the Net and the self*'. This orientation is then underpinned by the increasing "*micralization*" (making micro) and geographical dispersion of technology, or technology's increasing availability in a greater number of places. Castells's micralization expands the notion of globalization, and argues that by becoming local, micro or personal, technologies liberate individuals from the normativity imposed by the extant cultural order.

For the purpose of this thesis, all these understandings of technology are combined to propose that technologies are ordered structures of materials, symbols and knowledge that tie together cultural domains, social interests and actors. Media technologies are also structures that embed and locate, but simultaneously liberate individuals.

2.3 Consumption of technology - Continuance and Rupture: Replacement, Ambivalence, technophobia, connectedness and resistance.

Both Bernard Meige (1989) and Manuel Castells (1996) view technologies impacting on societies in two ways; as means of *continuance* for the established norms, or as causes of *rupture* in social and cultural paradigms. In this section I shall first be searching for notions of continuance in consumer research and allied disciplines, followed by the theme of rupture.

Theorists within the continuance perspective take an holistic view of technology and society in general and argue that CME technologies and their various applications are not revolutionary, but a distinct phase in the evolutionary process of both production and consumption of technology. As elaborated on page 28 later, such a view is based on the argument that those earlier evolutionary periods which saw the development of earlier technologies such as water turbine, steam engine, internal combustion engine, electricity and telecommunications have contributed greatly to the possibility and emergence of CME technologies. Many of these earlier technologies, which are now so established and domesticated that they have become what Borgman (1999) calls 'inconspicuous', invoked major social changes in their own evolutionary periods. Theorists such as Meige and Castells take an evolutionary view to argue that very much like these earlier technologies, CME technologies are now invoking their own period of social change.

2.3.1 Themes of continuance in Consumer Research: Mick and Fournier (1998) support an holistic view of continuance and look for connections, rather than ruptures in production and consumption orders and practices. Their seminal work on paradoxes of consumption of technology is an example of search for these continuities. Although their basic premise – '*No one eludes technology*', and '*Technological products are inescapable in contemporary life, and they harbour distinctive paradoxes reflective of*

wider trends in postmodernity.' (p 123, *ibid*) – appears to promise an investigation into ruptures, their discussion and findings tend to support the position of continuance.

Baudrillard (1988) and Bauman (2000) argue that postmodernity is reason behind creation of the special circumstances that have led to over-indulgent consumption of new media technologies, which in turn create ruptures in societies. However, Mick and Fournier do not go beyond mentioning post-modern paradoxes as one of the contributing factors and present a thesis that largely portrays consumers trying to fit the new technological paradigms within their existing norms, values and consumption practices. They posit that in the face of rapid technological advances the consumer is left with two obvious choices – '*navigate and negotiate*' or '*avoid, resign and be left behind*'. Arguing that one of the paradoxes of technology is its ability to simultaneously fulfil and create needs, Mick and Fournier (1998) posit that new technologies and technological products are aimed at replacing the existing, which may create any one or more of the four behavioural responses in the consumers; *ambivalence, technophobia, connectedness and resistance*.

Ambivalence can be both active and passive. Active ambivalence allows consumers to adapt to new technologies without much thought or diligence. Passive ambivalence may exhibit itself with consumers ignoring the new and staying with older technologies till beyond their obsolescence. *Connectedness* is incorporation of technology into daily life to a state where motivation and skills are adapted around it such that human functions and abilities are dependant on such mediation. *Technophobia* is the over-indulgent consumption of technology that may result in disengagement from, and total mediation of, human reality. And finally *resistance* is the process by which consumers decline or restrict new technologies to make any alterations to their own technology consumption paradigms.

Can the impact of technology be prescribed by a producer? It is pertinent to comment here that Mick and Fournier's work on consumption of technology portrays consumers as empowered, active, and dynamic in their consumption behaviour and thus represents a post-modern rather than modern orientation of consumption. Elements such as *ambivalence* and *resistance* in their thesis challenge the assertion of modernist scholars who treat consumers as passive recipients of 'marketed' products. Holt (1997) argues that a logical extension of a modernist view of hegemony of producers and enslavement of consumers is that the impact of technology could even predate its domestication; that marketers are free to 'prescribe' an impact before its appropriation. By acknowledging resistance and experimentation, Mick and Fournier are closer to the post-modern notion in suggesting that consumers do go beyond the prescribed ways of using technology by rearranging commodities and renegotiating their meanings towards achieving a seamless appropriation in their own life-worlds. As shall be seen in section 2.6, the post-structuralist turn in consumer research lead many contemporary consumer researchers to hold that consumers routinely mould and adapt (semiotically as well as functionally) marketplace offerings.

Acknowledgement of consumer freedom to accept, resist, rearrange or renegotiate technology is not unique to consumer research; works in strands such as *Social Shaping of Technology* (SST) (MacKenzie and Wajchaman 1985) deal with the means and modes through which consumers take an active and creative part in defining and incorporating technology into their lived experiences. Taking a view that an impact cannot be prescribed before it has been incorporated, SST has essentially acted as a counter-argument against the deterministic approach to explaining technology's influence on society.

The theme of continuance thus implies that consumption of technology is a consumer-defined process, and that consumers use their freedom to resist, renegotiate and adapt newer technological offerings into their existing consumption practices.

2.3.2 Consumption of technology and Themes of Rupture: The post-modern concept of fragmentation perhaps characterises rupture more than anything else, and thus postmodernists tend to subscribe to the rupture theory of diffusion and consumption of technology. Poster (1984), Venkatesh (1998, 2001) and Turkle (1995) are good representations of this orientation. However, in many other streams of research – some of which are not very sympathetic to the post-modern orientation – we find arguments that CME technologies are drastically redefining societies. Hoffman and Novak (1997) argue that Information and Communication Technologies (ICT's) possess unique environmental characteristics that distinguish them in significant ways from traditional commercial environments. This newer fluid 'electronic environment' is claimed to transform market offerings and activities

The diffusion of innovations view of consumption of technology – which studies how individuals and societies engage with innovations and the way they shape human lives – has established frameworks to distinguish innovations from other market offerings. Many characteristics of 'innovations' can be seen as causes of rupture in societies. Urban and Hauser (1993) espouse the rupture orientation by stating that new technologies are used to create '*products which revolutionize product categories*' and these new products '*shift market structures, represent new technologies, require consumer learning and induce behaviour changes*' (p. 47). Rogers (1983) supports the rupture theme by positing that some new products and technologies may be *incompatible* because they fit neither the existing technological order nor consumer needs nor expectations.

2.3.3 The Middle Ground between Continuance and Rupture: Some studies in consumer research have attempted to find a middle ground by asserting that although new technologies may create many ruptures in the production and consumption orders, consumers try to bridge gaps by using innovative mechanisms. Venkatesh and Nicosia's (1997) work perhaps epitomizes this orientation in consumer research. Building onto their earlier works on the symbiosis of interaction between technology and society, they proposed an interactional model revolving around the notion of '*space*' that encapsulated these ruptures. They effectively argued that consumers could slide in and out of this consumption space at will – maintaining existing consumption norms and practices, while at the same time sampling newer ones.

Venkatesh has also written extensively on the role new media technologies play in transforming societies. He acknowledges that technologies compete and vie for consumers' time and attention, as well as asserting that ICT's are increasingly replacing established media technologies. Many of his writings hint that he accepts that expansion in means and modes of consumption engenders a metamorphosis in consumption value systems, and places the two themes of continuance and rupture in one competitive arena.

Technology can simultaneously be seen as a mode of continuance by one group of consumers and a means of rupture by another. Several examples of both continuance and rupture in practice are evidenced in contemporary literature, which highlight the fact that these are not theoretical concerns, but real consumption constraints. Nie and Erbring (2000), and Fallows and Rainie (2004) note that the increasing replacement of newspapers by online versions are indicative of the fact that CME technologies (as causes of rupture) are winning out by reducing and replacing time spent on traditional media such as telecast, broadcast or print. In a large scale study Rainie (2000) found that aging baby boomers and senior citizens were the dominant group resisting internet

adoption at home. Calling it the grey gap, he categorised these consumers into two distinct groups: Net-dropouts and the inter-nots. On the other hand, not surprisingly, Lenhart, Madden and Hitilin (2005) found that American youth are leading the transition to a fully wired and mobile nation, forefronting generational difference as a factor in creation of both continuance and rupture.

Themes of continuance and rupture highlight the dynamically evolving nature of contemporary consumption practices. Computer media technologies, which use simulations in mediated environments, engender new regimes of consumption, which are both accepted and contested by consumers. The global acceptance of consumption in CME is often labelled as a post-modern phenomenon and Alladi Venkatesh (1997, 1998, 2001) has applied post-modern notions of simulation and simulacrum as a philosophical reference to CME technologies. The next section expands this debate of rupture and continuance by exploring the philosophical viewpoints on these post-modern concepts.

2.4 Simulations and simulacrum – Philosophical Viewpoints

20th century literary critic Northrop Frye, in his short book *The Educated Imagination* (1964), asserted that we as a human race are confronted by a world of nature oblivious to our values and desires. We respond to this confrontation by striving to turn the natural into a ‘human world’ through reconstructing the physical environment and creating an alternate human experience.

The creation of alternate human experience and realities is evidenced across human histories; fables and myths, stone carvings and cave paintings, fiction, drama, movies and television programs are but a few examples. The construction of virtual reality in immersive computer mediated environments is perhaps one contemporary response to

this age old confrontation. If Frye's realm of human imagination is extended to include computer simulations, then we can argue that simulations depict, not the world as it is, but a vision of the world as we desire it to be. Computer simulations are used to experiment with our fantasies, play with our imagination and satiate the desire for doing the undoable.

Cyberspace, both as a technological artefact and as a container and enactor of these simulations, has inspired new debates on nature versus nurture and the creation of reality. As in many other disciplines, some theorists in consumer research have also addressed the internet, CME or cyberspace with a post-modern agenda (Fuat Firat and Alladi Venkatesh figure prominently here), and have interpreted these new technologies of simulation metaphorically by problemizing authenticity of the 'real' in post-modern times. Very frequently both these scholars have used contemporary theorist Jean Baudrillard's explication of concepts like 'hypertelia', 'simulacrum', 'hyperreality' and 'simulation' as metaphoric critiques on events occurring in, or related to cyberspace.

In this section consumption of simulations in mediated environments will be discussed from a philosophical standpoint. To this end Jean Baudrillard's theorizations on production and consumption of technology in general, and consumption of simulacra in sign societies in particular, will be explored. Some of Zigmunt Bauman's work will also be drawn upon to illustrate how technology is a factor in forcing contemporary societies into a state of *liquid modernity* (elaborated on p. 23). It will also be argued that such a post-modern orientation offers a better prism for understanding consumption in CME than many other established philosophical schools of thought.

2.4.1 Father of the Simulacrum - Jean Baudrillard: Baudrillard's analysis of consumer society draws upon the disciplines of semiotics, psychoanalysis and political economy. He began theorising in an era when consumption discourses had become a

dominant force and the prevailing intellectual environment had yielded to postmodernism and post-structuralism. He bases his ontology of social behaviour on the use of sign in social processes and for the last twenty years has advocated a theory of sign value to explain contemporary social dynamism.

Perhaps the reason that makes Baudrillard the most prominent theorist to draw upon while exploring cyberspace is that his sign society closely resembles societies in mediated environments, and because his refined interconnected themes that describe social processes and outcomes in a sign society are directly applicable to contemporary societies that partly exist in cyberspace. His constructs of simulations and simulacra go a long way in explaining the fragmentation of society and individuals between real-space and cyber-space.

Baudrillard presents a view of sign which is characteristically different from many textbook definitions. Textbooks in semiotics depict image, representation and sign as intrinsically linked to a material 'signified' (Kress and VanLeeuwen 1996, Chandler 1995). In such definitions the concept of sign is based on ontological realism and is born out of a triadic relationship between object, representation and interpretation (sign-object-interpretant, sign-signifier-signified or referent-reference-interpreter). Its social view is that objects or commodities are assembled into a system of sign values governed by the logic of a cultural code. Baudrillard, on the other hand, theorises a level of signification where sign is separated from the commodity (material reality); for him it is the code which structures, organizes and reproduces social reality.

He establishes distinctions between sign, representation and simulation by asserting that representation is manifested on the principle that sign and the real are equivalent, whereas simulation does not have to have a reference to the real. This view of simulation is of a non-referential condition of existence which fits in well with the

reading of his concept of hyperreality, but is quite revolutionary in comparison with earlier treatments of either sign or representation in semiotics. In Baudrillard's (1998) view where;

representation tries to absorb simulation by interpreting it as false representation, simulation envelopes the whole edifice of representation as itself a simulacrum (p. 170).

To Baudrillard simulation is;

the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal' (and that the) 'age of simulation thus begins with a liquidation of all referentials – worse: by their artificial resurrection in systems of signs which are a more ductile material than meaning, in that they lend themselves to all systems of equivalence, all binary oppositions and all combinatory algebra... it is rather a question of substituting signs of the real for the real itself' (1998, p.166-7).

It is indeed a different view that highlights as well as establishes the difference between sign, image and real, but given the variations in translation, we may find divergent interpretations of this view. In many other writings Baudrillard also considers sign as a component used to create and interpret images. Baudrillard's view of simulacrum can thus also be understood as emerging out of evolution of images rather than signs. For him the image starts as a reflection of basic reality, progresses to mask and pervert a basic reality, goes on to mask the absence of basic reality and finally evolves to a point where it bears no relation to any reality whatsoever and becomes its own pure simulacrum (1983).

Baudrillard's Position on the Role of Technology in Reconstituting the Social:

Perhaps it would be useful to enhance our study of Baudrillard's concept of sign societies and simulacra by exploring his position in relation to other modern and post-modern theories and theorists. Contemporary theorists Mark Poster and Arjun Appadurai both believe that technology - as a facilitator of social processes, shapes society. They also believe that technologies do not, and cannot, exist purely in social orders, that they need a technological order to evolve and develop.

Baudrillard often makes a reference to progress in technology to argue that both modernity and postmodernity are socio-technological phenomena, and so his sign society is also technologically mediated. Although his strong focus and advocacy on the theme of 'sign society' distinguishes him from other contemporary theorists, Baudrillard is not alone in characterizing contemporary societies as technologically mediated. Bauman (2001) also links contemporary social conditions to the state of technology. Bauman explains the post-modern condition as *Liquid Modernity*, which is characterised more by a flow of electronically conducted information than by the embeddedness of heavy commodities;

I am inclined to describe our kind of social condition as 'light', or 'liquefied' modernity – as distinct from 'heavy' and better still 'hard' and 'solid' modernity of yore: ours is not the 'constructed', administered and managed, but a diffuse, all-permeating, all-penetrating, all-saturating kind of modernity (p.339, ibid)

Both Bauman and Baudrillard stress and focus more on social upheavals than on technological advancements. Bauman argues that computer technology is responsible for information flows that have transformed the society; Baudrillard acknowledges that technology is an important variable in the possibility and production of simulacrum. They both project a view of social transformation that assumes technology is an agent in the dynamic social processes. Both Baudrillard's sign-society, and Bauman's liquid modernity are illustrated in a society that is fragmented and torn between simulations or information *which exist in a technological order, and reality manifested in the social order*. In such a society consumption is voluntary, but social dynamism is not dependant on technological determinism. They both view postmodernity as a distinct social condition that exists within and alongside a dynamic technological order but do not advocate *technological determinism (technologies shape societies)* view of theorists such as Theodore Adorno.

Production and Consumption of Technology: Bauman (2000) asserts that a shift from normatively regulated life organized around production, to a life organised around norms of consumption, is the reason behind contemporary social dynamism. Cherrier and Murray (2004) interpret that Baudrillard considers production and consumption as different dimensions of a singular logical process. They argue that Baudrillard describes production at three levels of ‘*massification*’, ‘*domination*’ and ‘*commodification*’, and views consumption as ‘*an active manipulation of signs*’. He also counters Marxian ‘*Mode of Production*’ with his own ‘*Mode of Signification*’, and argues that consumption rather than production is the edifice of social behaviour. He critically engages with Marx and other philosophers from Western Marxist traditions like Foucault, who view technological and production orders as distinct potent forces causing social transformations. Contesting the modern premise that ‘*we can consume because we mass produce*’, Baudrillard asserts that *we produce because we consume*, and thus he effectively treats technology and production as agents in social processes rather than causes of larger social transformations.

Production versus consumption; Original versus simulation: It can be argued that Baudrillard does not accord primacy to technology over social processes. However, at the surface some of his ideas (such as his second order of simulacra) may appear to contradict this argument. His view of machines of production staging a social upheaval may even appear to support the assertion of philosophers from the Frankfurt school, such as Adorno (1991), that capitalist industries of culture gave rise to current social transformations and dynamism. However, in a broader reading, Baudrillard’s arguments strongly oppose Adorno’s assertion that consumers as enslaved masses are passive recipients of the products of capitalist industry.

Adorno (1991 [1947]) argues that production order dictates consumption practices, and that capitalism produces ingredients which are appropriated by masses to create popular

culture. He further argues that, although consumers may be able to see through the mechanisms of consumerism instilled by the culture industries, and may be competent enough to resist and choose between alternatives, they nonetheless find resistance a difficult task, and resultantly accept ready made symbolic definitions found in the capitalist marketplace offerings.

Adorno's view seems to suggest that consumers accept market-offerings as 'originals' that they can own and use to construct their identities. Adorno's argument also appears to suggest that producers are free to 'prescribe' social dynamism through the products they choose to produce. It can be argued that such a view ignores consumer experimentation, and does not acknowledge the fact that consumers often go beyond the prescribed ways of using a given market offering by rearranging commodities and by renegotiating their meanings for appropriating them seamlessly into their own life-worlds.

Baudrillard (2001) argues that there are no 'originals' in the post-modern society, only copies (simulacra). He holds that consumerism functions at the level of signification, that the ascent of consumerism is the reason behind the proliferation of signs and commodities, and that these signs are created and re-negotiated at the individual rather than the collective level. His stress in lived-experience is on *production* rather than *consumption* of the real by individuals; since there is no absolute real, a real is imagined and created in each process of consumption. In many of his writings he uses examples of theme-parks such as Disneyland, Magic Mountain, Sea-World, and IMAC movies to illustrate how sensory mediation is used to create lived experiences in mediated alternate reality.

Baudrillard presents the idea of simulacrum as a *'conceptual weapon against reality'*. He argues that human reality is nothing but a human creation that is discovered by individuals through their lived experiences.

'This is echoed by the other obsession; that of being into, hooked in to your own brain. What people are contemplating screen is the operation of their own brains, (Sic) operating like a video game. All this cerebral, electronic snobbery is hugely affected – far from being the sign of a superior knowledge of humanity; it is merely the mark of a simplified theory, since the human being is here reduced to the terminal excrescence of his or her spinal chord. (1986, p.4).

2.4.2 Simulations and Simulacrum: CME, as a manifestation of technology, has redefined the scope and concept of simulations. Although simulations can exist and be produced purely in social contexts (through fiction, drama, enactment and re-enactments), they have recently become synonymous with computers. In Baudrillard's view simulation can replace the real to an extent that makes it impossible to reconstruct the real from it by reversing its process of production. One of the most revolutionary ideas he advocates is the need to understand contemporary social phenomena through the prism of creation and consumption of simulacra. He contends that real has slowly given way to simulations of all kinds, such that in order to get to the real we need:

to put in place 'decentred' situations, models of simulation, and then to strive to give them the colours of the real, the banal, the lived; to reinvent the real as fiction, precisely because the real has disappeared from our lives (Baudrillard 1991, p.4 part 3).

He theorizes that these decentred situations are sequentially enacted in three orders of simulacra;

1. *Natural, naturalistic simulacra: based on image, imitation and counterfeiting. They are harmonious, optimistic and aim at the reconstitution, or the ideal institution, of a nature in God's image*
2. *Productive, productionist simulacra: based on energy and force materialized by the machine and the entire system of production. Their aim is promethean: worldwide application, continuous expansion, liberation of indeterminate energy (desire is part of the utopias belonging to this order of simulacra).*

3. *Simulation Simulacra: based on information, the model, cybernetic play. Their aim is maximum operationality, hyperreality, total control.*

(page 1 *ibid*)

Interestingly, because Baudrillard argues that these situations are incrementally staged in three orders of simulacra, his view of simulacrum is almost an extension of Frye's (1964) critique of imagination; the first order deals with existing and longstanding utopian imagery deeply rooted in culture, tradition and religion; the second is making utopian imagery real and accessible to all through machines of production; the third is going beyond the imaginary to a state where imagined becomes the reference of the real.

