Postwar Consumer Culture and the Rise of Market Segmentation in the U.S.*

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Contents

I. Introduction

This study examines the rise of market segmentation—the practice of dividing the market along various segments—in the U.S. from the late 1950s. As commonly noted, consumer culture[1)] in the U.S. reached its heyday in the 1950s. Many studies on American consumer culture examine this postwar development, as it radically transformed American culture and society. Yet, if consumer culture came to be established in the 1950s as the permanent and hegemonic feature of American society, its grip was only strengthened afterwards. It not only incorporated challenges to its domination (Belasco; Frank; Heath and Potter), but, according to Gary

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1) In this paper, consumer culture is defined as the modern capitalist culture that fuels the acquisition of material goods. The paper follows Stuart Ewen (23-30) who sees that consumer culture arose, as mass consumption was required to sustain mass production at the early 20th century.

Cross (1–4), prevailed over other ideologies of the 20^{th} century.

Given this, this paper aims to look at how consumer culture in the U.S. evolved after its triumph in the 1950s, extending its reach and managing challenges to its domination. As a specific instance to explore this, the paper examines the postwar rise of market segmentation. Market segmentation is now a conventional marketing strategy, but this paper examines it not as a marketing strategy per se, but as an important development in consumer culture.

This is mainly done by reviewing secondary sources in part due to the difficulty of accessing the primary sources outside the U.S. Lizabeth Cohen and Joseph Turow provide valuable insights into market segmentation. Cohen meticulously documents the rise and development of market segmentation. While she examines the implications of market segmentation for politics, Turow looks at how it reinforces the fragmentation of American society. Richard Tedlow shows the characteristics of segment marketing through such instances as General Motors and Pepsi.

Drawing on these studies, this paper is more focused on the question of how market segmentation helped extend consumer culture, sustaining consumption and accommodating changes in American society. To examine this, the paper is limited to the period between the late 1950s and the 1970s when market segmentation began to develop. Cohen points out that market segmentation is an interactive process involving both producers/marketers and consumers (308). Yet, this study examines segmentation largely from the perspective of producers/marketers, as such an interactive process ultimately resulted in expanded consumption.

The paper first provides an overview of the shift from mass consumption to market segmentation, as it emerged in the late 1950s. It then looks at how larger changes in the 1960s provided a favorable context for market segmentation. In particular, as the instance of market segmentation and changes in consumer culture from below, the paper examines social protest movements by groups long discriminated by the market and counterculture that explicitly challenged consumer culture. It looks at how they affected and were affected by market segmentation and helped expand consumer culture.

Following this, the paper examines lifestyle segmentation in the 1970s as an instance of market segmentation developed from above. It examines how lifestyle segmentation, arguably as the logical end or the most developed stage of market segmentation, enabled marketers to constantly divide up Americans in an effort to sustain consumption. It also intends to show the problematic aspects of market segmentation and its implications for American society by looking at how lifestyle segmentation helped drive Americans further apart.

II. From Mass Consumption to Market Segmentation

In the period after World War II, America entered a full-blown consumer society. Americans, equipped with purchasing power, readily plunged into consumption, pampering their pent-up demands from the depression and war years and creating "one of history's great shopping sprees" (Hine 3). In light of the long-held virtue of thrift, the ambivalence and the concern over unrestrained indulgence had often accompanied America's turn to consumption-oriented society. Yet, this receded in the postwar years, as consumption was seen central to the postwar order.

In the postwar years, consumption was seen as a way to support production, jobs and prosperity. Being centered on the suburban home and family, consumption was also thought to bring families together instead of feeding personal indulgence. In addition, within the Cold War context, the widespread availability of consumer goods and democratic participation in their acquisition seemed to be a point of national pride and patriotic duty, as they were seen to assert America's superiority over the Soviet system.

Further indicating the positive view of consumption in the postwar years, consumption, encompassing masses of people, was seen to lead to a more egalitarian and democratic society (Cohen 125). Closely related to this vision was the perception that a traditional class division was disappearing in the postwar years, as prosperity elevated a sizable portion of the working class to middle class status. It was commonly assumed that prosperity enabled rich and ordinary people alike to acquire the same "populuxe" or popular luxuries.