There was an initial period when Baudrillard's theory that social orders exist and evolve in systems of signs and simulations (1983) was not widely accepted. It took a while for contemporary theorists to come around to his viewpoint. Many of them now problematize rather than dismiss his ontology of representation by asserting that diverse relationships between signs and sociality may dictate divergent interpretations. However, in general, Baudrillard's explications of sign-societies and simulations and simulacrum have been widely accepted. Indeed some recent literature in anthropology, such as James Weiner's (1997) analysis of visual self representation in indigenous neo-tribal societies, has even striven to find evidence of the three orders of simulacra existing side by side in contemporary societies.

2.4.3 Simulations, fragmentation and disruption: Any discussion on postmodernism is perhaps incomplete without considering fragmentation and disruption of the social. Baudrillard's sign-society too is affected by the disruptive social impact of simulacra. In his ontology of semiotics he emphasizes the negative sociality created through interpretations of signs and images. In his works like '*Violence of the image*', '*Photographies*', or '*On the murderous capacity of images*' he asserts that in an age of hyperreality when the real ceases to be a reference, '*there is a proliferation of myths of*

origin and signs of reality; of second hand truth, objectivity and authenticity'. This gives rise to a social revolution of finding the truth in lived-experience created through production of the real and the referential; *'All the referentials intermingle their discourses in a circular, Moebian compulsion'* (Baudrillard 1983, p.173). To Baudrillard this fluidity and liquification of reference fragment society and liberate individuals, leading to the creation of individual life-worlds based on a pastiche of signs and symbols.

Over the last twenty years the human race has enhanced its capability to modify and confront nature. Human mastery is no longer limited to the reconstruction of the physical environment and the creation of alternate experiences; it has now the power to create new worlds in simulated environments. Simulation technologies are no longer a scientific frontier; they have become a popular consumption playground. How these technologies have gained acceptance and permeated through society is focus of the next section.

2.5 Domestication, Appropriation and Objectification of CME technologies

In its strictest sense, domestication refers to the initial stage of human mastery of wild animals and plants. Historically domestication was understood as a process of hereditary reorganization of wild animals and plants into human controlled systems, but it is now defined as a process through which artefacts, technologies and practices are stabilized and institutionalized into identifiable closures (lifestyles) within consumers' daily lives (Pantzar 1997). Given the dynamically evolving meaning of the term 'domestication of technology', parallels between the ways time travel may enter our future daily lives and the way animals and crops entered daily life 10,000 years ago become apparent.

Pantzar (1997) argues that there are four major theoretical orientations of technology-society interactions. Biography of Things orientation views technology and its artefacts as components of an environment that creates unique social conditions. Social Shaping of Technology orientation views technology and technological artefacts as shapers of society. Actor Networks theory explores how technologies get embedded in social structures to form socio-technical networks which define social transformations. And finally Ecology of Goods is a broader economic perspective which explores interdependencies between individual commodities and their consumers to argue that technologies exist in an ecology which defines not only the interdependent products but also the society. Although by no means a comprehensive analysis, table 2.4.1 presents these four major viewpoints on technology-society interactions and illustrates their differences.

Technology and Society – Some theoretical positions.				
Theoretical Orientation /view	Biography of things	Social Shaping of Technology	Actor Networks	Ecology of Goods
Units of Analysis	Micro: Commodities and households	Meso: Technological Systems	Meso: Socio-technic networks	Meso: Chains of commodities and consumers
Disciplines	Anthropology, sociology, consumer research	Sociology of science and technology	Communications Research	Institutional economics
Main Concepts	Domestication, Appropriation, Objectification, Incorporation	Social Construction Technological systems and frames	Translation, Heterogeneous networks	Origin, maintenance and selection of variations
Major Representatives	Arjun Appadurai James Carrie Daniel Miller Roger Silverstone	Thomas Huges Trevor Pinch Alladi Venkatesh	Michael Callon Bruno Latour John Law	Kenneth Boulding Mika Pantzar Arie Rip

Table 2.4.1. (originally from Pantzar 1997, enhanced by author 2006)

This diversity of viewpoints and theoretical orientations makes domestication of technology an interesting area of study. Many of these differences are due to the philosophical traditions within the diverse disciplines from which these viewpoints

originate. These viewpoints complement, contrast as well as conflict with one another, making it difficult to present an holistic perspective. Even within consumer research, there has not been a consensus as to how technologies and societies interact and reform each other. As an example both Arjun Appadurai and Daniel Miller subscribe to a 'Biography of things' school of thought in their study of interactions between technology and society. While many consumer researchers comfortably borrow from, and refer to, Appadurai to support their own point of view, few would subscribe to the theories of materiality that Daniel Miller propagates. Alladi Venkatesh too, for example, has taken positions both in Biography of Things and Social Shaping of Technology camps.

The social shaping of technology perspective argues for the interpretive flexibility of technological innovations and calls for a non-deterministic model of technological change. Mika Pantzar's social history of technology is a good example of this adaptive approach. Pantzar (1997) maps the metamorphoses of novelties from 'toys' to 'instruments', from 'luxuries' to necessities', from 'pleasure' to 'comfort' and from 'sensation' to 'routine' to assert that although these metamorphoses may start with a prescription, but always culminate in a non-deterministic domesticated impact. Pantzar also argues that technologies cannot be instilled as social revolutions. He gives two examples, the motor car and telephone, to highlight the differences and similarities between a prescribed use and its final domesticated impact on society.

When motor cars were first introduced as a commodity, they were seen as a technologically marvellous toy. They were sold as a plaything for the rich and the elite who already had valid means of independent transportation (buggies and horse carriages). Instead of providing mobility they were promoted as sources of enjoyment and excitement to their owners. A century later, the motor car has shaped contemporary societies by facilitating the emergence of suburbs around sprawling cities, strip malls

and edge-of-town shopping centres as well as the separation of industrial and workplaces from residential neighbourhoods.

When the telephone was first introduced about a century ago, its prescribed use was relaying important information immediately. The producers and marketers neither saw nor anticipated any need or use which provided enjoyment and recreation to users. Consumers who bought early phones for their 'remarkable functionality' soon discovered that the prescribed functionality was insufficiently imaginative as they did not have enough information that needed be relayed. In its early period, users could not figure out what to use the phone for. When initial experimentation with phones resulted in housewives using it to keep in touch with neighbours, phone companies were dismayed and declared that '*over 30% of telephonic conversations are idle gossip*' and so trivial in nature that they were '*a waste of important technological resources*' (quoted in Hamill 2000). One hundred years on, the telecommunication revolution that the telephone helped institute and domesticate has transformed the world, no less than through the evolution of mobile phone and the internet.

Domestication as a Process: Notwithstanding the debates between different camps on their philosophical orientation, in general, domestication of technology is studied as a process. It is considered an active process in which consumers attempt to find a place for a technology in the household and subsequently appropriate it by making it useful and meaningful in their everyday life. In a larger definition, domestication can be described as '*a process through which artefacts are defined and placed in a way which may imply redefinitions of one's own routines and practices*' (Sorensen and Lie 1996, p.9). Domestic appropriation of a technology is enacted by individual members of a household through incorporation in consumption narrative and meanings, and by embedding it in household transactional systems. Silverstone and Hirsch (1992) propose

that total domestication of a technology entails four elements of *appropriation*, *objectification*, *incorporation* and *conversion*

Appropriation is acquisition of technology as a commodity. Once such a commodity enters a household, members start ‘owning’ it, which strips it of its objective common social identity and imparts a new household-specific identity. **Objectification** is placing of the new possession in the spatial household environment such that symbolic meanings are attached to it, which in turn places it in the household’s emotional environment. **Incorporation** is negotiation and integration of new technology into the household’s temporal dimension. Once incorporated, an artefact becomes an integral part of consumption routines, rituals and discourses within the household. **Conversion** is effectively the reverse of appropriation. Household specific symbolic and functional meanings of the technology are now exported back to the society. The refined and negotiated symbolism attached to the technology now leaves the household and enters the wider society to contribute to its objective common social identity.

Members of a household are the main actors in the process of domestication. In general experimentation with technology starts at an early age, and so in the case of many new technologies the younger members of a household are responsible for the initial appropriation of technological goods (Horrigan 2003). New media technologies are no different in this regard as ‘digital’ has emerged as the preferred lifestyle for the young adults (Wilska 2003). The process of domestication ends in transformation; by altering the consumption rituals and routines of the household, domestication of technology changes the household, and in turn society itself.

The Domestic Space: The process of domestication also has strong links to the concept of space. ‘Domestic’ is a sub-spatial system of the larger geographically defined society. Perhaps the most defining characteristic of CME technologies is the creation of

space in alternate dimensions. Venkatesh and Nicosia's (1997) work introduced consumer research to the significance of space in the process of domestication of CME technologies. Building on their earlier works on the symbiotic interaction between technology and society, they propose an interactional model revolving around the notion of 'domestic space'. Identifying and treating the two interdependent elements of 'social' and 'technological' space, they present a theoretical model of household adoption and use of new ICTs. Because their approach is structure / function oriented, their view of domestic consumption of technology is centred on systems, organization and environment. They consider the household as an organization and technology as a system. Such an approach can be interpreted in two ways: that the technological environment exists outside and independent of the social environment, or that the household as an organization acquires and incorporates suitable technological solutions for efficient operations. Venakatesh and Nicosia (1997) use this analogy to assert that there is an interdependent symbiosis of interaction between technological and social orders.

In summarizing, domestication of technology is an active process of adoption of technological artefacts in the household space by members of a household. Their negotiations with technology create new symbolic and functional identities, which in turn contribute to the objective symbolism and functionality of technology in the wider society.

Perhaps the most important domestic impact of CME technologies has been in the erosion of boundaries between workplaces, social places, adventure lands and the domestic residence. Networked mediated environments allow fusion of these independent spaces into one mediated space which, although represented by and accessed through technological artefacts, functions at the social and cultural level. The

next section explores how and why this alternate consumption space has achieved such widespread domestication.

2.6 Interpreting CME technologies: Cyberspace, the new consumption frontier?

Cyberspace has been called a place where the post-modern individual could recreate herself out of a pastiche of fragments of her existence and thence finally unify herself, an imaginary space to revert to so as to escape the social and market-places. Venkatesh, Firat and Meamber (1998) have called cyberspace the ultimate consumption space and CME technologies the new consumption frontier.

There are obvious links between such views on consumption in cyberspace and the post-modern theory. In this section I will explore how post-modern theory links with consumption in cyberspace and how the diffusion of boundaries between virtual and real alters consumption habits. I will first define Cyber(consumption)-space and then explore the links between postmodernism, consumption-space and hyperreality. I follow on with exploring how diffusion of boundaries between virtual and the real is creating newer means of acquisition, possession and consumption. I finally look at the literature that argues that cyberspace is a new consumption frontier.

2.6.1 Consumption space in cyber‘space’: Humans are spatial animals: a sense of space and place is an integral component of lived experience. Theories of space and time have been a focal point of many discourses in both philosophy and physical sciences. In the late eighteenth century Kant claimed ‘*there are two pure forms of sensible intuition, serving as principles of a priori knowledge, namely space and time*’ (1781, p.36, quoted in Bishop 2001). Kant also ascribed three important properties to space; that it is singular, it is infinite, and it is real. In a large part, these discourses on

ontology of space have been dominated by two oppositional formulations: that space is substantial and absolute, or that it is subjective and relational in nature. Theories of absoluteness look at space as a container that exists independent of its contents and the interactions between whatever exists within it (Gould 1961, Kharma 1993). Theories of relational space are constructed around the interactions of objects and space, and argue that the container does not exist on its own but through the context given to it by the relations between actors and objects (Newman 1989).

However, in consumer research consumption space is not considered an empirical reality in the true Kantian sense. Sherry (2000), for example, posits that the whole edifice of consumption is based upon ‘replacement’ of undesirable and ‘implacement’ of desirable, which allows us to master our terror of the void. According to Sherry, because the expansion of experiential repositories requires expansion of consumption space, in many ways consumption threatens the ecosystems (such as space construct) upon which life itself depends. Casey (1996) informs us that in the subjective context of human experience, places go far beyond the Kantian thesis of an a-priori unity of time and space; Places are not singular Cartesian entities but spaces with action. Maclaran and Brown (2005) call utopia the ultimate representation of consumption space, and characterize it not only as an idyllic place but as a socially and culturally constructed activity, trajectory and process. So the question arises: what exactly is consumption-space?

Lefebvre (1991) introduces the concept of space from a sociologist’s perspective as follows:

Not so many years ago, the word ‘space’ had a strictly geometrical meaning: the idea it evoked was simply that of an empty area. In scholarly use it was generally accompanied by some such epithet as ‘Euclidean’, ‘Isotropic’, or ‘infinite’, and the general feeling was that the concept of space was ultimately a mathematical one. To speak of ‘social space’ therefore, would have sounded strange. (p.1)

Cicognani (1998) interprets Lefebvre to argue that 'space' is characterised more by attributes such as possibility of action, possibility of dwelling, construction of community and sense of time, than its spatial orientation. Lefebvre's original typology of three types of space (Physical, Mental and Social) has been revisited and expanded in various contexts many times since, and theorists have continually proposed their own versions of spatial orientation of our social and cultural worlds. Two of the more recent examples are Arjun Appadurai's (1990) 'scape' construct (finance-scape, techno-scape, media-scape, ethno-scape and ideo-scape) and Alladi Venkatesh's virtual version (cybermarketscapes 1998b).

Appadurai (1990) holds that contemporary fluidity in means and modes of consumption has resulted in geographically unbounded flows of consumption practices across a global cultural economy. In a post-modern perspective all these 'scapes' are containers of fragmented reality that offer consumers a series of elements out of which scripts can be formed of imagined lives, their own as well as those of others living in other places.

The notion that an electronic environment can contain a 'space' is still a challenging new concept that prompts redefinition of many common notions of existence. It can be argued that belief in the concept of unity of time and place is only partial. While we can certainly cope with two places at one time (distributed existence), we still cannot imagine two times in one place. Computer technology enables us to simultaneously exist in mediated as well as real environments (distributed existence). Because the cognitive processing of cues from this medium shares properties with the processing of physical space, a mediated environment empowers us to represent, use and manipulate 'space' in manners that have no equivalent in physical space.

The term '*cyberspace*' was coined by contemporary fiction writer William Gibson (1984). Because it represents such a dynamically evolving entity, all references to

cyberspace tend to be more narrative and descriptive than scientific, and thus it does not enjoy a universally acceptable definition. As its name suggests, cyberspace is the spatial dimension of CMEs.

Connotations and Denotations of Cyberspace: Biocca (2001) describes 'space' in cyberspace as a metaphor for locations of simulations in an abstract 'representation space'. There are no distances or real 'spaces' in cyberspace: Every 'place' is electronically connected to the other, and 'distances' can be traversed instantaneously at will. In the term cyberspace, where 'space' suggests it contains some physical matter with molecular manifestation, 'cyber' gives it immaterial characteristic. Biocca argues that events taking place in cyberspace are nothing but temporally distributed electronic transformations; that they are intercepted and interpreted by humans at any given time gives them 'virtual' existence and 'place' in the phenomenological as well as physical world.

There can be many question marks on the categorization of cyberspace: is it a system in itself, a subsystem of the larger systems of the world, or an entirely independent self-referential system in hyperreal terms? Venkatesh, Firat and Meamber (1998) call cyberspace a self referential 'marginal environment'. Many consumer researchers find it difficult to accept this post-modern notion of cyberspace as a self-referential system (*a separate life-form for each individual with no geophysical connects*), as it is not entirely detached or independent from physical space (*it still needs physical networks and peripherals as well as sensory immersion locations*). Perhaps a better understanding could be that it is a 'hybrid space' contained within the larger physical space.

Perhaps because cyberspace has been conceptualized as a metaphoric parallel to the real world, theorists have continually applied theories and concepts derived from the 'real world' to explain how consumers behave, navigate and negotiate in cyberspace.

Hoffman and Novak (1997) applied theories of flow, calling it a space of flows. Manuel Castells (1998) calls it a spaceless or space-neglecting entity where social/economic/political discourses of power are enacted. In stark contrast, Miller and Slater (2000, p.82) dismiss the term virtuality as a starting point for analysis of social relations in mediated environments, and stress that any understanding of acts in cyberspace should be based upon events in local societies.

2.6.2 Postmodernism, consumption-space and hyperreality: Alladi Venkatesh (along with Lauri Meamber and Fuat Firat) has been instrumental in consumer research in establishing links between postmodernity and cyberspace. Venkatesh, Meamber and Firat (1998) asserted that '*cyberspaces as (are) site of fragmented virtuality, a highly individualized, decentralized spaces of human subjectivity and 'cyberspaces as (are) subversive and transgressive of many of our established norms and expectations of behaviour'* (p.303). Venkatesh (1998b) also took the view that consumers are constantly in need of new spaces to exercise their freedoms and establish their identities**. He asserted that there are '*no behavioural norms*' (1998, p.672) in cyberspace and thus there is unlimited consumer freedom.

Understandably, this over-generalization of cyberspace has its roots in the post-modern shift in consumer research. Firat and Venkatesh have made liberal use of the post-modern agenda to characterize cyberspace as an ultimate manifestation of fragmentation, liberation and hyperreality. Zygmunt Bauman suggests that unlimited consumer freedom empowers the consumer to shape society:

in the present day society, consumer conduct (consumer freedom geared to consumer market) moves steadily into position of, simultaneously, the cognitive and the moral focus of life, integrative bond of the society and the focus of systemic management. (1988, p.807)

**We have to realize here that the social norms in cyberspace were not as well established or evident in 1998, and thus the social memory, that Venkatesh talks about in his paper, has now created very real and applicable cyber-norms.

This notion of unlimited consumer freedom shaping society, culture and marketing practices is the hallmark of the post-modern orientation in consumer research. Brown (1993) noted that various social commentators have characterised postmodernism differently, and comments that there is a lack of consensus and clarity on the nature of postmodernism and postmodernity. However, Firat (1991) posits that postmodernism is a social and cultural phenomenon characterised by five major traits; fragmentation, hyperreality, decentring of subjects, reversal of production and consumption, and juxtapositions of opposites. At least two of these traits, fragmentation and hyperreality, can contribute to our discussion on establishing cyberspace as a consumption space.

Fragmentation: Firat (1991, 1992, 1995) views fragmentation in discourse, experience and self as a meta-narrative characterizing contemporary lived experience. The accelerated pace of technological development is one contextual contributor to this fragmentation. The corollary of continual (evolutionary) fragmentation in media and contexts is an ever accelerated fragmentation of our desires, thoughts, actions and behaviour; a separation of object and function, and fissures between signifier and signified. Postmodernists view this fragmented, decontextualized existence (self) as an alternate form of being, one that is liberated from the conformities of a single regime of truth. Firat argues that the post-modern meta-narrative is a lived experience devoid of any central, unified meaning and purpose for life, *'a life that is increasingly fragmented into moments dominated by tasks required by products consumed'* (Firat 1992 p.204). Turkle (1995) posits that perhaps because her fragmented self is scattered and distributed in different places, a post-modern individual needs to identify and relate with a set of spaces to construct a pastiche of, or to unify, her fragmented self. Cyberspace has emerged as a flexible and adaptive container of all these fragments.

Hyperreality: It is a recreation of reality beyond what reality might have been, to an extent that this 'recreated-real' becomes the reference of the real. Baudrillard (1991)

believes that in this age of computer simulation, commodity fetishism has been replaced by virtual reality, real has ceased to be a reference and thus there is a proliferation of myths of origin and signs of reality, of second hand truth, objectivity and authenticity. This gave rise to a social revolution where truth is found in lived-experiences created through production/consumption of the real and referential**. While hyperreality diffuses the boundaries between virtual and real, simulation and original, reflection and reality, fragmentation manifests itself through simultaneous existence of multiple life-worlds. Together, they form an ideal basis for acceptance of, and existence in, the multiple windows environment of cyberspace. Venkatesh, Karabana and Ger (2001) take the view that as the world moves closer to cybernetic life forms we need to question the meaning of being 'human', that perhaps for the first time in human history we are entering a phase of becoming 'post-human' in a life-world that is inhabited by cyborgs, self-regulating entities and machines.

2.6.3 *So...is cyberspace a new consumption frontier?* Frontier refers to the edge or border of a known region, and it is often interpreted that what lies at the other side is unknown. When we get closer to the edge of the known, we may discover some portion of the unknown, thus expanding or advancing the frontier. It can thus be interpreted that proximity to the edge provides new opportunities for expansion. In the light of the commentary and literary positions as presented above it can be suggested that CME technologies, by diluting the strongholds of time and space, by bringing geographically as well as temporally dispersed events and people closer together, allow them to interact and evolve faster. Consumption, as an act, event or process, exists within interactions

**Video games present themselves as a good example to support these post-modern claims. Game consoles and games have been the biggest selling Christmas gifts both in the US and UK since 2003. While many of these games are based on movie characters, often games too turn into movies in an intermingling genre diffused fashion. Authenticity in videogaming is created by a right console – PS-3, X-box 360 or Nintendo DS, and the right game- EA games for beginners, aftermarket pro-enhanced or online versions for serious gamers. To many serious gamers progressing beyond various levels in the game becomes the focus of life.

between subjects and objects. Simulated environments, by allowing subjects and objects to come together at will, allow newer forms and modes of consumption, expanding the known universe of consumption and advancing its frontiers.

An outline of our known universe of consumption is presented in the next section.

2.7 The way we understand consumption: means and modes analysis

Firat (1999) comments that the post-modern turn in consumer research has altered the way it views consumption; that it is now viewed as a narrative, encompassing consumers' whole lives. Shaughnessy (2002) holds that it is now viewed as a discourse on creation and expression of self and identity. Both Firat (1991, 1995, 1999) and Shaughnessy (2002) view consumption as a fluid and creative act independent of the characteristics of the consumable, and appreciate that both consumption and its meanings are highly malleable.

Consumption as a post-modern narrative is a dialectic involving congruencies and tensions between subject, object and the audience. Consumption in cyberspace dematerializes the object, decentralizes the subject and geographically disperses the audience. Elliot (1997) draws upon congruencies and tensions in consumption discourses to list five dialectical dimensions in the study of consumption. These are: material versus symbolic, social versus self, desire versus satisfaction, rationality versus irrationality and creativity versus constraint. Two of these dimensions, material versus symbolic and social versus self, are central to understanding consumption in cyberspace. These are discussed in detail later on in section 2.8 and 2.11 respectively. This section develops a definition of consumption from extant literature and then explores the remaining three dialectical dimensions in general by posing simple what, why and how questions.

2.7.1 Material V/s Experiential: What do we consume: Several valid elaborations of consuming exist within consumer research. These definitions can be synthesized into the position that consuming is essentially a subject-object interaction in which an object is used as a resource to produce an output that is consumed. Consuming is a process of both destruction (*depletion or use of resource*) and production (*of what is consumed*). Firat and Venkatesh (1997) equate consumption with play, and the consumer with a child who uses consumption as a comfort zone full of warm feelings, pleasurable thoughts and experiences. The experiential (feelings, fun and fantasy) strand in consumer research views consumption going beyond its tangible manifestation - the consumable or product. For many consumers, it is the experience that is consumed, remembered and collected. The notion of experiential consumption entered the arena of consumer research with Holbrook and Hirschman's seminal article in 1982 and has been a mainstay of consumer behaviour theory ever since. Hoch (2002) argues that the term 'experience' is empirically untestable and thus its definition has been rather labile and ideological in nature, leaving much to interpretation.

The selection of a consumable from an available set of market offerings depends in part on consumers' past experience, which is an important determinant of cognitive and affective responses to a consumable. Hoch (2002) holds that positive product experience seduces consumers into memorizing positive affective responses which are recalled later when selecting among alternatives. Hoch admits that although 'experience' is an ambiguous term, affective responses, together with expertise into using a consumable, help create both a familiarity with and preference for a consumable. He explicated consumption experience in terms of engagement (*employment of all sensory perceptions*), credibility (*personal experience outweighs others' opinions*), selective interpretation (*experience is pseudodiagnostic in nature, consumers cannot try all alternatives to make an objective assessment*) and endogenicity (*each experience is*

encoded, interpreted and constructed in an individual's context) to argue that a product experience proceeds like a seduction.

The underlying assumption in such explorations of consumption is that in the process of consumption it is not the product, but the emotion associated with the product that signifies the act of consumption. In her exploration of the role of affective processes in consumption, Richins (1997) deduces that emotions are contextual, non-biological and non-universal, which seems to suggest that this uniqueness of emotions is responsible for creation of individual consumption experiences.

2.7.2 *Desire and the 'Why' in consumption:* If the 'why' of consumption is viewed through the lens of emotions and feelings, desire becomes the driving principle. However, unlike emotions and feelings which are non-universal, desire is rooted in social and cultural patterning. Holt (1997) argues that contemporary consumption is characterized by consumption patterns that are structured by contextual cultural frameworks and that the reason 'why one consumes what he consumes' lies in cultural predisposition. He also proposes that '*in terms of purpose, consumers' actions can be both ends in themselves (autotelic actions) and means to some further ends (instrumental actions)*' (1995, p.2), he organizes his ontology of consumption around four thematic dimensions or metaphors; *consuming as experience, consuming as integration, consuming as classification and consuming as play.*

Holt posits that *consuming as experience* refers to methods used by consumers to make sense of, and respond, to the consumable. Enacted in progressive stages of accounting, evaluating and appreciating, the experience of consumption is structured by the interpretive framework consumers apply to engage with the consumable. *Consuming as integration* metaphor references the methods consumers use to relate-to, and integrate, the consumable into their self-concept. This process is sequentially enacted through the

stages of assimilation, production and personalization. *Consuming as play* metaphor references the use of consumption as an end in itself such that consumer-object-consumer interactions do not have an ulterior end. And finally *consuming as classification* metaphor references to the ways in which consumers use consumables to classify themselves in relation to others.

Arnould and Price (2000) extend this thesis by contending that consumption can also be an authenticating act, that people often consume products and services as a means of affirming uniqueness and individuality and/or revealing the true self. These authenticating acts of consumption are vital expressions of who they are as individuals and help them develop a desired self-narrative.

Consumption has, both traditionally and historically, been explained in terms of desire, and such attempts can be dated as far back as early Biblical discourses. But what is this desire that consumers have, that drives their consumption? Within consumer research desire has been characterised as a powerful cyclic emotion that is both pleasurable and discomfoting (Belk, Ger and Askgaard 2003), and is considered one of the motivating forces behind consumption. Belk, Ger and Askgaard (1997, 2000, 2003) recognize vernacular relationships and distinctions between needs, desires and wants. They assert that desire is driven by self-seduction and hopefulness, that it is a source of tension between seduction and morality, and that it manifests itself as an embodied passion involving a quest for otherness, sociality, danger and inaccessibility (1997).

Desire as a consumption motive and as a quest for satisfaction and happiness has been a subject of study in many other disciplines and thus has been approached in divergent ways. For example, in media consumption studies Taylor and Saarinen, take a philosophic, if not cyclic and moebian view of desire. They contend that '*Desire does*

not desire satisfaction. To the contrary desire desires desire.' (Taylor and Saarinen, 1994).

The study of desire in consumer research is also inextricably linked to social aspects of consumption (Elliot 1997, Belk, Ger and Aaskegaard 2003). In this perspective it is argued that desire develops from physical needs through a growing awareness of the existential choice between a desire-to-have and a desire-to-be, desire being defined by absence of being (Elliot 1997). A general interpretation of this existential phenomenological view could be that desires are constructed through symbolic linkages between consumption and our identity, and map the difference between our current perceived and aspired self identity.

2.7.3. Rationality versus irrationality, creativity versus constraints: How do we consume? Rationality in consumption demands an analytic and judicious use of all available resources. These resources can be emotional, material or temporal. Scarcity of resources acts as a constraint to consumption and consumers often use creativity to maximize consumption benefits. In one early piece attempting to explain 'how do we consume' Fuat Firat (1987) proposed the prism of consumption patterning. Subsequent works (such as Holt 1995) which expounded the 'how' were in reality exploring the 'what' and effectively established that both 'how' and 'what' of consumption are closely linked, that it was not possible to understand one in the absence of the other. Freedom of choice between alternatives results in huge variations in individual consumption behaviour and 'how' is perhaps best defined by the level of involvement and investment of time and resources.

In their exploration of the duration of an act of consumption, Holbrook and Gardner (1993) connected emotional response to the length of a consumption experience. They argued that consumption duration is dependant on the perceived significance of its

experiential benefits. In a recent study, Cotte, Ratneshwar and Mick (2004) explored time-styles as well as temporality of consumption through a phenomenological lens and categorized rational utilization of time (time-style) in terms of social, temporal planning and polychromic orientations. A corollary of their argument could be that consumption-style defines time-style which in turn dictates lifestyle.

Although separated by more than a decade, both these studies stress that one of the pressing issues of contemporary life is choice between consumption alternates and the time allocated to them. The significance of time becomes very important and transparent in looking at individual self reflections. Reflecting on the past becomes a way of constructing emergent autobiographic self-narratives which drive future consumption. Time has perhaps remained the scarcest commodity on the market, forcing consumers to make conscious decisions about 'how to consume' in order to maximize their time utilization. Use of discretionary time is one of the major sources of tension and conflicts for the consumer, which makes consumption duration an indicator of how we consume.

In summing this section, it can be asserted that both phenomenological as well as post-modern orientations in consumer research refined the notions of consumption by taking its definition beyond economics, by asserting that consumption and its meanings are highly malleable and that consumer behaviour can be irrational as it can be reward or benefit centred. This section established a definition of consuming as will apply specifically to cyberspace. It also explored the untestable and labile nature of consumption experience and desire and connected them to the 'why' of consuming. These definitions will be drawn upon in our data analysis and interpretation.

2.8 Materialism, Materiality and Dematerialization

Much of early consumer research was based on the premise that the act of consumption is defined and bounded by properties of the product. In recent decades, consumer research has somewhat over-compensated for this by emphasizing the consumer at the cost of almost ignoring the consumable. While the consumer as subject and act of consumption are explored in detail, the object consumed or consumable is often taken for granted. Although the current focus on experiential consumption, identity construction and self-concept, semiotics and sociality of consumption characterises subject-object relationships between consumer and consumable somewhat passively, no explicit efforts have been made to crystallize this relationship. In the context of this thesis – in order to appreciate how consumption in mediated environments is qualitatively different from consumption in material environments – it is important to understand and differentiate between the concepts of materiality, materialism and dematerialization.

2.8.1 Materiality and subject-object relationships: The study of consumption is contextualized by consumer, consumable and the world they inhabit together. Borgerson (2005) argues that understanding of consuming subjects' world is based upon understanding how individual and object come together in an interaction which is consumption. She also points out that although many consumer researchers exploring materiality do not fully subscribe to symbolic interactionism, most published work in this area is subject-focused and views objects as symbolic resources; subject-identity (self) can be created, extended, represented and expressed through objects (possessions).

Daniel Miller (1987) is one of the foremost proponents of theories of materiality in Consumer Research. He views consumption as a process through which human beings

materialize or objectify values and meanings and resolve conflicts and paradoxes. Borgerson (2005) notes that some consumer researchers argue that because Miller believes that subject-object relationships are co-created by the subject and object, his view is too strongly commodity centred. Miller (1987) asserts that overall material environment plays a role in creating humans as subjects, and that subject-object relationships may result in the emergence of a subject-object hybrid, something which some consumer researchers (Belk 1988) call extended self.

It is a common argument in Consumer Research that objects are products of human thoughtfulness and creativity. Objects also bear cultural imprints and serve as primary sources of cultural information about the producer and consumer. Miller extends this view of material culture by arguing that cultures are influenced and shaped by a material environment and that individuals' positive potential development is based on a dynamic, mutually constitutive relationship between subject and object, outside of which neither can exist independently (Miller 1998). He believes that although consumption meanings and values, as well as consumers, may be transient, materiality instils continuity, stability and security through objects. He theorises consumption as social self-creation on the assumption that material culture is the effect and instrument of contests over the means to project self-image.

Miller views consumer culture as a shift from a position where meanings and values were objectified in persons to a point where they are now objectified in objects. Although he views consumption of mass goods as liberating, he also thinks consumers are constrained by access to these objects, as well as by having little control over their design and form (Miller 1987). It can be argued that because he characterizes consumer attempts to individualize and personalize mass produced consumables as struggles for the appropriation of objects, Miller's views also have much in common with the modernist, cultural imperialism school of thought. This modernist position and material

culture bias is evidenced in all his writings: his effective rejection of Baudrillard's position on simulations and simulacra, his assertion that in terms of consumption there is no such thing as cyberspace, and in his application of ethnographic methods. I find that theories of materiality with a consumer focus are rare outside of consumer research. Miller's views are neither contested nor accepted in consumer research, however they are significant in that they take an alternate view of how culture and consumption is defined and depicted by material artefacts.

2.8.2. *What is a material object in a human world?* A material object is an entity around which most consumption takes place. Objects are seldom mere objects, inert, mute, or purely utilitarian. They exist in material, social and cultural contexts and are commodified, transacted, symbolized and consumed in these contexts (Appadurai 1986). Material artefacts animate the life-worlds of societies, and through their forms and uses transmit a gamut of meanings; social, cultural, political, economic and gender-specific. Societies create structures that govern the ownership of objects and actions surrounding their use. Meanings are attributed to these actions and agency of the objects is established. Objects are rooted within human and social contexts and they intervene to shape and reshape these contexts. Objects form inventories, and these inventories define individuals and social groups.

2.8.3. *How does it interface with a human world?* Objects, beyond their material manifestations, through symbolic expression, help create, maintain and transform social collectivities (*Collectivities as described by Holt 1997*). Attaching symbolism to consumption objects is a culturally universal phenomenon. People tend to make inferences about others based on their choice of consumption objects or possessions. Conversely, consumers use consumption objects and possessions to speak for themselves, allowing them to communicate non-verbally and to achieve the satisfaction of self-expression through possession and consumption (Belk 1988).

Issues of origin, location and interpretation of meanings are often raised in the study of semiotics in cultural anthropology. It is almost universally accepted that all meanings are socially and culturally constructed such that there is essentially no external reference point. A cultural code acts as mediator between object matter and transient meanings (Appadurai 1986). Meanings attached to objects operate at both social symbolism and self symbolism levels. As much as the object, consumption of these meanings is a social process that helps crystallize the cultural values and social structures.

The interfaces between an object and human world thus operate at a variety of levels. Objects acting as relational effects bind societies together. Individuals and societies recursively and reflexively perform materiality, attaching systems of symbols to artefacts which define social structure, cultural norms and consumption practices. Because material objects as well as social relations exist at local levels, they may not add up to form a universal pattern or structure (Law and Mol 1995), and thus the resultant differences in material culture distinguish individuals and societies from each other.

2.8.4. Materialism: State of mind or state of being? Modernists argue that the abundance of resources, free-market economy and mass production of consumer goods in the post-industrial age have established materialism as a defining characteristic of social change. Adorno (1966) argues that conservative groups in the society view crass materialism as rebellion against many social norms and as an antithesis to religious values. Haferkamp and Smelser (1992) while charting the evolution of late modernity in the USA comment that consumer groups are in rebellion against orthodoxy in society and respond by proclaiming, albeit satirically, the supremacy of contemporary materialism over established social and moral values of thrift, generosity and charity.

As mentioned previously, materialism has been explored from a variety of interdisciplinary angles and perspectives and thus there are wide and varied views on it. However, one common element found in many of these approaches is that they consider materialism comprising of both antecedents (innate or learned) and consequences (value judgement, good or bad). That materialism is innate trait and can be either good or bad, or that it is learnt behaviour which again can be manifested as either good or bad.

It is interesting to note that even contemporary views on materialism hold contrasting antecedents and value judgments. Belk (1988) asserts that materialism is a learnt behaviour, a trait comprising three subtraits; envy (*desire for others' possessions*), nongenerosity (*unwillingness to share possessions with others*) and possessiveness (*control of ownership, collection and retention of objects*). Richins (1994) on the other hand contends that values are objectified in possessions and that '*what object we hold dear is what characterizes and communicates our most important values*'. While Belk (1988) posits '*we are what we have*' and that we use our possessions to extend our selves, Richins (2004) claims '*what we have is what we value in life*' and that materialism is a value that '*influences the way that people interpret their environment and structure their lives*' (p.209). Belk studies materialism as a trait aspect of living; it can be hedonistic and self indulgent, but is good and self-defining. Richins on the other hand views materialism as a value contained in conventions learnt through the practice of consumption.

Materialism has also been studied in a social cognition perspective (Hunt, Kernan and Mitchell 1996) where it is argued that we not only use possessions as tools of perception for self and others (*that we measure worth in possessions*), but also that we use this criterion of materiality as a super-ordinate construct when framing stimuli for social cognition purposes. This perspective suggests that our materialism moderates our relationships with other people.

Materialism and happiness: Technologically induced consumerism has spawned many debates on the relationship between happiness and materialism (and by implication, technology). Linkages between consumerism and happiness have been a topic of controversy among economists and social commentators for many decades now. In general, many of these debates revolve around capacious relationships between broad material prosperity of western societies and well being, both in individual and societal contexts.

In a purely social psychological definition materialism involves a certain degree of self centeredness. It is defined by ownership of, and pride in, objects and is characterized by a belief that purchase and consumption lead to happiness (Richins 1994). There is now a consensus of opinion in consumer research that the main determinants of happiness are unrelated to consumption, but rather to fulfilment in social relationships. Csikzentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) were the first to establish that even object-associations are dependant on people-relationships, and that those individuals who do not consider themselves materialists have strong or extensive relationships with other people. Csikzentmihalyi in particular has worked extensively on materialism and its relationship with happiness. He posits;

‘the virtual monopoly of materialism as the dominant ideology has come at the price of a trivialization that has robbed it of much of the truth it once contained. In current use, it amounts to little more than a thoughtless hedonism, a call to do one’s own thing regardless of consequences, a belief that whatever feels good at the moment must be worth doing. (1999, p.80)

It can be argued that Csikzentmihalyi’s view above is representative of a somewhat outdated conservative orthodoxy. Richins and Dawson (1992) argue that materialism is widely viewed as a life value and have reported that consumers do not consider themselves as thoughtless hedonists. They define value as a centrally held belief that

guides actions and judgements across specific situations and beyond immediate goals to more ultimate end-states of existence.

Materialism and Wellbeing: As stated earlier, differing views on the relationship between material prosperity and well being in western societies have been proposed in several major disciplines. One of the early works on establishing a relationship between prosperity and well being was by economist Richard Easterlin (1974), who posited that there was no real correlation between a nation's income level and citizens' happiness. Obviously, Easterlin's ideas were in stark contrast to the established economic theories of wealth, which equated 'utility' with 'welfare' such that an increased ability to choose to acquire and consume lead to incremental levels of satisfaction (well-being, happiness).

In one of their earlier studies, Rindfleisch, Burroughs and Denton (1997) used a social psychological view to explore the nature of relationship between material values and life satisfaction by investigating role of family structure as a moderator of the relationship between materialism and childhood satisfaction. Later, in 2002, Burroughs and Rindfleisch summarized many widely held views of subjective well being in social psychology to argue that it consists of three separate but related components: (1) cognitive evaluations of the conditions of one's life, (2) positive affective state (*happiness*) and (3) negative affective states (*dissatisfaction*). Belk's materialism scales (1984, 1985) also contain elements closely related to these indicators of wellbeing. These scales have been applied in several subsequent studies supporting the view that materialism correlates negatively with both happiness and satisfaction. Schroeder and Dugal (1995) found materialism to be positively correlated with social anxiety and supported Richins and Dawson's (1992) finding that more materialistic people were more dissatisfied with their standard of living than their less materialist counterparts.

2.8.5. What are dematerialized replacements? If materialism is manifested in the bricks and mortar world where objects have tangible existence, dematerialized replacements exist in the ethereal world of simulations manifested through networked computing. The concept of *dematerialization*, as used in the context of this thesis, is a heuristic tool; it does not have a fixed meaning at this time. However, its origins lie in the literature on industrial ecology that discusses the interaction of technology and environment. It is further strengthened by works on modes of information (Poster 1984). In these traditions the concept has been used to refer to the *inverse* of materializing processes (Miller's position) whereby individuals and societies place value on commodities and things. It also represents the macro level social processes of *Liquid Modernity* (Bauman 2000) whereby individuals and societies lighten up by opting for electronic flows in lieu of embedded heavy commodities. It also borrows from Jean Baudrillard's elucidations of simulations and simulacra. And finally, it represents the process of replacement of real and tangible by its simulation.