Accordingly, the majority of people, buoyed by postwar prosperity, participated in the same consumer market. Manufacturers and marketers naturally targeted this mass market as the one that promised most profits. Following their corporate clients, advertisers also aimed the mass marketing, addressing consumers as a unified group (Cohen 292). Mass consumption was thus a greater leveler and force of homogenization—implied in the term "mass" and admittedly achieved with the help from advertising—and had been recognized as such. For example, Albert Lasker, one of the leading ad men, asserted in the 1920s that "we are making a homogenous people out of a nation of immigrants" (Turow 23).

At the same time, the homogenizing potential of mass consumption, arguably further enhanced by an unprecedented level of postwar consumption, was also a cause for concern for generating conformity, another hallmark of the 1950s consumer culture. Indeed, rows of identical, or almost the same, suburban houses and the competitive urge to "keep up with the Joneses" easily conjured up the horror of conformity. As a sign of troubles with postwar America, the concern over conformity resonated with many contemporary Americans and would become a rallying cry for critics of mass consumption during the 1950s (Frank 10−1).

Yet, a close scrutiny often revealed a more complex picture. Allegedly homogenous suburbs were marked by the splits along class and racial lines, spawning a new geography of inequality (Henretta et al. 906−7). Likewise, the assumption of a unified undifferentiated mass market increasingly gave way to the recognition of a fragmented nature of supposed masses and their consumption habits. Rather than mind−numbing sameness decried by critics of conformity, market segmentation, or the idea that the market could be profitably divided along variously defined segments, began to gain a foothold in marketing from the late 1950s.

According to Cohen, a shift from mass marketing to market segmentation was driven by the concern for market saturation. As Americans bought more and more goods, marketers came to fear the saturation of markets, which a sluggish economy from 1954 and recession in 1957 seemed to vindicate. In order to stimulate demand, some manufacturers further relied on planned obsolescence (Cohen 293), encouraging consumers to trade their consumer goods every few years for the latest, more expensive model . Yet, while this was still predicated on a unified mass market, others suggested segmenting it.

For example, Wendell Smith, past president of the American Marketing Association and director of marketing research and development for Radio Corporation of America, saw the growing competition for the same mass market. In an article published in the *Journal of Marketing* in 1956, he thus proposed dividing consumers in smaller segments. He figured this would lessen competition among marketers pursuing different segments, while segments, when combined, could lead to bigger markets. Writing in the same journal two years later, Pierre Martinueau, marketing director of the *Chicago Tribune*, further gave a boost to segmentation in arguing profound differences among consumers (Cohen 293, 295).

Market segmentation involved the act of dividing the market and targeting certain segments (Kotler 194). Both Cohen (295–6) and Turow (19–20) acknowledge that it existed even before Smith and Martinueau proposed the strategy. According to Turow, the so-called "specialty" magazines such as *Time*, *Fortune*, and the *New Yorker* aimed at particular groups of readers during the 1920s and 1930s (29). Radio also followed a similar path, going after specific segments, as television emerged as the most attractive mass marketing medium.

In addition, General Motors (GM) reorganized its divisions (Cadillac, Buick, Oldsmobile, Pontiac, and Chevrolet) into different price ranges in the 1920s purportedly to offer a "car for every purse and purpose" (Tedlow *New and Improved* 7) and this helped GM challenge the domination of Ford and its unchanging Model T. Besides, certain age segments like youths or teenagers were seen as distinct groups even before the term segmentation was widely used (Cohen 318–9).

Yet, GM's strategy was initially designed to eliminate product overlap and internal competition among its divisions. Also, it focused on products and price differences (Turow 31), while later market segmentation focused far more on users and less on product characteristics, customizing products to different user groups. Most magazines and radio, both once mass marketing mediums, went after segments, not necessarily because they preferred them over a mass market, but because they were being replaced by television. Market segmentation thus existed before the late 1950s, but was largely overshadowed by the lucrative mass market.

If the concern for profit made marketers look to market segmentation, Cohen shows its rise depended on the convergence of several factors (298–301), which also explained the limited development of market segmentation prior to the postwar years. For example, consumer market research, which grew explosively in postwar years, explored psychological factors driving consumption and helped suggest ways to segment consumers as well as appeal to specific segments. The postwar growth of advertising and marketing professions provided necessary service, which selling to fragmented consumers would require more than selling to a unified mass.

Network television was also critical to the development of market segmentation. It is true that network television was the leading mass marketing medium. Yet, some of its programs during non-prime time were made for particular groups, such as children in early mornings and on weekends and housewives during the daytime. In turn, they attracted sponsors interested in these groups with commercials tailored to particular consumers (Cohen 302-3), like soap companies for daytime programs and their viewers. Network television thus fostered the formation of segmented markets, which were more fully developed and exploited by cable television in the 1970s.