In many of these contexts, the term '*dematerialization*' tends to engender hype and euphoria, ranging from predictions of a fully wired and digital global economy to Sci-fi inspired depictions of the realm of the Matrix (1999). Arguably euphoria often leads to ill-founded assumptions about the state of the things to come. Negroponte (1995), for example, claimed that,

The information super highway is about the global movement of weightless bits at the speed of light. As one industry after another looks at itself in the mirror and asks about its future in a digital world, that future is driven almost 100 percent by the ability of that company's products or services to be rendered in digital form. (p.12)

Twelve years on, although most of the world is wired up and many companies have a presence in cyberspace: Negroponte's digital future is not here yet. And how could it be, as not all material forms and functions can be rendered digital? Although we can email instead of writing a letter, SMS in lieu of email, read books and news off the screen,

buy songs online for our iPod Nano, buy airline tickets or groceries (and everything in-between) through wi-fi enabled work-n-play on-the-go laptop, we still consume largely in a material world. We need cars to travel, cots for babies to sleep in and carving knives to serve that turkey – no matter how digital, we still live in a material world. Negroponte's comment, along with many other 'out of this world' hypotheses, has proven to be hyperbole. The migration from 'bricks to clicks' and 'atoms to bytes' has been slow but steady. Now, more than ever, consumption is defined by the characteristics of the electronic media, and lives are increasingly shaped by activities in cyberspace.

Needs, means, modes and forms of consumption vary across times and across societies. Postmodernism argues that we have come to a point where the needs for social connectivity, aesthetics and experience have replaced the needs for acquisition and retention of mere objects: Increasingly, subject-experience interfaces are replacing subject-object interfaces. Because computer simulations have proven to be efficient means of providing subject-experience interfaces, they have earned a claim to be playing a significant part in the process of transforming our societies.

2.8.6 Culture of commodity v/s culture of consumption: material culture v/s culture of simulations: Post-modern notions of culture of consumption and simulations are countervailed by modern notions of material and commodity culture. Economists such as Isherwood consider goods as stable and visible categories of culture, and as information systems. Together with Mary Douglas (Douglas and Isherwood 1996), he argues that goods, beyond being containers and enactors of meanings, are creators of consumption spaces, hierarchies, rituals and social relationships.

Miller and Slater (2000) view the internet as an object, good and commodity, and as a manifestation of material culture. They contend that the '*internet is not a monolithic or*

placeless cyberspace; rather it is numerous new technologies, used by diverse people, in diverse real-world locations'. They argue that 'virtuality' associated with the internet has played a key role in suggesting that media can provide both means of interaction and modes of representation that add up to spaces and places that participants can treat as if they were real. They believe that the post-modern connotations of cyberspace and virtuality provide a liberation in which the performative character of all social realities and identities is brought to light, deconstructed and transcended. They argue that just because the internet appeared at precisely the right moment to substantiate post-modern claims about abstraction and depthlessness of contemporary mediated reality can not justify the generalizations that self and identity can be detached from embodiment and other essentialist anchors.

Miller and Salter (2000) believe in the internet as a commodity, and as a continuous medium which is embedded in geographically defined social spaces, such that internet users '*cannot escape into a self-enclosed cyberian apartness*'. To them, the internet (rather than cyberspace) is embedded in societies that exist in a particular place, and can be understood on the following basis: *dynamics of objectification* – people engage with the internet as an instance of material culture and use it as an object in the process of self and social identification; *dynamics of mediation* – people engage with the media as media, they frame and make use of its features and potentials according to their own social and cultural norms; *dynamics of normative freedom* – people adapt to the new ways in which freedom and normativity is linked to the internet without surrendering their local context; and *dynamics of positioning* – that people use creative strategies to adapt to the fluidity of cultural, political and economic flows that the internet offers and reposition their senses of self and social.

In contrast, Mark Poster (1995) questions the validity of Heideggerian perspective in describing cyberspatial phenomena by proposing a very nice analogy. He argues that

internet is more of a social space than a ‘thing’ in that its effects on society are more like those of Germany (society) than a hammer (material object). He further argues that:

as long as we understand the internet as a hammer we will fail to discern the way it is like Germany. The problem is that modern perspectives tend to reduce the Internet to a hammer. In the grand narrative of modernity, the Internet is an efficient tool of communication, advancing the goals of its users who are understood as preconstituted instrumental identities (Poster 1995, p5)

Poster argues that because earlier technologies were manifested in physical forms (canals, water wheels, steam coming out a funnel, spinning wheel), it was easy for an individual to connect magic to the mechanism; objects representing technologies aided in cognitive mapping. Turkle (1996) posits that the cognitive mapping of information and simulation technologies, however, is not that transparent, rather abstract in nature. Because an overwhelming majority of consumers do not have even the basic knowledge of computer architecture or mechanisms of simulation, in the current culture of simulation, transparency is not about making the connection itself, but about being able to perceive that there is a connection.

Materialization and dematerialization are polarities that complement each other. While materialization represents a state of society in which there is a scarcity of commodities and thus value is placed on acquisition and possession of objects, (*my interpretation of*) dematerialization refers to endless replication and easy distribution of consumables in CMEs. At the moment we live in a world in-between these two polarities; we can consume experientially in cyberspace but we need a sophisticated material environment to do that.

Perhaps it is easier to understand the concept of an electronically dematerialized society by using the analogy of a ‘post-bourgeois’ society portrayed by Inglehart (1971). He argues that in a post bourgeois society changes in consumption values are represented by changes in nomenclature of consumables and not by proliferation or extinction of objects. A post-bourgeois or post-material individual is not an abdicator of all

materialistic traits and values, rather he places value on the human condition. Similarly, our partially dematerialized world is exhibiting the transformation from material to simulated state of existence through changes in the nomenclature of consumables (*simulations in lieu of material objects*) and individual attitudes towards consumption.

2.9 Mediated Consumption: immersion and detachment

Of all the characterizations of consumption in cyberspace, notions of immersion in the medium and disengagement from reality can perhaps be called most Baudrillardian in nature. At a glance, any definition of media engagement and detachment appears to be an extended application of the concepts of simulacra and hyperreality. Perhaps this is why early depictions of cyberspace as a consumption space characterized it as a window onto an imagined world, and often considered consumption in cyberspace as a form of laboratory experimentation (Rhinegold 1993, Dibble 1995). Many such early views and characterisations were based on the belief that because CME has the capacity to engage at both sensorial and emotional levels, it provides immersion and flow that can detach individuals from their immediate surroundings.

Latter literature in computer and media studies was based on systematic scientific explorations which made direct connections between media engagement and consumption experience. This section explores media engagement in detail by presenting an anatomy of a mediated experience, and by synthesizing strands from diverse disciplines on transcendence, flow and (dis)embodiment in the medium.

2.9.1 *Anatomy of a Mediated Experience:* Although consumer research does not possess a complete definition of mediated consumption experience yet, it does have Joy and Sherry's (2003) definition of a somatic experience which comes fairly close to defining a mediated experience. Joy and Sherry posit that somatic experience is a

complex processing of embodiment and multi-sensory immersion, and occurs at both phenomenological and cognitive levels. This can be further bolstered by reference to Martin's (2004) argument that evocation and thematization associated with fantastic imagery is an essential ingredient of a consumption experience.

Outside of consumer research there are detailed descriptions and diverse views on how a mediated consumption experience is created. However, most of them consider CME a technological artefact, and thus scientific and technological paradigms are used to define, explain and understand mediated consumption experience. A selection of these views on the construction of a mediated consumption experience are briefly highlighted below.

Neuro-phenomenological view: Neuro-phenomenologists such as Francisco Varela (1991) and Kenneth Berridge (2000) posit that reality is a perception and a construction - that every act, action, thought and behaviour is a mental projection. They argue that because all cognition is built on sensory mediation, everything and every experience is based on embodiment, immersion and telepresence. Neuro-phenomenologists thus argue that because creation of a consumption experience is dependant on interaction between somato-sensory interfaces and cognition, there is no difference in authenticity of perception between real world, imaginary world and simulated worlds; that every experience in the real world can be created in a computer mediated environment through sensory mediation.

Computer engineering's view: Computer engineers and software designers need to understand and define mediated consumption experience well in order to create successful simulations. Computer and software engineers focus on how technology interacts with, and is perceived by the user. Within computer design and media research, man-machine interaction is studied in terms of *affordances* a machine environment

offers to a consumer. Media scientists use four types of affordances – cognitive, physical, sensory and functional – to define the mechanisms, depth and quality of a mediated consumption experience (Rex 2003). Cognitive affordance is the intelligent mental connection between the simulation and consumer, physical and sensory affordances together provide the somato-sensory connections, and finally functional affordance is the ability of a machine environment to satisfy consumer needs.

New-media scientists' view: Novak, Hoffman and Yung (2000) argue that somatic experience in a mediated environment entails a certain degree of sensory abstraction and requires focussed amplification of somato-sensory cues available within the mediated environment. This sensory abstraction is achieved through focusing attention on a set of stimuli produced by the medium and by ignoring cues from the material environment external to the medium. Because a mediated environment cannot provide a full range of somato-sensory cues to replace all elements of a material environment, it relies on amplification of available cues and requires that the consumer ignores the material environment by initially assuming that stimuli provided by simulations are real and fully replace those from the material environment.

Hoffman and Novak (1997) also posit that Interactivity in CME acts at two levels: interactivity between individuals (*human interactivity*), and between peripheral and individual (*machine interactivity*). CME acts as a connection between technology and human cognition; it is the interface between cognitive processing and sensory reception. Machine interactivity on its own is the interface between sensory perception and human cognition, and enables simulated experiences (virtual experiences).

Hoffman's view of mediated consumption is highly technology centred. However, technology is not the only factor responsible for creating a mediated consumption experience. At a psychological level, the user has to emotionally and intellectually relate

to the simulation more than she would relate to her immediate physical environment. Li, Daugherty and Biocca (2001) examined the contents of a virtual experience by exploring psychological parameters. Arguing that vivid virtual experiences involve active and affective psychological states, they identified thirteen psychological parameters, which they classified into five characteristics of '*virtual experience*'. These characteristics were: active process, presence, involvement, enjoyment and affordances. Although Li, Daugherty and Biocca do not make a reference to Celsi and Olson's work (1988) in signifying the importance of situational cues within the situation (simulation), it is easy to see a direct relationship between these two works. Celsi and Olson argue that consumers' intrinsic self-relevances combine with situational cues to constitute a felt involvement. If in a CME, the mediated environment is considered the felt environment, it can easily be seen how the situational cues within the medium define attention and comprehension efforts and dictate the experiential outcomes. It can thus be argued that, along with the depth and quality of the medium and simulation, personal self relevances also define the quality and meaning of a mediated consumption experience.

A consumption experience, thus, is more than mere passive reception of external sensations (stimuli) or subjective mental interpretations of an event. It is a construction, a unique, self-generated, contextualized somato-sensory interpretation of the object and context of consumption. It is an integration of both physical (phenomenological) and psychological conditions that results in an ongoing transaction, providing gains in quality, intensity, meaning and value to the consumer.

2.9.2 *Cognition, Memory and mediated consumption experience:* Cognitive scientists suggest that in one way or another our minds are computers. As mentioned earlier, neuro-phenomenologists like Kenneth C. Berridge proclaim all experiences are '*in the brain*' (Berridge 2000). Neuro-phenomenologists understand and explain

experiences on the basis of how brain structures function at both conscious and subconscious levels to create memories. Cognitive scientists like Varela believe that experiences are created and maintained in the memory; thoughts, emotions and feelings are used to create a memory which is called experience.

Varela, Rosch and Thompson (1991) posit that human intelligence is based on the capacity to store, process and retrieve information that is relevant to social, emotional and cognitive needs. This capacity exists and develops through interaction with information-bearing environments. Biocca (1995) extends this argument by taking the position that increasingly complex information rich environments dictate enhanced levels of contemporary cognitive demands. Viewed from this perspective CME technologies have a synergetic relationship with human intelligence. Biocca also argues that because information storage and retrieval in a CME compares favourably with the capacity of human memory, knowledge strategies of seeking and remembering information have begun to change. Computer users have started to operate at a level of meta-knowledge, where they find it more important to know 'how to know' than to know itself.

Gordon (2001) holds that experiences are coded in memory on a cognitive (analytical processing) as well as an emotional (somatic) basis. These two elements are inextricably linked such that it is the combination of this coding, rather than reasoned logical recollection, that determines what stimuli would be associated with an experience. Feelings are sensations when emotions become conscious, and thus when articulating how she feels about a certain event or experience, an individual essentially relates stimuli with logical recollections.

Gordon also summarizes cognitive science's view of memory by dividing it into systems of organized recollections. She explains it in terms of *Procedural memory*,

which is the how-to memory (such as how to walk, run or cook a meal); *Episodic memory*, which is ‘what happened’ memory of events in the past and; *semantic memory*, which is related to learning and abstract thoughts. Recollection or retrieval from memory is dependant on the cue used to recollect. For some individuals, emotional cues are better recollection devices, while for others it could be reasoned logic or fact. Gordon also argues that all memories are re-constructions and do not necessarily duplicate stimuli received during the event.

Perhaps the best synthesis of neuro-biological, cognitive and social sciences’ views of a consumption experience is evidenced in Donald Merlin’s writings. By mapping evolution of modern mind using synthesis of literature from both camps, his book *Origins of the Modern Mind* (1991) greatly contributes to the nature versus nurture debate between cognitive and social scientists. He notes that cognitive scientists classify human brain structure into three main systems: *Photo-reptilian brain* consisting of stem and cortex controls the bodily needs at the physiological level; *old cortex* being the limbic system which receives and processes emotions, primitive drives and mammalian instincts; and finally *neocortex or cerebral cortex* which is the centre of higher brain functions such as learning, language, thinking, analysis and sensory perception. Merlin seems to successfully merge scientific, social, and cultural viewpoints in an overarching theme addressing the age old culture-nature dichotomy that questions which of the two is superior in explaining and guiding human behaviour. Because he accommodates many diverse points of view, he ends up with a complex and sophisticated theory, which contrasts well with other theories of cognitive evolution.

2.9.3 Autotelic consumption experience, flow: *After a long day on your feet, you finally get the kids to bed at 9. Breathing easy, you try to settle in front of the TV, but it has been a tough day and you are in no mood for following political debates and crisis of terrorism. You reach for your laptop on the table and plan to stretch out and check your emails. Something interesting steals your attention before you even get to your*

mailbox, you click on it and a new window pops opens. Following the cookie links, you travel between one window to the other, – soon you have lost yourself in the web. At something past ten you yawn and glance at the clock – It's past 2 am.

You have just had a time warp experience called flow.

Flow is an experiential state of consumption regularly applied to CME. Csikszentmihalyi defines flow as the process of optimal experience that occurs when a sufficiently focused and motivated consumer achieves a balance between skills and the challenges of the consumption process (Csikszentmihalyi 1990). He bases his theory of flow on a collection of more than 10,000 interviews from around the world, and describes autotelic experience or flow as a:

particular kind of experience that is so engrossing and enjoyable that it becomes autotelic (Sic) is worth doing for its own sake even though it may have no consequence outside itself (1999, p.82).

Csikszentmihalyi conceives autotelic consumption experience as being qualitatively different from everyday routine. To him it transcends time and space of the ordinary. It is a sense of being in a different reality created and maintained by environmental cues, as well as a feeling that is produced within, by focusing attention on a set of stimuli with its own rules. It is spontaneous in nature, and exists only when the conditions are right and the consumer is responsive. It is an engrossing act in being neither challenging, nor mundane; it is a perfect balance between a person's ability to do, and the acts needed,

when challenges are in balance with skills, one becomes lost in the activity and flow is likely to result (1999, p.84).

Flow has become a popular construct in defining consumption experience and has been applied to a range of consumption scenarios in CME with a variety of orientations. For the purpose of this thesis Thomas Novak and Donna Hoffman's (1996) application of flow to consumption in CME would be used. In a later work they summarize flow in CME as:

A cognitive state experienced during online navigation that is determined by;
1. *high levels of skill and control*

2. *high level of challenge and arousal*
3. *focussed attention and is*
4. *enhanced by interactivity and telepresence*

(Novak, Hoffman and Yung 2000, p.24)

Hoffman and Novak consider this cognitive state similar to Csikszentmihalyi's characterization of 'optimal experience', in that it is intrinsically enjoyable, comprises the complete involvement of the actor with his activity, and is experienced by people who are motivated enough to be deeply involved in the activity. Where Csikszentmihalyi's flow construct is descriptive and labile, Hoffman and Novak's conceptualization of flow is highly structured. In their several subsequent studies they modified it in many ways and added many more variables to it, ultimately framing up a three and a four channel model as variations of their basic model (Fig. 2.9.3). Hoffman and Novak also find abilities and skill as essential components of the experiential dimension of flow and establish two antecedents for achieving flow in a CME:

1. Skills and challenges are perceived to be congruent and above a critical threshold,
2. Focused attention must be present.

Hoffman and Novak assert that an individual's computer prowess is a prerequisite in

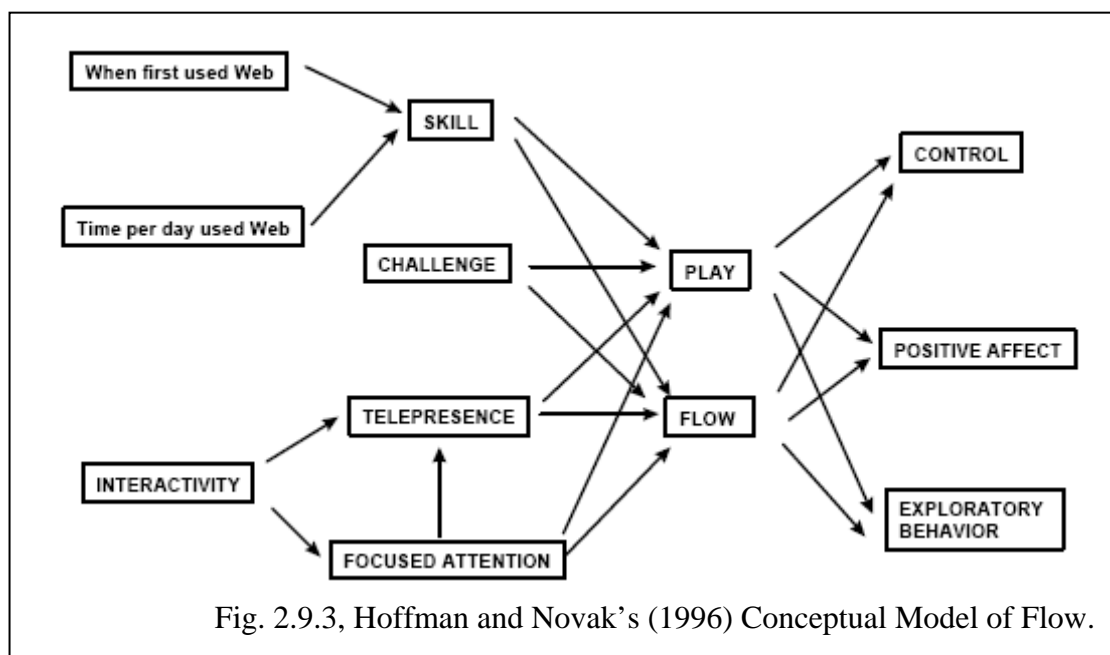


Fig. 2.9.3, Hoffman and Novak's (1996) Conceptual Model of Flow.

achieving flow; in order to gain satisfaction matching or exceeding expectations, a consumer must be able to navigate through the content in distributed windows in a meaningful manner.

Hoffman and Novak also posit that flow in CME depends upon content characteristics as well as interactivity of the medium. Vivid and detailed simulations which perform at a speed that the user finds compatible with her abilities contribute towards flow. Video game playing is one example in which both consumer efforts to match challenge with ability, together with the importance of content characteristics, are clearly evident. In order to seek flow, video game players tend to choose game levels that are neither easy (boring) nor difficult (too challenging). They are also more likely to prefer fast games with detailed, lifelike simulations over the mechanical ones.

2.9.4 *Transcendence and presence in mediated environments:* We always consider ourselves present in our immediate material environment; our consciousness demands us to link our existence to a place. Presence is thus a fundamental property of consciousness and its definition is psychological rather than ontological (Loomis 1992).

However, the immersive capabilities of new media technologies have the ability to transport our 'sense of being' into simulated environments. Current media and communications systems can generate a sense of being in another place by providing a phenomenological space, and by allowing us to indirectly meet and experience other objects and entities. Audio-visual, tactile and behavioural simulations in CME create a sense of presence in the environment which results in mediated consumption experience.

Presence is the subjective sense of being somewhere. Loomis (1992) identifies two independent distal attributions (senses of being) associated with presence: the phenomenal body (self schema), and the self (perception of identity). Loomis also

argues that in case of presence in a mediated environment, both phenomenal body and the self may not always correspond with the physical body.

Various scholars have defined mediated presence differently. Jonathan Steuer (1992) defines such a mediated 'presence' as the '*experience established in a represented environment by means of a communication medium*'. Lombard and Ditton (1997) describe it as '*an illusion that a mediated experience is not mediated*'. Biocca (1997) refines Steuer's original concept by arguing that to be truly useful to media theory, the concept of presence should be applicable to all forms of mediated environments, including the now traditional television media. He thus describes presence as '*the fact or condition of being at the specified or understood place*'.

Lombard and Ditton (1997) also define and characterize presence in terms of social richness, realism, transportation, perceptual immersion and social action. Their definition of presence in terms of *social richness* is the extent – in spite of the physical distances between interactants – to which a medium is perceived as sociable, warm, sensitive, or intimate when it is used to interact with other people. In terms of *realism*, they define presence as the degree to which a medium can produce representations of objects, events and people, that look, sound, act and feel like the real thing. In terms of *transportation* it is capacity of the medium to create a space where the subject and the object can commune, as well to transport the user to this shared place. In terms of *perceptual immersion* they define it as the capability of the medium to submerge the perceptual system of the user. And finally *social action* is the ability of the mediated entities (*both machine generated and transported*) to interact with the user giving a perception of real social interaction.

Biocca (1997) posits that sensory saturation achieved during immersive experiences in CME acts as a sensory suppressor, which detaches the individual's sense of being from

her immediate physical surroundings, and transports her to a mediated presence. Although he accepts that being in a mediated environment is not the same as being in a physical environment, he labels the feeling of 'being there' as *arrival* and the feeling of 'not being there' as *departure*. He further posits that being in a virtual environment is not equivalent to not being in a physical environment, that arrival in a virtual space does not mean departure from a physical space.

Kim and Biocca (1997) posit that consciousness of mediated presence is inherently unstable and oscillates between different senses of presence. They define three different senses of presence: the physical space (*Distal Immediate*), the mediated space (*Distal Mediated*) and the imaginary space (*perception of Distal Stimuli*). They also argue that because the feeling or consciousness of presence in mediated environments is built around perception of distal stimuli, consumption experience may take place interdependently within three spaces – physical, mediated and imaginary.

Biocca (1997) uses the term Telepresence to refer to an immersion which is built in part on imageries. Telepresence has also been used in the study of flow (Hoffman and Novak 1997), as well as in the characterization of perception of existence in a mediated environment. Biocca (1997) uses the variables attributed towards generation of flow – vividness, interactivity and focussed attention – as prerequisites of telepresence. However, there are differences in the way the two terms of presence and telepresence are understood and used. In the light of Biocca's (1997) definition of 'arrival' and 'departure', presence can be considered an inclusive term. Telepresence, however, is characterized by detachment from immediate physical environment and its implied meaning is that departure always results in arrival at a new place. The application of telepresence has also been instrumental in developing the construct of binary environments* that forms the basis for a mediated consumption experience.

*Binary environment refers to the two environments that distinguish between simulation and reality: the real environment in which the consumer physically exists, and the simulated one in CME.

2.9.5 (Dis)-Embodiment through sensory cues: The concept of telepresence in mediated environments can perhaps be traced to the primordial human fantasy of teleportation. Disembodiment (reducing the body to a non-corporal entity so that it could be transmitted across distances and times), time-travel (travelling to future or past) and teleportation (travelling between physical spaces without a loss of time) have been longstanding cultural themes and can be evidenced in both religious and cultural texts. Religious, as well as cultural, mythology attributes powers of disembodiment, teleportation and time travel to the chosen ones as a mark of distinction from the masses.

Because 'presence' in a mediated environment affects consciousness of the real environment, stimuli from virtual environments compete with stimuli from the physical environment for focal consciousness of the individual. Embodiment in a mediated environment is a learned behaviour, and individuals learn to achieve sensory saturation by suppressing sensory cues from the physical environment. It has been argued that such 'embodiment' in a mediated environment disembodies an individual (Boicca and Delaney 1995, Venkatesh, Karabana and Ger 2001). Figure 2.9.5 illustrates the range of possible input (sensors) and output (effectors) devices for a virtual reality system, as well as the pattern of progressive embodiment in virtual reality systems.

The illustration is purely mechanical in nature, and thus does not highlight the effect various combinations of somato-sensory inputs have on a consumption experience. Venkatesh, Karabana and Ger (2001) argue that computer and simulation technologies are gradually taking embodiment beyond its biological and mechanical substrate into the realm of consciousness.

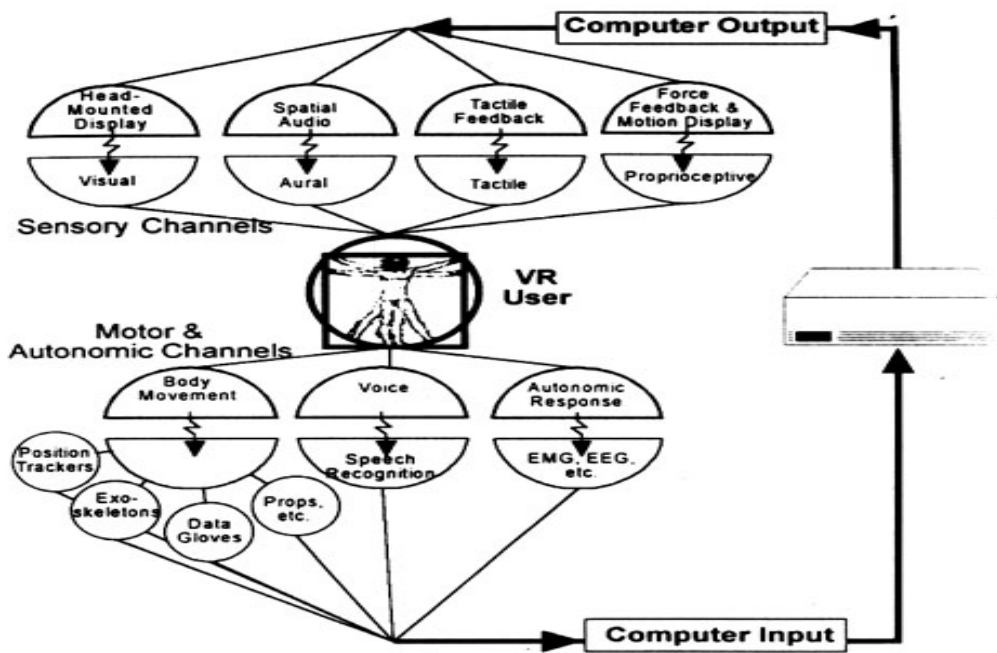


Figure 2.9.5. Range of possible input (sensors) and output (effectors) devices for a virtual reality system. Illustrates the pattern of progressive embodiment in virtual reality systems. Source: Biocca & Delaney, 1995

Biocca (1997) argues that contemporary technological advances create a *'paradoxical situation in which the development of increasingly 'natural' and embodied interfaces leads to 'unnatural' adaptations or changes in the user'* (p.19). Venkatesh, Karabana and Ger (2001) argue that contemporary domains of technology have necessitated reconceptualization of conditions of human embodiment – that there exists a transcendent status of human which is neither human, nor non-human, neither embodied nor not-embodied.

Immersion in CME works at two levels: interface level engagement where the individual is consciously manipulating the machine controls in order to generate and receive desired somato-sensory cues and life-world level engagement, where he becomes a part of the events in simulations presented through these somato-sensory cues. The concept of embodiment as presented in fig. 2.9.5 is based on characteristics of the medium. Biocca bases his explication of embodiment on Steuer's (1992) assertion that the breadth and depth of a medium determine the level of embodiment it offers. He

defines breadth as the number of sensory dimensions of the simulation medium; the more the sensory inputs, the more enriched the consumption experience. He defines depth as the resolution or the quality of the simulation; it is the generation of a near real simulation in terms of applied sensory dimensions.

Frank Biocca (1995, 1997) has also been at the forefront of propagating the concept of 'progressive embodiment'. He describes progressive embodiment as a process in which

the body is becoming present in both physical space and cyberspace. The interface is adapting to the body; the body is adapting to the interface (1997b, p.2).

One direct consequence of progressive embodiment is the psycho-somatic condition of dis-embodiment. Increasing levels of consumer experimentation with rapidly evolving immersive mediated environments has made a certain degree of dis-embodiment an everyday phenomenon. Such disembodiment is as much technology as it is creativity and perception. It is built up on elements of (tele-)presence, imagination, memory, knowledge and skill. As consciousness of presence is constructed around perception and imagination, it can be argued that it is built on memory of objects, situations and interactions. Multi-sensory stimuli delivered through CME are integrated with embodied conceptual knowledge and memory to create perceptions of reality of objects, situations, events and interactions (Rosa and Malter 2003). Because conceptual knowledge and memory vary across individuals, perception and embodiment through somatosensory cues may also vary among consumers (Peck and Childers 2003). These individual differences in perception of embodiment are evidenced in some consumers becoming addicted to simulations such as videogames, while others are not. Addiction to simulated environments and its resultant detachment from the real are discussed in the next section.

2.9.6 *Addiction and Detachment: a socio-psychoanalytical view:* One of the earliest attempts at classifying CME consumption behaviour was in 1997, when Martin and

Schumaker defined 'abnormal' internet use as 8.5 hours online per week, and classified it as pathological. In the same classification 3.2 hours per week was considered symptomatic and 2.4 hours per week as normal. It is interesting to note that in 2005, 8.5 hours per week of internet use was considered below average for most users (Fallows 2005).

LaRose and Eastin (2004) note that behavioural psychologists look for abnormalities in behaviour to apply theories of psychoanalysis, and comment that some behavioural psychologists studying media and communications promote theorizations which have much in common with Freud's hypothecations on fantasies of neurosis. They see CME consumption activities, such as role-playing or chatting, as examples of fantasies of neurosis – illusory versions of ourselves seeking to win over, escape and overpower illusory versions of the primary caretakers of childhood. They argue that Freud's psychoanalytical theory provides a good understanding of how and why, aware or unawares, consumers indulge in excessive surfing, chatting or video-gaming. This psychoanalytical view of consumption in cyberspace considers the internet as a gigantic, virtual theme park that consumers use to escape from reality (LaRose and Eastin 2004).

LaRose and Eastin (2004) also note that apart from considering peculiarities in CME consumption behaviour as a retreat from true self into neurosis, behavioural psychologists also label excessive media consumption as addictive-compulsive. Some also argue that there are commonalities in all research on media and thus research on television applies equally to videogames and computers (Csikszentmihalyi 2004). Obviously, such a position makes it easier to explain all peculiarities of consumption behaviours in mediated environments through a common psychoanalytical framework. This also makes it possible to make interdependent and connected arguments that activities such as excessive television watching (Kubey and Csikszentmihalyi 2004),

video-gaming, chatting or surfing (Martin and Schumaker 1997) are either addictions or retreats.

Robert Kraut and Vicki Lundmark (1998) have extensively researched the impact of the internet on social involvement and psychological wellbeing. They conducted several longitudinal studies exploring the social impact of computer technologies as part of their *HomeNet* project at Carnegie Mellon University. Findings from their research prompted them to view the technology-society interaction as a paradox. They argue that the internet, viewed as a social technology aimed at enhancing interpersonal interaction, was actually causing increased social isolation and decreased psychological wellbeing among its users.

In reporting their landmark '*internet paradoxes*' longitudinal study, Kraut et.al. (1998) also posited that greater use of the internet was associated with a decline in person to person and immediate family communication as well as in the size of the user's social circle. They also claimed that individuals spending extended time in CME were more likely to develop depression and feelings of loneliness. To justify their proposed causal link between internet use and social alienation, they claimed that social activities and ties in cyberspace directly replaced those in the geographically local and accessible social arena. They further proposed that this displacement of social activity and social ties in turn was a possible cause for internet induced depression.

In contrast, some studies in social psychology were specifically aimed at propagating an alternate view. such studies demonstrate that increased online communication decreased depression, enhanced self-efficacy increased self-esteem (LaRose, Eastin, and Gregg 2001), that online relationships led to expansion of real world social contacts (Parks and Roberts 1998), that there were no differences in self perceptions of sociability between internet users and non users (Scherer 1997), and that, rather than displacing existing real

world relationships, online communications and interactions supplemented them (Hamman 1999). However, it should be noted that while Kraut and Lundmark's longitudinal study used a substantial database to establish internet paradoxes, many of the studies mentioned here (with the exception of Robin Hamman's ethnographic study) were based on small scale internet surveys.

Cyberspace, as a consumption space, is no longer considered purely laboratory experimental platform. Instead of a focus on its capacity to engage at both sensorial and emotional levels, current thrust is on understanding and explaining an individual's role and place in the cyber-social worlds. Immersion and flow in the medium that detach individuals from their immediate surroundings make cyberspace a parallel universe in an alternate dimension. Individuals' simultaneous existence in these two worlds creates many dualities of existence and disjuncture of behaviour, which is the subject of the next section.

2.10 Online-offline dichotomy and disjuncture

One early popular use of the internet was for social communications, often between total strangers. Bulletin boards turned into chat sites, which soon grew into online communities built around common interests. It was in this early period that social commentators began opining that online communities would drastically affect societies, and that there was a real danger that these communities would be populated by para-social or a-social elements that would use this powerful platform to propagate countercultural and deviant behaviour. Commentaries on relationships in cyberspace, gender-blending, alternate identities, countercultural practices and para-social activities were frequent in both popular and academic press. Many such claims purporting to highlight the internet's detrimental affect on society were not supported by empirical

investigations. The internet was thus popularized as well as vilified by both media and academia.

To many social commentators the World-wide-web, viewed as an apparently superficial and dynamic entity representing transient acts of consumption and consumers, is emblematic of post-modern society. An individual may appear to be an anonymous and fragmented entity, untraceable in this seemingly fluid and disembodied domain; '*on the net nobody knows you are a dog*' (Giacomello 2000). In CME a consumer appears to commandeer a consumption space that allows her to create and maintain an identity (Turkle 1995), extend and express 'self' (Schau and Gilly 2003), consume fantastically as well as experiment, experience and negotiate existence in new forms (Gould & Lerman 1998).

Because of its ethereal nature, cyberspace can impact on consumers differently from other modes and platforms of consumption. Many early social scientists exploring cyberspace thought it was characterized more by dichotomies and disjuncture than any thing else. They considered it a place where reality had to be separated from fiction, where it was difficult to identify a real person behind an on-screen persona. Rhinegold (1993) argued that because of masking and distancing of the medium, the authenticity of relationships and identities in cyberspace was always in question in ways that it was not in question in real life.

Hamman (1999) and Hegland and Nelson (2002) argue that cyber-identities, no matter how fluid, do mimic grounded real world identities, and that the apparent absence of identity cues such as gender or race in mediated communications does not eliminate the online expression of attitudes such as racism or sexism, or even the hierarchies that pervade societies generally. Disjuncture in cyberspace is often exemplified by the claim that, although a gender identity in cyberspace is self-designated, it does not in itself

eliminate the control mechanisms that gender hierarchies instil. One of the earliest cases documenting disjuncture of gender identity in cyberspace was published in 1991 (Van Gelder 1991). Since then, numerous studies on cyber-cross-dressing and gender blending, often using cases in which males try to build confidence and rapport with females have been carried out to substantiate these claims of disjuncture.

Post-modern literature portrays CME as a container of increasingly immersive hedonic, aesthetic, semiotic and functional consumption spaces for both individuals and social collectives, spaces where the self can be limitlessly extended, where pastiche and countercultural impulses can be satiated, and where geographically ungrounded acts of consumption can be created. It views cyberspace as imparting a certain mind-body (phenomenology-physicality) split characterised by disjuncture and dichotomies. This section examines cyberspatial disjuncture and dichotomies by exploring the literary debates on contests of existence, disjuncture of identity, behaviour and culture and online-offline dichotomies.

2.10.1 Contests of existence: The study of consumers and consumption in cyberspace to-date has centred on either ontology or phenomenology. Questions such as '*can we accept existence in a mediated environment as 'real'*' have been a focus of many such ontological discussions. Postmodernists argue that the duality of existence in cyber and real spaces, exhibited in the division of real identity and creation of multiple cyber-identities, is its premiere disjuncture (Rhiengold 1993, Turkle 1995).

Because of the ethereal nature of cyberspace, it is in an implicit contest with real space. Any discussion on cyberspace is intrinsically linked to, and can be supported by, discussions on materiality and simulacrum. Further, the notion of disjuncture of existence is also closely linked to discussions on self presentation and extension in cyberspace, both of which need detailed examination, and are expounded separately

later in sections 2.11 and 2.12. However, to highlight this contesting of existence, this section presents the ‘grounded into reality’ point of view of Albert Borgman (1999) and Katherine Hayles (1999), as a comparison and contrast to the simulation and simulacrum (Baudrillard 1983), progressive embodiment (Biocca 1997) and post-human (Venkatesh 2000) concepts presented in section 2.4 and 2.9.

Albert Borgman (1999) and Katherine Hayles (1999) have studied, jointly as well as independently, behaviour in distributive cognitive environments. They argue that geophysical embodiment is the only form of existence. In this vein, their orientation is very similar to the material culture orientation of Daniel Miller. In his book, Borgman (1999) makes illuminating distinctions between natural, cultural and informational realities and argues that ‘topophilia’ (his term for geographically local cultures) have a strong hold on the natural form of existence. Together, Borgman and Hayles propose that embodiment is not only physical but cultural and moral as well, and that we cannot escape our ‘bodies’ without shifting our moral and cultural centre of gravity to cyberspace.

Refuting the claims of cyberspatial disjuncture of existence, and almost countering the post-human realm of embodiment (Biocca 1995, Venkatesh 2000), Borgman and Hayles note the historical fascination with man-machine interfaces (man thinking of himself as a machine), but dismiss the ‘alternate world-reality of cyberspace’ to argue that consumption and embodiment in mediated environment is just another phase in this human fascination. They insist that real lives in real worlds always compensate for our illusion that a part of us exists in virtual reality. They also dismiss the claims that cyberspace liberates an individual from accidents of gender, race, class and bodily appearance. They further argue against the assertion that the blurred identities in cyberspace, which are bleached of human presence and represent fantastical characters without gender, social background and racial heritage, signify its liberatory ethos. They

claim that if cyberspace really freed an individual of necessity for identity, why should there be a need to create a cyber-identity in the first place.

Together Borgman and Hayles claim that virtual reality can never displace the three dimensional world in which our perceptual systems evolved. They argue that the richness, diversity and spontaneity of this immensely complex environment make even the most sophisticated simulation look like a stick world by comparison. They see simulations as hybrid objects produced by collaboration between nature and culture and do not believe that there is any dichotomy between real and the virtual, either in cyberspace, or in the real world. These notions of 'topophilia' and 'holding onto the ground' (Lash 2000), which effectively dismiss claims of individuals' existence in cyberspace by countervailing progressive embodiment (Biocca 1995, 2001) as a post-human condition (Venkatesh 2000), represent the other side of arguments on cyberspatial disjuncture of existence. The very fact that there are strong contrasting arguments on both sides of the debate signifies and highlights the importance of disjuncture of existence associated with cyberspace.

2.10.2 Disjuncture of identity: It is a common belief that Internet chat rooms are spaces where individuals experiment with identity through textual social encounters. It is also argued that such experimentation – which often exhibits a deviation from social and cultural norms – is facilitated because individuals believe that their real identities are not disclosed. In cyberspace there is no wall between public and private, and so individuals tend to separate their real identities from the virtual, leaving their real identity behind, and by assuming an entirely new one. There is a substantial body of literature on gender blending (Turkle 1995, Hegland and Nelson 2002) and multiple identities (Hamman 1999, Gould and Lerman 1998, Rosen 2000) which may suggest that individuals consider their virtual identities dispensable and easily replaceable, while at the same time valuing their real identities as precious and irreplaceable.

Such disjuncture of identity is not limited to consumer experimentation alone, and may extend to day to day activities in cyberspace. Rosen (2000) established that as long as users were confident that their virtual identities were not being linked to their actual identities, many were happy to accept third party mediation and monitoring (cookies) in exchange for some navigation benefits. Rosen's findings were in the specific context of DoubleClick.inc. However, when DoubleClick bought a data-mining company and begun linking the virtual identities to individuals' names and addresses, there was a public outcry and the US government was forced to regulate such practices under new privacy legislations. While on one hand, this DoubleClick controversy points towards the threats to privacy in the public internet domain, on the other hand it also highlights the playful experimental nature of virtual identities, and points to the fact that consumers do not want these two identities to be linked and brought into the public arena.

Gender and identity are primary means by which we sort and define self and others. Brenda Danet (1996) argues that gender and identity are such strong and salient perceptions of consciousness that concepts of gender-free existence and fluidity of identity are not associated with even imaginary societies. Cultures make it binding for individuals to identify with a gender, and to continually maintain an external appearance that adheres to this culturally constructed gender identity. Although attempts to escape gendered identity through practices such as androgyny have become increasingly acceptable, explicit gender swapping is still not a common occurrence even in liberal western societies. (*Danet gives example of Michael Jackson and his pale skin, sharp and highly sculptured features, neither male nor female, black nor white look, as a androgynous cultural icon.*)

Despite the early portrayal of cyberspace as a new playground, which consumers enter by leaving their bodies and identities behind, consumers' cyber-identities are neither

residual nor experimental, but reflect and constitute their 'real' identities. Hegland and Nelson (2002) argue that even in extreme cases such as virtual cross-dressing, it was often the case that consumers used cyberspace as no more than a very convenient shopping and community centre to support and reaffirm their chosen identities.

Alternate identities in cyberspace are also indicative of cultural changes. Macro-social processes in cyberspace, like Multi-User-Dungeons (MUDs) and chat-rooms, dynamically and actively intersect with micro-systems of geographically local societies and communities. In a recent study, Chen, Davies and Elliot (2002) reported that while gender and identity representations in role-play on the internet reflected and reinforced cultural expectations and entrenched hierarchies, they also reflected profound cultural changes through the prevalence of gender switching and multiple identity creation. Such role-play and experimentation, which allow individuals to feel and experience the emotions and roles of the 'other side' and other self, create cultural evolution and adaptations on one hand, and on the other hand represent the disjuncture of identity in cyberspace.

2.10.3 Disjuncture of behaviour and culture: Both enactment and interpretation of behaviour are intrinsically linked to culture. In keeping with its depiction as a fluid, permissive and liberatory medium, cyberspace has also been portrayed as a place where behavioural norms are not tied to any single geographically local culture. Cyberspace does not have a singular, unified culture. Individual online-communities have their own codes of conduct and behavioural norms; behaviours are considered deviant if they are not in accordance with community standards (Escobar 1994, Appadurai 1996).

Because membership of social groups and communities in cyberspace is not subject to geographic limitations, many such communities comprise individuals from a wide cross-section of societies. Virtual communities are thus much more diverse in terms of

culture, demography, ethics and politics than local communities (Escobar 1994). Divergent ethical and behavioural norms combine to create an amalgam that accommodates most common elements among these diverse cultures. Frictions may sometimes arise between individuals if they tend to conform to their local society's standards.

Behavioural variances in cyberspace have attracted the attention of both media and theorists, and have been variously labelled as deviant, obscene, harassing and libellous. Although in reality all experimental, unethical and non-conformist behaviour on the internet might be more the exception than the rule, such behaviour has overshadowed the new behavioural norms that define interaction in these ungrounded cultural spaces (Escobar 1994).

The internet has paved the way for new forms of behaviour, many of which do not conform to any geography-specific culture, but are not seen as unusual in their own context. Citizens of cyberspace use this new environment to establish very fluid cultural norms tailored to its unique qualities. Loosely bundled in the term 'netiquette' (Johnston and Johal 1999), these norms are a set of beliefs and standards shared by this diverse group of cyber-citizens, and help individuals to interact socially and negotiate their way while behaving in an acceptable manner on the net. However, because of its self-regulatory and democratic nature (Poster 1995), cyberspace imparts a 'false' sense of reality, lowers the potential levels of detection, and thus increases the propensity for misbehaviour (Gammack 2002). It has also been argued that because cyberspace does not have regulatory institutions with social agency and political authority (Hamman 1999), it does not and cannot have any single definable culture (Poster 1995), and thus it is and will remain a place of disjuncture between behaviour and culture.

2.10.4 Online-Offline Dichotomy (Virtual and Real, local versus global):

Technologies expand means and modes of consumption by providing newer opportunities. Consumers utilize newer means and modes of consumption available to them in two ways: by adapting existing consumption practices to suit new opportunities, and by creating entirely new consumption practices suitable to the new opportunities. Disjunctures of existence, identity and behaviour are manifestations of this process of adaptation.

Gould and Coyle (2000) argue that the internet, as a medium, has been used disruptively to extend longstanding forms of consumption. They argue that self-extension through the internet fits in well with the plasticity associated with the post-modern self. They also argue that the anchorage in time-space continuum of the real (grounded, offline) self is now shared by a virtual (online) pole, making the self a composite, bi-polar entity. In an earlier study (Gould and Lerman 1998), Gould also argued that this interplay between longstanding and post-modern results in contests and negotiations between the real and hyperreal self. It can be argued that these contests and negotiations are the upshot of an online-offline dichotomy that characterizes cyberspace.

Whether it is a continuation of the known and the longstanding, or a rupture in forms and practices of consumption, the displacement of consumer activities from the real to the virtual has resulted in the generation of dichotomies. In Gergen and Gergen's (1988) terms internet symbolizes a paradigmatic shift that allows for the creation of entirely new consumption narratives. Much of the social and cultural world in cyberspace mimics the real. In many cases the real world is simulated in a CME and consumers are encouraged to experience a parallel world that allows for far more consequence-free experimentation.

Cyberspace, in being inherently transient, ephemeral and ethereal, presents unique opportunities to the consumers. It also presents new challenges to the researchers. Contests of existence and disjuncture of identity, behaviour and culture create an online-offline dichotomy which is difficult to access and investigate through traditional research techniques. This is discussed in detail in chapter 3.

Dualities of existence and disjuncture of behaviour are also indicative of consumer efforts to create and maintain independent identities in both virtual and real worlds. Much of consumption is also about creation and presentation of a self and identity, which is the subject of study in the next section.

2.11 Consumption, Self and Identity

Study of self and identity forms a critical cornerstone within both modern and post-modern sociological thoughts. In both these camps, self is considered the experience of reflexive consciousness: it is a conscious attention towards its source and gradual construction of a concept and definition of 'me'. Self concept is circular in nature, and starts and ends with an awareness of one's existence. In a larger, ontological definition of self (which guides remainder of the discussions on self and identity in this thesis), Cushman (1990) defines the concept of self as:

the concept of the individual as articulated by the indigenous psychology of a particular cultural group ...(sic)... the self embodies what the culture believes is humankind's place in the cosmos: its limits, talents, expectations and prohibitions. (p.599)

Historical notions of Self and Identity: Literature in psychology and anthropology over the last one hundred and fifty years has established a notion of self which is based on a (largely western) view of an individual who exists in a social cluster, but is a multifaceted, independent, self-contained, autonomous entity (Belk 1988), who comprises of a unique configuration of internal attributes (traits, abilities, motives and

values), and behaves (1) as a consequence of these internal attributes (James 1890, Markus and Wurf 1987, Markus and Kityama 1991), and (2) in response to other's view of his behaviour (Goffman 1959, Heidegger 1962, Wylie 1974).

While identity has been a salient descriptor of human existence throughout history, the notion of self is a relatively recent phenomenon. Kenneth Gergen (1992) charts the evolution of modern and post-modern notions of self and identity by contrasting them with the earliest notions of identity as follows:

According to anthropological folklore, in traditional societies, one's identity was fixed, solid, and stable. Identity was a function of predefined social roles and a traditional system of myths which provided orientation and religious sanctions to one's place 'in the world', while rigorously circumscribing the realm of thought and behaviour. One was born and died a member of one's clan, a member of a fixed kinship system, and a member of one's tribe or group with one's life trajectory fixed in advance. In pre-modern societies, identity was unproblematic and not subject to reflection or discussion. Individuals did not undergo identity crises, or radically modify their identity. One was a hunter and a member of the tribe and that was that. (Quoted in Kellner, 1992, p.141)

Modern conceptualizations of self can be traced back to the late nineteenth century.

William James is widely credited as one of the earliest modern theorists of self. Chapter 10 of his book *Principals of Psychology* (1890) uses observation, conceptual synthesis and metaphorical analysis to ground the modern concept of self. James uses the term '*the empirical self*' to refer to an individual's sense of being, which he describes in terms of three components of the material self, the social self and the spiritual self.

James's 'material self' refers to the psychological ownership of tangible objects (both corporeal and extra-corporeal), people or places that signify the designation 'me' or 'mine'. The social self refers to how we are recognized and regarded by others, and signifies the identity and role components of 'me'. The spiritual self refers to the inner or psychological component that comprises of everything a person calls my or mine that is not a tangible object, person, place or a social role. Beliefs, attitudes, emotions,

wishes, abilities, opinions, interests, motives, traits and memories are all part of the spiritual self. James describes the spiritual self as,

By the spiritual self (sic)... I mean a man's inner or subjective being, his psychic faculties or dispositions.... These psychic dispositions are the most enduring and intimate part of the self, that which we most verily seem to be. We take purer self-satisfaction when we think of our ability to argue and discriminate or our moral sensibility and conscience, of our indomitable will, than when we survey any other of our possessions. (p.296)

James also makes the observation that there is an instinctive drive to expand the psychological ownership of objects, to be noticed and recognized by others, and enhance the abilities and roles. Later on, Russell Belk (1988) built upon to this foundation to propose the concept of extended self.

2.11.1 Modern notions of self and identity: Many modern theories of self (such as those by Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow, Erich Fromm and Karl Marx), take an organismic view of the self that is grounded in society. Such a self is a self and social identity which is manifested as a component of a larger group identity, and is expressed within a social hierarchy through territoriality and possessions defined by natural, social or cultural boundaries or markings. Even Irving Goffman (1959), who considered that the self '*...is not an organic thing that has a specific location, ... it is a dramatic effect arising diffusely from the scene that is presented*' (p.253), portrays the individual a part of a larger social drama. Postmodernism argues that such an organismic view has an inherent problem of dualism between individual agency and social and cultural determinism, and cannot fully accommodate the discourses of agency between individual, society and culture.

Within the modernist camp, Wagner (1994) widened the scope of *constructability* of identities by arguing that contemporary identities were fluid. He also argued that identity configurations were multi-component constructs. He proposed social permeation, choice and stability as three qualifying criteria that can be used to

differentiate between various configurations (1994, p.157). Through the criterion of *social permeation*, Wagner argues that the existence of the idea of identity construction questions whether all human beings living in a given social context share a singular idea, and are affected by it. *Social permeation* of an identity configuration may be limited at a certain time, in a certain geographical or social space, and thus many configurations may share a common social space simultaneously.

Through *choice*, Wagner argues that individuals in the process of constructing their social identities have many choices available to them. In many circumstances, however, choice may be a highly 'theoretical' concept. Although other options may be available, certain choices may be considered natural or ascribed. For instance, multiple choices of gender identity may exist, but for each individual only one of these may be considered natural or ascribed. Through *stability* Wagner posits that identities are not lifelong projects, and that the lifespan of a chosen identity may vary. This variation is conditional to whether such a construction of identity is considered once-in-a-lifetime occurrence or as less committing and open to reconsideration and change.

Notions of Social and Group Identity: Notions of both self and identity are social, historical and cultural formations, and thus are dynamically interdependent and interactive in nature. Introduced by the works of Cooley and Mead, identity studies have evolved and grown central to all sociological discourses. Cerulo (1997) notes that within these diverse discourses, there has been shifting salience and focus from individual identity to the collective and back.

James (1890) focused on individual identities. He linked identities to his description of senses of self and categorized them similarly as material, social and personal identities. Late modern theorists focused on collective identities. Michelle Foucault expanded these notions of identity, by crystallizing social imaginaries which demarcate

individuals as a particular kind, thereby entrenching new identity regimes. What was previously considered merely a set of traits, behaviours and activities – such as having sex with a partner of the same gender, slow learning, stealing, excessive drinking – has now become social identity categories of homosexual, learning-disabled, criminal and alcoholic.

In contemporary societies, cultural identity is the most significant personal descriptor and signifier beyond self. Gone, Miller and Rappaport (1999) define cultural identity as an individual's normatively oriented conceptual self: a cognitive network of ideas about oneself that consists of the entire corpus of self-relevant abstractions which are conscious, reflexive and evaluative, that stem from the constitutive powers for the self of the shared moral order, norms, standards and values. Several other scientific designations of social identity occupy a common conceptual space with the construct of cultural identity. These are: subcultural identity; communal identity; ethnic identity; cultural identification and acculturative status. Each of these constructs refers to an individual's avowed membership or participation in a particular ethnic, cultural or consumption group.

2.11.2 Contemporary notions of self and identity: Post-modern deconstructions of epistemological certainty have left an intellectual mark upon the exploratory and descriptive attempts on self, as surely as they have upon social theory generally. The self in postmodernity is conceptualized neither as a given product of a social system, nor as a fixed entity which the individual can simply adopt, but as something the person actively creates, in a large part through consumption (Giddens 1991).

Kenneth Gergen (1991) asserts that epistemological deconstructions of the modern formulations of self started with the stage of 'strategic manipulation', whereby social saturation disrupted traditional ways of understanding oneself. He points out that '*the*

sense of self as a strategic manipulator derives ... from the modernist context, in which real, authentic selves existed and to act in any other way was a form of forgery or deceit' (1991, p.150).

Contemporary fragmentations have affected the inherent stability of the self, and the social context which supports it. Contemporary self is also intrinsically linked with acquisition, possession and consumption of objects and symbols (Belk 1988, Holt 1995, 1997, 2002, Thompson 1995, Arnold and Price 2000, Firat and Venkatesh 1995, Elliot 1997). Featherstone (1992) suggests that post-modern consumers establish and express their 'self' through consumption, and that they '*make lifestyle a life project and display their individuality and sense of style in the particularity of the assemblage of goods, clothes, practices, experiences and bodily dispositions they design together into a lifestyle*' (p-63). Thompson (1995) describes the post-modern self as a symbolic project, which the individual must actively construct out of all available symbolic materials, materials which '*the individual weaves into a coherent account of who he or she is, a narrative of self identity*'. Nicholas Humphrey (2004) views the contemporary self as a '*conscious qualia*': a subjective being which has a phenomenal experience with richness beyond anything physical.

Fragmentations in self, fluidity of Identity and personal narratives: Sadeq Rahimi (1999) argues that conception of being and consciousness is currently in a state of liminality. He argues that this liminality is

'well beyond what human consciousness has ever experienced, or is prepared for; a passage to a universe so different one may call it posthuman. No rite de passage have been prescribed for this transition, so anxiety, fear and mourning seem to be the only tools our species have for rendering the passage meaningful.' (p.4)

Kenneth Gergen (1991) asserts that contemporary identities are multiphrenic in nature, in that they split the individual into a multiplicity of self investments. Consumers tend to organize various aspects of their empirical self – their possessions, roles and traits –

into a coherent pattern in the context of a personal narrative (Brown 1998). A personal narrative is a story a person constructs about her life, and includes the ways the person thinks of herself, as well as memories, feelings and experiences. Consumers use many of the literary devices from fiction – such as plots, characters and dramatization, defining junctures and themes to unify and make sense of their lives.

Giddens (1992) identifies the need to construct personal narratives as one of the conditions of late modernity. He argues that unlike social conditions in previous eras, where people knew and were constantly reminded of their place in the society, contemporary definition and maintenance of identity is a creative ongoing quest; it is a project; *‘in modern social life, self-identity, including sexual identity, is a reflexive achievement’* (p.147). Post-modern destabilization of identity categories permits a relatively free experimentation with a range of possibilities.

Perhaps the Heideggerian concept of Dasein bridges the gap between modern and post-modern camps in explaining construction of these fluid identities. Heidegger’s concept of Dasein is based on contingency of concept of self, and highlights the shifting salience of social construal of identities. From a Heideggerian perspective constant rupture and redefinition of ‘social’ necessitates constant and indeterminate engagement in practices to build conceptions of identity, self and individual.

2.11.3 Consumption and self expression / extension: Bauman (2000) argues that because contemporary societies need and engage their members in their capacity as consumers, they can be called consumer societies, and that the members of these societies are judged by their ability and willingness to play the role of consumer. He argues that the economic engines of the post-modern society have powerful stratifying effects on social life, creating divisions that, at the extremes, lead to almost diametrically opposite individual experiences of time, distance and place. Traditional

relationship between needs and their satisfaction is reversed; the promise and hope of satisfaction precedes the needs to be satisfied, and desire is centred on promises of satisfaction. All consumption takes time. Proliferation of consumption objects has made time a scarce commodity and thus this stratification and reversal has resulted in a consumer desire for instant gratification, requiring no learning skills and no lengthy groundwork.

Proliferation of consumables has also increased consumers' capacity for consumption. Consumers are constantly exposed to new temptations which keep them in a steady and perpetual state of dissatisfaction. Cushman (1990) links this steady dissatisfaction to the configuration of the concept of self, and argues that contemporary 'self' has developed into an 'empty self'. He describes this empty self as a self that experiences a significant absence of community, tradition and shared meaning, and it embodies these absences as chronic, undifferentiated emotional hunger that needs possessions and consumption to assuage it.

Belk (1988) views the situation from an holistic perspective and proposes the construct of the extended self. Drawing upon a wide array of evidence and theory, from a variety of fields of investigation, Belk argues that self-extension has existed and operated more or less as a constant throughout social evolution, and thus his construct can be applied across a range of eras and societies. Extending James's (1890) thesis that we are the sum of our possessions, Belk argues that possessions are a major contributor to, and reflection of our identities. Because possessions define who we are, our having, doing and being are mediated by them. They help us maintain a coherent sense of self across multiple levels of identity and existence. In stressing that '*we are what we have*' Belk claims:

Our accumulation of possessions provides a sense of past and tells us who we are, where we have come from, and perhaps where we are going.

Self-extension occurs through control and mastery of an object, through creation of an object, through knowledge of an object, and through contamination via proximity and habituation to an object. The extended self operates not only on an individual level, but also on a collective level involving family, group, subcultural, and national identities (p.160).

His very elaborate thesis explicates complex consumption scenarios and practices such as acquisition, collection, disposition and disuse, keeping pets, gift giving, vicarious consumption and organ donation very effectively and competently. Belk's construct of 'extended self' is revisited in detail in Chapter 5, where it is extensively used in exploration of the role of simulated consumables and possessions in self extension.

Consumption and Subcultural Identities: Construction of social identity through consumption style can offer an individual a membership to a 'neo-tribe' (Maffesoli 1988) where bonding is created and strengthened through buying, displaying and consuming tribe-specific objects as well as adhering to distinct social and cultural practices (Schouten and McAlexander 1995). These neo-tribes are often called subcultures and are defined as sites of praxis. They are ideologically, temporally and socially situated in ways that allow fantasy and experimentation to construct, express and maintain peculiar consumption identities. In terms of identity projects, these identities are pluralistic in nature and challenge extant norms through establishment of alternative practices which lie at the heart of social and political expression of this subcultural identity (Schouten and McAlexander 1995).

New media and identity construction: Bauman (2000) considers new media technologies an agent in the larger technological and social dynamism that gave rise to the fluidity of identity. New and radical changes in communication and networking technologies offer individuals the possibility of constructing and communicating new identities. Spaces created within these communication technologies, allowing thought processes and ideas to fluidly exist, interact and mutate, are naturally suited for existence and display of fluid identities. Time is a crucial element in communication.

Because new communication technologies allow multiple synchronous and asynchronous social connections simultaneously, they have become popular contemporary tools for identity construction.

Identities constructed in these media-spaces are often considered a social chameleon, as well as fluid, contextual and non-permanent. While many early media-manifestations of identity were limited to text alone, contemporary consumers now have the means to use pictures, graphic icons, sounds and video clips in addition to the text.

Although they may neither be inconsequential, nor trivial to the individuals, these social identities are very narrow scripts, and often do not reflect the whole of the individual. However, the very fact that media-spaces empower individuals to reveal, conceal or alter identities raises the issue of identity creation in a novel and compelling manner, and is explored in detail in the next section.

2.12 Cyberspace and presentation of self

Kenneth Gergen (1988) argues that while medieval and modern periods were about an enlightenment which was based upon morality and unification, postmodernism is fascinated with the fetishism of creation and presentation of self. Self is a pivotal notion in both modern and post-modern philosophy. In the modernist view the quest for finding a true self is essentially an exercise in unification, becoming one and achieving wholeness. Duality of existence is a contradiction worth avoiding, and multiplicity of self can be viewed as a clinical condition.

Postmodernism asserts that contemporary fragmentation does not allow a self to become unified. A post-modern self is not a unity of existence imposed by internal and external conditions; it is a constellation of tensions and attractions between many diverse elements which, conceived of together, present a self (Gergen and Gergen 1988). These

diverse elements may include race, gender, class, language and roles, among many others. Postmodernism views an individual (and self) in the light of theoretical concerns such as identity, community, embodiment, representation and utopian quests. These concepts are easy to abstract and apply to cyberspace. Modernists, however, focus on society and community more than on individuals, and actions and consequences more than their meanings and interpretation. It is thus that modernists argue that cyberspace is better explicated through a phenomenological lens.

Heidegger is one of the more pre-eminent theorists of phenomenology who has tackled self-presentation. Heidegger's phenomenology focuses on the everyday lived experience. Coyne (1998) interprets Heidegger to posit that he sees an individual and her self through her social and emotional acts, such as care, being-with, corporality, praxis and disclosure. His concept of self is *Dasein* (Heidegger 1962 p. 27), a self which is fluid but is situated (grounded) at the same time, a narrative entity that is non-determinate but is constructed by individuals through pragmatism and contingency rather than pastiche, rebellion and discord. To Heidegger, self is central to one's existence, and thus it is not a pastiche but a contextual entity emerging out of direct interaction with society.

This notion of centrality of self is taken a step farther by Foucault, who asserts that self representations have become so important to us that we have moulded and adapted technologies for this purpose. Foucault (1988) organises contemporary technologies into four groups: *technologies of production*, which permit us to produce, transform and manipulate the physical environment; *technologies of sign-systems*, which permit us to use signs, meanings, symbols or signification; *technologies of power*, which determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination; and *technologies of self*, which permit individuals to effect, by their own means or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their bodies, souls, thought, conduct,

way of being, so as to transform themselves and thereby attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection or immortality. Foucault suggests that consumers use any combination of these technologies to reflect on self, to transform the way they think of it, as well as to reform and re-create it.

On the other hand, Kenneth Gergen (1991) forefronts the mediation of human reality in the midst of this ensuing techno-cultural revolution. Gergen focuses on the new '*technologies of sociation*', and questions if the traditional conceptions of self and community continue to serve a secure morally viable society. He posits that these new technologies create an environment of *Polyvocality* (with multiple sources of reality creation) that gives rise to multiple human realities. In his view, this unlimited mediation of reality results in *Plasticity* (human realities distributed over many sites), which challenges an individual with new and fluid behavioural demands. These behavioural demands, however, are mellowed because of the increasing '*Transience*' (escaping the role expectations of multiple significant others) an individual finds within these technological environments.

2.12.1 Cyberspace as a Technology of Self: Theorists in communication and media studies suggest that interactive activities in a CME are linked to creation and representation of self. These self presentations are technological products, in that they are transmitted through a network, are stored on individual computers and accessed as pixels on screens generated at remote locations.

Historically, social communication is characterized on the basis of information transmission between a source and a receiver, as depicted in the classic Shannon and Weaver (1949) model. However, in phenomenological terms, communications become shaping entities when they are interactions between minds; it is this interaction that causes the construction of context and meanings. Lately, theorists in Communications

Research have focused on the phenomenology of communication by highlighting mutuality and interaction within CMC (computer mediated communications) more than the characteristics of the medium. Many theorists view CMC as a system of simultaneous mutuality between individuals, and view it as the means by which minds come to understand one another.

Media theory also asserts that communication norms in CMC mimic longstanding communication practices. Concepts that contextualize discourses in real world, such as 'talk', 'face-to-face', 'private' and 'public', are symbolically replaced in cyberspace by 'chat', 'chatting', 'e-mail' and 'posting'. Individuals may use these elements to extend pre-existing identities in cyberspace, or to make direct solicitations to construct identities in the course of the communication process.

A self distributed in Windows: In a post-modern perspective, while a computer is a current representation of technology-of-self, the multi-media *Windows environment* is an example of contemporary fragmentation of the self. Computer users have learnt to 'multi-task' by opening several windows on their screen at any given time. Each screen acts as the space in which one task is performed and may represent a component of self. Together, the many screens may represent the sum-total of the user, whose attention and interests are malleable and keep shifting between windows. Sherry Turkle (1997) calls this spectacle a '*self distributed in windows*'.

Technologies are used, modified and mediated by culture. Cyber-psychologist Sherry Turkle argues that increasing social acceptance of computers takes them beyond their mechanical characterization and gives them a cultural identity. Many consumers consider computers closer to being living things than to being linear, logically acting machines capable of only mechanical deterministic actions; '*computers offer themselves*

as models of mind and as objects to think with when thinking about self (Turkle 1997, p.1093).

Turkle is a psychologist with a post-modern orientation and her views are not widely accepted within the community of psychologists. Many of her contemporaries take a clinical view of the impacts of consumption in CME, and argue that in true psychoanalytic tradition, Distributed Distal Presence (DDP) is a non-pathological multiplicity, and impacts behaviours negatively. Kraut et.al. (1998) posit that consumption in mediated environments may create psychological conditions such as anxiety, depression and feelings of loneliness. Turkle, on the other hand, takes an holistic view by putting it in a sociological perspective and asserts:

Today's adults grew up in a psychological culture that equipped the idea of unitary self with psychological health and in a scientific culture that taught that, when a discipline achieves maturity, it has a unifying theory (1997, p.1110).

Turkle also suggests that consumers who use new media technologies on a regular basis coexist in virtual and real worlds. They cycle through these two worlds by putting their virtual selves to bed for the times they are active in real, and vice-versa. To her, a self distributed in windows is not only fragmented but also represents a coexisting multiplicity and heterogeneity of self.

Personal Homepages and self-presentation: The internet has spawned a new genre of self-presentation: Home-pages. Personal home pages are multi-media narratives, created by consumers to represent a desired self by addressing the question '*who am I?*'

In a post-modern perspective a webpage is a manifestation of the personal domain of bricolage blurring the boundaries between private and public. It represents a cut-and-paste pastiche of fragmented identities that consumers try to fuse together seamlessly to present their desired selves. Chandler (1998) holds that web-pages are significant not only as a record of the consumer's self, but because anything recorded in cyberspace is

automatically published globally, as presentations of self before multiple audiences. Chandler argues that because web-pages are asynchronous in nature, a spatial rather than a chronological metaphor is a more appropriate application. Personal web-pages act as reception rooms in cyberspace where one's identity is on permanent display.

Web-pages are one of the few forms of consumption in CME which have been explored by consumer researchers. There have been attempts at both categorizing and interpreting, as well as exploring, the motives underlying creation of web-pages. Schau and Gilly (2003) have investigated the ways in which consumers construct identities by digitally associating themselves with signs, symbols, material objects and places in cyberspace. In one of the early attempts to theorise and classify webpages, Zinkhan, Conchar, Gupta and Geisler (1999) explored the motives behind the creation of web-pages and identified five such motives: achievement, affiliation, power, novelty and creation of post-modern identity. Their study borrows heavily from motivation literature, and seems to have overlooked bulk of relevant communication and consumption literature, which makes both their approach and findings vague.

2.12.2 Text as a mediator of identity: Identity is always socially mediated and much of this mediation is through language. Development of language is intrinsically linked to the evolution of new social processes and the creation of new aspects of identity. Garner (2003) argues that the development and manifestation of self is different in oral and literate societies. Oral cultures, lacking instruments of abstraction, do not provide the ability to abstract. In such societies, events and communications are limited to 'here and now' and thus truth becomes the province of those who can remember (story tellers). In oral cultures truth is a fluid entity and can only be reproduced through fables and stories. Writing, on the other hand, solidifies events, communications and thoughts. Thus text has historically been considered more truthful than an oral account, which was often considered to be mere gossip and myth. Foucault (1988) posits that by being

permanent and unchanging, text creates a space for truth and reality to exist. Foucault also posits that contemporary life-worlds are divided between a real time and a time frozen in text. A corollary of this position is that 'Identity' and 'Self' are also divided between a real time fluid existence and a more distanced abstracted documentation in textual space (diplomas, awards, writings, knowledge).

The difference between these two selves is often depicted as the self-as-is, and the self-as-desired. Obviously, individuals are more likely to disclose their self-as-desired than their true selves publicly. One traditional way of achieving this has been through writing and publishing memoirs or autobiographies. However, public self representation for mass consumption has historically been a privilege reserved for rich, the literate and the elite. Web-pages represent tools, within these new technologies of self that allow creation of a public-self by the proletariat. Because an identity created in cyberspace does not have to reflect an individual's true self and identity, Baudrillard calls such forms of identity a hyperreality; we create the self we want to be, and then try to live the self we have created.

Texts in Cyberspace: Keneth Gergen (1999), in the context of the historical emergence of *absent presence*, argues that textual representations of identity are a result of progressive privatization of dialogic communication technologies. The internet is perhaps the perfect example of a mass privatized dialogic communication technology. Internet communications emerged as an entirely new form because they were neither one-to-one, nor one-to-many, rather one-to-anyone communication.

Poster (1995) asserts that the internet's ability to act as a publishing house for the proletariat has eroded the distinction and authority, traditionally accorded to certain status defined roles, to prepare and publish text for common consumption. It has been said that cyberspace blurs the distinction between oral and written by recording and

publishing the kind of private information that used to be exchanged around the village well (or water cooler in the office). Although cyberspace itself is often characterised as ephemeral in nature, communications in cyberspace are neither transient nor temporary; any text in cyberspace can become a permanent public record. If, in a moment of youthful enthusiasm, an individual posts intemperate or explicit comments on a chat site or forum, they can be retrieved by anyone even years later.

Because the world-wide-web acts as a social hyper-text, textual communication can be used as a tool to create newer manifestations of identity. Consumers devise ways to mask and circumvent their true identities even in the most intimate of exchanges. Explorations on self-disclosure in CME suggest that, in some rare cases, because of a perceived anonymity, consumers do reveal their true intimate selves, and it has been reported (Moon 2000) that such intimate exchanges also affect their subsequent interactions.

Chandler (1997) claims that using text and symbols as creators and mediators of identity allows an individual to create sanitized hypertext versions of her desired-self through web pages, autobiographies, scrapbooks and family slide-shows. It has already been noted that Turkle (1995), Danet (1996) and Schau and Gilly (2003) also hold that consumers write their desired selves in cyberspace. One way of understanding such authored self-representations in cyberspace is by using the narrative identity framework.

2.12.3 Cyberspatial Identity as Narrative: Narrative psychologist Kenneth Gergen (1988, 1991) proposed understanding of identity as a *narrative*. Such a narrative identity can be defined as the unity of a person's life as experienced and articulated in stories that express this experience. These self-stories are contextual and variable and can be used as self-representations only within specific social and cultural frames. Each society has its own set of connotations and denotations, linguistics and grammar to

regulate construction of these narratives; storytellers therefore are not free in their storytelling. Acceptance of these stories is dependant upon adherence to acceptable patterns (as exhibited in list 2-12-3) and the explicit consent of other actors in these self-narratives.

Components of a Well-Formed Narrative (Gergen & Gergen, 1988, pp. 20 ff.)

- Establishment of a valued end point
- Selection of events relevant to the end point
- Ordering of events
- Establishing causal linkages
- Demarcation signs

List 2-12-3

Narrative constituents of identity in cyberspace are drawn from an assemblage of conventional paradigmatic elements: salient symbolic or cultural attachments, personal statistics or biographical details, interests, passions, likes and dislikes, ideas, values and beliefs as well as socially significant others. It has been argued that analogous to grounded socially constructed identity, cyber-identities are defined by connections to other virtual entities. A common quip in chatrooms is *'show me what your links are, and I will tell you what kind of person you are'*.

Turkle (1996) recognizes that although these authored narratives of identity are not depictions of the true self, they do act as tools for self negotiation and reconstruction. She believes that *'web-pages act as objects which enable their authors to think about their identity in a certain way'* (p.260). If we illuminate Turkle's assertion with Foucault's *Technologies of Self* orientation, we can argue that web-pages act as technological narrative tools which allow an individual to transform herself into what she really wants to be, as well as to discover new aspects of self.

Bricoleur, Cut and Paste and Pastiche Identity: Kenneth Gergen (1991) describes pastiche personality as a social chameleon, a cover built by borrowing bits and pieces of identity from known sources and to suit given situations. Gergen also argues that our post-modern identities are a pastiche of desirable elements. Self presentation on the web

can easily be accomplished through cut-and-paste of text and symbols, and can easily be updated, modified and altered. Thus a self created through hypertext in cyberspace has the propensity to become the ultimate pastiche. As an example, Schau and Gilly (2003) present several cases where individuals had constructed web-pages around their passions and interests. What was peculiar was that many of these individuals built their virtual identity around objects and symbols that they did not own in their physical world.

Gergen's pastiche personality can perhaps be bolstered by reference to Claude Levi-Strauss's (1974) notion of *bricoleur*, to characterize the creation and representation of self through web-pages. The authorial practices of bricolage (*inclusion* of particular elements, *allusion* to others, *omission* of what is noticeable by absence, *adaptation* by addition, deletion, substitution and transposition, and *arrangement*) are amply evident in the ways pre-existing texts undergo key transformations to create an assemblage that becomes self expression of web-page author.

As in the real world, bricolage in cyberspace is a voyage of self discovery rather than a conscious, planned and rational practice. Webpage authors are seldom satisfied with their identity and the material they appropriate (cut and paste). They may go through several iterations before considering a web-page a valid representation of their bricoleur identity. This process of appropriation not only transforms the material appropriated, but also the presentation of the bricoleur.

Consumers also find that this textually created identity can give rise to issues concerning authenticity. Chandler (1998) argues that skilfully created web-pages are generally considered more authentic by viewers. Style, format and complexity of a webpage thus represent an individual as much as its' content. Prowess in this technological realm may portray an individual as a master in his element and thus help

define who he is to an even greater effect. Gergen (1991) posits that while such pastiche works well for some individuals, for many others it may result in a sense of superficiality and guilt for not having measured up to multiple borrowed criteria

2.12.4 Goffman's dramaturgical approach and 'face': Any discussion on creation and maintenance of identity cannot be complete perhaps without some reference to Goffman's face construct. Irving Goffman, a symbolic interactionist of the Chicago School, made a significant contribution to the study self-presentation. His work is significant because he was the first theorist to place an emphasis on qualitative analysis of the component parts of the interactive process in understanding individuals' interactions. His explorations of individual identity, group relations and meaning in interactions use a 'dramaturgical' metaphor. His book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959) uses this metaphor to provide a detailed description and analysis of process and meaning in everyday mundane interactions.

He puts forward the construct of 'dramatic realization' which is defined and described in terms of what an individual wants to achieve through social interaction. It is a process and a set of linked activities that constructs a complete, role appropriate 'impression' that fits well with the audience and their social contexts. He considers the individual as an actor, and her interactions as performances, in broad social contexts shaped by both environment and the audience. He argues that 'performances' are constructions that provide others with 'impressions' to achieve desired goals of the actor. Building onto his metaphor, he argues that social identity is closely related to the concept of 'face' (1967) or 'front', which he describes as the part of a performance that regulates and defines the situation for the audience. He also defines group dynamics in terms of ritualized, symbolic actions, and argues that a group interaction is a role defined, rehearsed and choreographed drama, and that it is necessary for each individual to maintain his or her face and deliver a performance in order to achieve collective goals.

Goffman also maintains that individuals, like actors in a theatre, need backstage areas where they can let down their public masks, tell dirty jokes, collect themselves and relieve the tensions that are an inevitable part of any public performance. Arguing that uninhibited behaviour boosts creativity and brings out the true self, some communication theorists have extended Goffman's thesis by characterizing cyberspace as a backstage of the real world, and cyberspatial identities as true selves in these backstage areas. It is significant to note that in comparison to the social chameleon, bricoleur, or pastiche identity characterizations of post-modern theorists, characterizations drawn on Goffman's thesis proclaim fuzed cyber-identities as real reflections of true selves. If we write ourselves in cyberspace, and try to live the self we write, we are trying to achieve congruence between our true (cyber) self and our 'face'.

Goffman's themes of dramatization, role-play and re-creation, contrast well with enactment of the real. They also appear to have much in common with post-modern themes of hyperreality and simulacra, and thus fit many scenarios in cyberspace. Goffman's face construct has since been often used to explain many cyber-interactions in chat-rooms and Multi-User-Dungeons (MUDs). However, in terms of distinction of application, several key issues can be raised when his constructs are applied to cyberspace.

First, the internet as a medium represents a radical departure from the modes of *'presentation of self in everyday life'* that Goffman talks about. Instead of self presentation based on one-to-one or one-to-many communication of 'everyday life', cyberspace represents asynchronous mass communication where even the actors may be unknown to each other. In many cyberspatial interactions, roles are malleable, identities are discrete and common goals and symbolism is often not very well defined. Cyberspace thus cannot be treated on a par with everyday life.

Second, Goffman's analysis of interactive processes remains within the boundaries of large and common social groups and does not consider interactions of marginalized or experimenting groups and individuals. In contrast, much social and communal action in cyberspace takes place in small communities of interest, many of which are formed by individuals who are either experimenting with newer forms of consumption, or are marginalized in their local societies. Many other communities are totally libratory and experimental in nature. While marginalized groups and individuals suffer from pressures of idealized conduct in their interactions, libratory and experimental behaviour is often exhibited as non-conformist and creator of a non-idealized normative identity. Neither of these conditions are conducive to the creation of a group interaction that can enact a role defined, rehearsed, choreographed drama as required if a dramaturgical metaphor was to apply.

Third, Goffman's explication of 'environment' and 'audience' which drive his theorizations on creation of a relevant and appropriate front or face is based upon familiar interactants and does not consider interaction between total strangers in exclusivity (Manning 1992). Self-selecting groups or communities of interest in cyberspace are transient in nature and are often composed of members from a cross-section of societies who are, and remain, total strangers to each other in real life. In the context of internet communication, there is rarely any transition from stranger to familiar.

Fourth, feedback is a significant determinant in the creation of a face or front. Many self presentations in cyberspace are through webpages. WebPages are static in nature, and cannot be made adaptive to the changing audience and contexts. Web-page authors cannot get instant feedback through communication. In cyberspace, unless a member of the audience deliberately decides to provide feedback, it will not be available to the web-page author, and thus acceptance or rejection by the audience remains unknown.

The Symbolic Interactionist approach does provide some very valid theorizations of micro-social processes. At the surface, self presentations through internet communications – by being enactments before an audience, and by being construction of a front or face – do provide a strong basis for application of Goffman’s ‘presentation of self’ construct. However, as argued above, a direct application of this construct could provide erroneous interpretations.

Study of self and identity forms critical cornerstones in sociology, philosophy as well as psychology. Consumption has traditionally had a strong link with both the concepts of self and identity. Contemporary fragmentation and fluidity, newer modes of consumption, along with new technologies of communication, pose new challenges for self construction and presentation as well as identity management.

Consumer research has been instrumental in establishing and highlighting connections between consumption and the notions of self and identity. Perhaps its greatest contribution to the epistemology of self and identity has been the construct of self-extension. Replacement of real and tangible by simulations, as it occurs during consumption in mediated environments, challenges the existing notions of possessions and self extension. What roles, if any, can simulated replacements of possessions play in self-extension? Self-extension through simulated possessions was a substantial part of this enquiry and is presented in chapter 5.

2.13 Pleasures in cyberspace: conformity and deviation

Section 2.5 on domestication of technology presented the argument that consumers mould and adapt technologies to serve functions which may be beyond producers’ prescription. In terms of this adaptation, CME technologies are no exception; more than anything else, consumers have adapted them to become entertainment platforms within

domestic spaces. Computers are not as much used for computing, as much for accessing and manipulating multimedia. In many households, computers are used exclusively for recreational purposes, such as playing games or videos, sharing pictures, online chatting or random surfing.

Kerr, Brereton, Kucklich and Flynn (2004) argue that there is a widely held belief in media communications research that increasing levels of sensory engagement and interactivity in the new media create a shift in emphasis from narrative to the performative. Such a view is based on the observation that when the media was textual and asynchronous, narratives alone sufficed, but now with increasing levels of depth and richness in interactive, real-time, online media, online communications and activities require participants to act and perform as if these were real life encounters. Because of its interactive as well as immersive nature, consumption in CME can be more engrossing than consumption through other media.

Kerr, Brereton, Kucklich and Flynn (2004) posit that seeking pleasure in CME is an involved, active, dynamic and deliberate act, requiring high levels of involvement in performance. They also argue that consumers tolerate these higher levels of involvement because resultant pleasures justify the efforts.

2.13.1 Pleasures of text and graphics: Performative in CME is directly linked to pleasure. Because of the nature and status of technology, simulations in CME are either textual or visual representations. Pleasure in CME is achieved by interacting with narratives and situations. These are created and represented through texts, audio-visual media, and social entities.

Renowned textual theorist, Roland Barthes, in his book '*Pleasures of the Text*', (1973) posits that text can provide two kinds of pleasures, both to the writer and reader: a physical pleasure operating beyond culture and ideology, *Jouissance*; and a culturally

conformed, mundane pleasure he calls *plaisir*. Some of the earlier forms of interaction in CME, and all their resultant functions and gratifications, were based entirely on asynchronous transmission of text. For instance Gould and Coyle's (2000) study of narratives in cyberspace indicates that the consumption gratifications from cyber-text can both be *Jouissance* and *plaisir*. With the advancement of technology, consumers now benefit from progressive embodiment and multi-sensory engagement that go well beyond text alone, but textual interactions still remain a very important aspect of consumption in cyberspace.

2.13.2 Defining play and Pleasure: Firat and Venkatesh (1997) propose that the history and concept of play is neither distant nor different from that of consumption, and that 'play' – which is synonymous with 'fun' and 'enjoyment' – highlights the separation between public and private. Play resonates with thoughts of pleasurable experiences, and projects the image of joy, abandon and sweet satisfaction. In the context of CME, Mathwick and Rigdon (2004) define play as '*a highly positive experience capable of delivering intrinsic value in the form of escapism and enjoyment*'. They also posit that play serves as a link between flow theory and online consumer attitude formation process.

Although complete theorizations on pleasure in cyberspace are scarce, John Fiske's theoretical position on television and video games can easily be applied to explicate pleasure in mediated environments. To Fiske, pleasure is a multidiscursive entity, it may mean different things to different people in different discourses (1987).

Fiske (1987) posits that pleasure in an activity is independent of enjoyment of the activity. While pleasure can be effortless and is provided by the activity itself, enjoyment has to be created and may require investment of psychological and emotional energy. Seeking pleasure is also ordinarily considered a recreational activity, which is

effectively closer to play, and often considered compensatory to work. Investment of psychological and emotional energy into work may make it enjoyable, but pleasure is normally derived in the absence of work. Work and play thus assume polar relationships, and the notion of work-life balance suggests that in an individual's life, work is a set of ordained duties which deny life, and thus must be compensated by play or pleasure.

2.13.3 Pleasure and play in mediated environments: Fiske argues that the multiplicity of needs and desires that people bring to the media results in diverse forms of pleasure and meanings created in the process of consumption (1987). For him, seeking pleasure in mediated digital environments is similar to other leisure activities, in that it is an effort to produce meanings of self that the world of work denies.

He posits that the places where one plays videogames (*medium-space*), offer an individual opportunity to resist social control, as well as the space to exhibit power and control – experiences which might ordinarily be denied in the real world. Fiske effectively argues that man-machine interaction in video-games (which players enjoy as a feeling of competing against and beating a machine) symbolizes the discourses of power between systems and individuals in the real world.

Fiske also argues that through playing videogames, an individual enjoys a pleasure which is as much located in the self and the body, as much in society, and that this resistance and empowerment may be limited to the period of media activity and may not lead to changes in social behaviour afterwards. Obviously, his view, which contrasts well with the now commonly accepted impacts and consequences of excessive video-game playing, pertains to the conditions and context of media consumption in the 1980s.

Fiske believes that pleasure derived from playing videogames is a compound entity, is descriptive and labile, and comprises of three elements of control, immersion and performance. *Control* in play is a challenge to dictate the outcome, and is characterised by the tension and opposition of forces, and is confined by procedures and rules of the game. *Immersion* in play is a loss of awareness of one's surroundings, emotions and time. *Performance* is exhibition of skills, and gratification of recognition thus earned. He also posits that although specific pleasures of play are contingent upon the pleasures derived from these three components, because it is a compound entity, the resultant pleasure can be greater than the sum of its parts.

Pleasure as a non-purposive activity: Fiske asserts that multiplicity of needs and desires that people bring to the media results in diverse forms of pleasure and meaning created in the process of consumption. His assertion is supported by Hirschman and Holbrook's position that, although experiential consumption is tied to imaginative constructions of reality, an act of consumption is an outcome of a complex relationship between thought, emotion, activity and value (1982). Thus, Fiske, Hirschman and Holbrook, together suggest that even playful and aesthetic acts of consumption are purposeful, deliberate activities which consumers undertake with desired outcomes.

Some forms of experiential consumption may seem non-purposive in nature. Many consumers spend hours in front of a screen with a game controller, or scroll through pages of pornography endlessly. Psychologists contend that there is a fine line between habitual recreation and obsessive compulsive disorder, and that prolonged non-purposive pleasure seeking can become a behavioural anomaly.

Cherian and Harris (1990) argue that to suggest that all acts of consumption have thought and value as underlying motives is rather erroneous. They present a very interesting explication by introducing social brain theory to the consumer research.

Social brain theory posits that there are several modules in human brain, all of which are capable of working in parallel. Some of these modules are capable of synthesis and verbalizations, while others are not. Situation, context and physiological state (brain activity) often dictates which modules take charge of action and interaction with the environment, which shapes the dominant self from among the possible multiple selves. Purpose in an act is dictated by the desire to operationalize the dominant self. The modules capable of verbalizing may impute the purposiveness to the self that at times may not even exist. Such occurrences may result in apparent absence of real purpose in activities which a consumer may undertake very purposively.

Non-purposive pleasure consumption, such as video-gaming, can also be explained through Celsi and Olson's (1988) felt environment and personal relevance framework. They argue that beyond thought, emotion and value, felt environment plays a motivational role in an act of consumption; such that 'feels good' can be a valid purpose in itself. Because 'feeling good' can be a sense of pleasure in itself, sensations, feelings and felt environment together can become the purpose and reason for extended media activity.

Social commentators, such as Baudrillard, have also questioned the notion that need underscores all forms of consumption, and that there is a specified purpose behind every pleasure. Baudrillard argues that gratification is the reason and outcome of all consumption, and that consumers aim for nothing greater beyond pleasure itself. In spite of wide acceptance of Hirschman and Holbrook's hedonic consumption construct, the understanding of relationship of need and motives with pleasure remains tenuous.

Obscure Purposes in Pleasure- Videogames: Ito (2002) argues that multi-person interactive play is structured by, and productive of cultural dynamics, manifesting as heterogeneities in forms of play as well as micropolitical negotiations between peers

and between children and adults. Because children and adults orient variously toward cultural notions of status and achievement, intergenerational competitive play seeks to escape established cultural dynamics. It also observes that consumers often resist calls for sustained engagement with the game by quickly determining the conditions for “beating” a game and moving on to the next level. In their effort to ‘beat the game’, consumers often find ways of detecting and sharing codes and cheats through oblique or hidden referents in the game.

Gee (2003) argues that because games allow players to be producers and not just consumers, and because good games confront players in the initial levels with problems that are specifically designed to allow them to form good generalizations about what will work well later – when they face more complex problems – gaming technologies can be used for learning enhancement. He argues that players playing in multi-player online environment collaborate in teams using different but overlapping set of skills, share knowledge, skills and values among themselves. Sherry Turkle (1997) supports this argument of learning through videogames by asserting that object manipulation in simulated environments exposes youngsters to physical disconnects of distant agency and distant causation, as well as challenges them with thought and reasoning at an abstract level.

2.13.4 Pleasures in CME: Sexual / Emotional Experimentation. Some literature purporting post-modern notions of consumption in mediated environments gives examples of emancipated sexual experimentation to establish cyberspace as a post-modern consumption space (Gould and Lerman 1998, Hamman 1999, Chen, Davies and Elliot 2002). Pornography, gender blending, subcultures of sexual experimentation and intimate chatting are also presented as activities representing life behind the screen: a life in which sense of corporeal body is exchanged for idealized sanitized virtual body, and where consequence free experimentation represents ultimate empowerment.

However, cyberspace is neither the exclusive cause, nor the tool for contemporary proliferating of sexual experimentation. Danet (1996) argues that sexual experimentation traditions such as androgyny and gender blending have enjoyed a long tradition in many cultures around the world. Bergstrand and Williams (2000) posit that in contemporary societies varying degrees of voyeurism (such as commercial pornography) is considered normal, and there exist many other forms of sexual sub-cultural lifestyle practices such as orgies, dogging or swinging. Cyberspace is a reflection of the society. Privacy, anonymity and flexibility in gender, race and age has made cyberspace home to many communities of interest, including gay and lesbian subculture, as well fetish, bondage and S&M aficionados. For these individuals and groups, cyberspace acts as an extension of their real world.

2.14 Consumption narratives and Generation @ Txt: An intertextual and Linguistic view

'hay, omg! da page is bomber den b4! i wuv it! lol!

Translation

Hey! Oh my God, the page is cooler than before. I love it, Laughing out loud

(Quoted in Taylor et.al. 2002)

Narratives form patterns of consumption, and consumption narratives depict the consumers' lifeworlds. Consumer research imparts a great significance to consumption narratives created around brands (Holt 2002, 2004). Study of narratives is important in the context of cyberspace because of its largely textual nature.

Self expression, communication and interactions in cyberspace take place in mainly a textual form. These textual interactions in cyberspace have captured the imagination of both consumers and researchers. The naive narrativity and experimentation with linguistic rules in digital texts make them immensely pleasurable to interactants. Marie-

Laure Ryan (2005) however argues that digital textuality suffers from a certain split condition, in that although there are elements of artistic expression in digital texts, its readership is limited to interactants alone. She holds that digital texts are not as much aimed at readers as much they are at fellow interactants.

What is a narrative? Ryan (2005) divides the history of narrativity into four periods delimited by technological innovations: the oral age; the chirographic age; the print age; and the digital age. She argues that in these four ages narrative has progressed from content in memory to accounts of events, belief and behaviour, from attitude and ideology to value and rationalization, and finally from assimilation and interpretation to unlimited dissemination and prosumption. Linguistic dimensions of narrative comprises three elements of symantics, syntax and pragmatics. In narrative theory, semantics is the study of plot or theory, syntax is the study of discourse or narrative techniques and pragmatics is the study of narrative as performance.

Narrative has been a mutable concept that differs from culture to culture and discipline to discipline. Traditionalist school conceives narrative as an invariant core of meaning that distinguishes it from other forms of discourse and gives it a transcultural, transhistorical and transmedial identity. Where traditionally narrative was structured around Aristotelian sequence of beginning, middle and end around a plot, contemporary understanding of narrative is no longer a temporal chain of events linked by elements of causality.

Semantic broadening of the term narrative is often accredited to French structuralist Roland Barthes (1966). Along with Lyotard, Barthes was instrumental in emancipating narrative from fiction and literature, and in recognizing it as a semiotic phenomenon that transcends media and disciplines. Because narrative is also commonly associated with the post-modern theory, it does not have a widely accepted contemporary

definition, but it does have many descriptions. Foucault (1988) describes a narrative as particular mode of thinking which creates and transmits cultural traditions and builds values that define identity, and as a vehicle of dominant ideology and an instrument of power. Herman (2002) describes it as a fundamental way of organizing human experiences and as a tool for constructing models of reality.

Ryan (2005) lists four modes of contemporary narrative. These are: *Diegetic mode*, telling someone that something happened, usually in the past (story); *Mimetic mode*, enacting a story in the present by impersonating a character and mimicking action, (drama); *Participatory mode*, creating a story in real time by playing a role; and *Simulative mode*, creating a story in real time by designing an engine that will implement a sequence of events on the basis of internal rules and inputs to the system, (story based cyber-games).

In a definition that guides this research, narrative is a type of meaning generated in response to certain stimuli. In terms of digital textuality, a narrative text is an artefact designed to create and transmit this meaning. A narrative exists independent of knowledge and belief, and of textual support; it is not reality on its own, but a depiction of reality; it is not an authoritative view but a subjective account; it is not an uncovered truth, but a reflection of truth that helps construct a reality. Narrative is a metaphorical or metonymic assimilation of the properties of all the following; content, memory, behaviour, ideology, value, rationalization, interpretation, attitude, belief and account. Many narratives together construct a discourse.

Narratives and Cyberspace: Behaviour in cyberspace is defined and constrained by language and the tools used for communication of the language (web browser, chat forum). The linguistic resources of cyberspace are always emergent in nature, cyber-

communities continually adapt, modify and create newer forms of expressions (Cicognani 1998).

Because of its polyglot qualities and large vocabulary, English has become the primary language of cyberspace. Although other languages like Chinese, Korean, Japanese and Spanish also have strong footholds in many regional cyberspaces, English by far has a command and control of the internet (Gammack 2002). However, English has a strong expressive nuance specific to British and American cultural norms. To provide global acceptance, English had to lose its nuances before it was adapted for use in cyberspace. Further, instead of natural extension of native models, global cyberspatial communications has converged around the dominant norms mostly developed in the US. This has occurred because of the extrinsic requirements of the Internet, and has resulted in cyberspace being socially and politically constructed within the technological limitations of the dominant technological infrastructure. While such linguistic hegemony has created an alienation of experience for some non-native speakers, it has also introduced linguistic tensions and separations in many societies. The difference in form between creation of a non-native language text and its translated interpretation creates a separation in mediated communications which is often not understood in cultural terms. The global cyberspatial communications require a conformity to non-indigenous values, and in many cases such conformity creates a tension with traditional values associated with specific cultures (Gammack 2002).

Language is naturally ambiguous and is only valid in its immediate context. Often, forms of symbols can get in the way of communications, distracting from the message. Many externalities in an electronic message, such as words in an email, may become referenced to discourses never intended. Transcultural communications via electronic means, which enable interactions, relationships and access to previously unavailable cultural resources, are governed by an overlay of emergent 'netiquette' norms. These

netiquette norms are largely influenced by western values and may at times be applied superficially, relative to their meanings in other cultures, and thus they may not necessarily supplant terrestrial cultural understandings.

Authenticity and Authority in the age of Cyber-Narratives: Walter Benjamin (1969) argues that lithography, photography and cinema have changed the nature and our perceptions of art. One of these changes is the loss of authenticity and authority of both the creator and the creation. The internet, because of its ability to digitally produce and distribute many works of art, specially in literature, has confounded this argument. On the one hand where the ease of production and distribution reduces the authority and authenticity of text, on the other hand because the internet has emerged as the most popular source of information for the masses, it awards a certain degree of authority and authenticity to its content. At present, anonymity of authorship does not seem to reduce the authenticity of the content.

Along with email, chatting has become one of the most important component of internet communications. Realizing its importance, even purely commercial oriented websites allocate spaces for consumers to interact and chat among each other. Consumers sometimes themselves act as 'naïve marketer' in their attempts to attract other chatters by creating a symbolic advertising message around their internet representation (Zinkhan, Kwak, Morrison and Peters 2003)

Emotions in symbols: It has been argued in section 2.12 and 2.13 that virtual interactions undermine many traditional constructions of perceived identity: race, gender, age, ethnicity, education, accent, class and status become invisible. This denaturing of the context places a larger emphasis on exchanges within interactions to decipher and interpret meanings. Interactions and communications are likely to have an emotional component, but conveying emotions in distant digital interactions requires a

common symbolic code. Cultures have specific terms for a variety of emotions, which do not readily translate between languages and cultures. In expressing emotions, languages resorts to abstraction, creating archetypal forms which need explication within a cultural context to reveal hidden meanings (Gammack 1999). In order to ensure that the meanings are not lost in translation, in many electronic exchanges pictographics (called emoticons in cyberenglish) replace formal linguistic constructions. Although emotions themselves remain culturally relative, in order to facilitate human symbolic functioning, emoticons enhance and clarify complex messages and intentions both through their connotations and denotations. Technological mediation thus allows diversity of expressive communicative forms and media. This creates a common basis for mutual understanding, which is prior to cultural norms and other overlaid social constructions, and assumes an epistemological status in defining linguistic applications and appreciations.

2.15 Life-worlds: diffusion of boundaries between virtual and the real

“Can anyone tell me how to /join #real.life?” {message from an online chat session, (quoted in Turkle 1995, p. 186)}

Cyberspace, as an alternate space for human existence and consumption, is increasingly becoming a container and enactor of our existence; boundaries between real world and cyberspace are diffusing. Libraries and collections, music and art, pictures and videos, news and history, knowledge and education, justice as well as crime, economy as well as technology, media as well as entertainment, business and commerce, pleasure and retreat, consumer activism and communities are increasingly structured around elements which exist solely and entirely in cyberspace.

Baudrillard asserts that many realities with strong links to 'grounded' referentials now exist in modes of simulacra. This assertion can be evidenced in Horrigan and Rainie's (2001) finding that online communities have become an important means to create and maintain both long-distance relationships and local ties. Fallows (2004) reports that the internet has become a mainstream component of American lifestyle that is increasingly playing a greater role in consumers' everyday lives, and that cyber-activities are replacing many traditional everyday activities. Cyber-commuting (working from home on the internet), cyber-chatting, cyber-dating and cyber-sex are examples of activities that originate and terminate in cyberspace, and replace vital elements of real life-worlds (Lenhart, Rainie and Lewis 2001).

The growth of global societies and communities owes itself to information networks that exist in trans-national networked ecologies and economies in CME. Continual growth of CME technologies promises the fulfilment of a long-held dream of humanity, that of completeness - documentation, preservation and accessibility of all human output at will. CME synergises diverse forms of human output in a way that not only it is possible to access a singular document, picture, sound but to organize, and link any number of them in any order of preference. We as a human race are trying to organize and duplicate our world in cyberspace.

Such diffusion has its own costs. It has been argued that the cyberspace embodies the double visage of contemporary social phenomena; that individuals experience social phenomena not in a unitary unparadoxical fashion, but rather in a dichotomous paradoxical manner. Where cyberspace provides opportunities to an individual to extend her social circle, at the same time it may alienate her from her longstanding social group. One of the dichotomies associated with cyberspace is that although it is a space in which alternate human and non-human life-forms can exist, it is also a tool for dehumanizing the real social spaces. It is common to see individuals on a long haul

commuter train to be wired into the technology through earphones and CRT screens, socializing in remote cyberspaces, at the same time ignoring other fellow passengers.

One of the most obvious examples of this diffusion is creation of alternate communities in cyberspace. Howard Rheingold was among the first to document and report creation of alternate life-worlds in cyberspace. He wrote in the context of cyber-communities,

People in virtual communities use words on screens to exchange pleasantries and argue, engage in intellectual discourse, conduct commerce, exchange knowledge, share emotional support, make plans, brainstorm, gossip, feud, fall in love, find friends and lose them, play games, flirt, create a little high art and a little of idle talk. People in virtual communities do just about everything people do in real life, but we leave our bodies behind. You can't kiss anybody and nobody can punch you in the nose, but a lot can happen within those boundaries. To the millions who have been drawn into it, the richness and vitality of computer linked cultures is attractive, even addictive. (Rheingold 1993, p-8)

Life-worlds with unique life-forms: Turkle (1996) holds that in the short history of how the computers have changed the way we think and act, children have led the way, and that in their interactions with computational artefacts that mimic life, they are now pointing towards the radical heterogeneity of theory of life. Children do not suffer from online-offline dichotomies, and do not differentiate between face to face and online interactions. She experimented with children's definition of 'alive' and found that in contrast to earlier definitions such as '*it is alive if it moves on its own accord*', contemporary definitions of life were '*can it learn, can it cheat, can it know?*' She argues that children take the new world objects and impose a new world order of computational life-forms to them. This new world order is based more on psychology and behaviour than on physics and biology.

She argues that although children are unable to link the magic to the mechanism, they don't see computers as transparent computational machines; they see artificial intelligence as a valid life-form and exhibit strong emotions and attachments to their virtual pets such as Tamagochi. In human interactions and relationships, people

generally take things at the face value and don't delve deeper into others' minds to decipher its mechanisms. In the culture of simulations too, if the system works for us, it become a reality for us. Computers and minds have converged on a circular path of common inferences; the computer thinks like a human mind, the human mind is like a computer.

As is the case with discourses on modernity and postmodernity, materiality and virtuality, cultural imperialism and globalization, debates on diffusion of boundaries between real and simulated life-worlds are bipolar in nature. Katherine Hayles (1999) reflects back at the inaugural moments of computer age and holds that the erasure of embodiment cannot be planned and executed in the computer age so that intelligent existence becomes a province of formal manipulation of symbols rather than enaction in the human life-world. She argues against the notion that human identity is an information matrix, rather than embodied enaction, and that consciousness can be downloaded and run in a computer simulation. She firmly believes that embodiment is the origin of all thought, of all cognitive functions and of all human actions.

Perhaps the best way to explore the ontological status of these lifeworlds is to engage with the consumers and gather some lived-experiences by adopting their consumption practices and exploring their worlds. The next chapter outlines such an exercise.