Finally, the shift to market segmentation would have been impossible, had it not been for the ability to produce in smaller volume according to demands from different segments (Cohen 306). This "flexible production" is also necessary for the increase in product diversity both in degree and in kind, which, Tedlow argues, is the major factor that distinguishes market segmentation from mass marketing (*Rise and Fall* 25, 27) Yet, diversity offered is often one in kind rather than in degree, as the difference between, for example, Coca-Cola and Pepsi is not that of their product characteristics, but one of brand images and marketing.

Certainly, these developments signaled neither the end of mass marketing, nor a complete break with it. Given the long reign of mass marketing, its sustained profitability and the investment in its development, it is unconceivable that manufacturers and marketers would give it up overnight even amid the signs of market saturation. Moreover, the logic of profit would make marketers target as many people as possible in a given segment that could stretch across a region, the nation, or even globally. Accordingly, the idea of mass marketing still informed segment marketing, and many segments can be called "mass" segment markets.

Rather than the end of mass marketing, the shift to market segmentation heralded the beginning of the change that, following profit, marketers were far more willing to differentiate Americans than simply grouping them into one mass market. Precisely at a time when the concern for conformity was widespread, manufacturers and marketers began to look toward the opposite direction of embracing difference.

III. The Development of Market Segmentation in the 1960s

In the 1960s, market segmentation continued as a veritable trend. Cohen shows one statement after another that proclaimed the coming of market segmentation. According to a survey of media directors of advertising companies by *Media/Scope* magazine in 1966, "a majority of marketing plans for consumer goods" involved target groups. An executive of a major advertising industry quoted in an article in the *Journal of Marketing* in 1966 said that the "isolation of particular target segments is standard operating procedure here. It has become practically impossible to enter the national market on a broad, undifferentiated basis with any real hope of success" (300, 304).

It is probably not an accident that market segmentation, after years of being marginal, quickened during this period. In fact, had marketers not conceived of segmenting the mass market in the late 1950s, they might have had to do so sooner or later, as waves of protests and other developments challenged the status quo and made the assumptions about homogenous consumers untenable.

As an era of protests and challenges, the 1960s opened with the African American civil rights movement, followed by a host of other movements by feminists, environmentalists, the countercultural youth, Asian Americans, Hispanics, Native Americans, senior citizens, and gay people, to name some. In many cases, these were first expressed in the political sphere, but soon spilled over to social and cultural realm and would be full blown into so-called "identity politics" with the demand to recognize histories and cultures of various groups. Meanwhile, the postwar Cold War consensus also began to unravel, as the U.S. was mired in war in remote Vietnam.

As these developments laid bare deep divisions within, it seemed both sensible and imperative to continue the ongoing breakup of the mass market. Marketers divided the market along the major demographic features such as class, gender, age, race and ethnicity, often subdividing them by one another, as they further sought segmentation. Generally, the more profitable a segment is, the more it becomes divided, as everybody tries to get a piece of it (Turow 56). Goods offered may be (near) mass-produced but marketed differently to each segment, or they could be both produced and marketed for specific segments.

Market segmentation was not imposed upon consumers by marketers, but initiated by consumers as well. Youth subculture was typical of a segment initiated from below and later seized by the market. During the 1960s, as a telling sign of upheaval and changes, some of the new segments and changes in consumer culture were inspired by protest movements of various groups that had long suffered discrimination or neglect by the market and the countercultural movement that explicitly opposed consumer culture. As in social protests, African Americans led the way in this regard.

African Americans had long suffered discrimination by the market, although the market had been central to their struggle and lives. In the 1930s, they tried to use their market power as leverage to make stores in their neighborhood to hire blacks. In addition, the equal access to marketplace was one of the major features of the early civil rights movement as indicated by lunch counter sit-ins (Cohen 323). Eventually, their political protests and cultural assertiveness led marketers to recognize African Americans as a distinct market segment, setting the precedent for others to follow.

Cohen's reprints of three hair-care product ads for African American women that appeared in *Ebony*, the leading black magazine, show the changes in marketplace recognition of African Americans over time (326). First, the white-owned Godefroy Company ad in 1956 was typical of color-blind mass marketing at that time. Featuring a white female model, it could have been taken from any white magazine. A Clairol ad in 1961 minimally adjusted a white ad with black faces, featuring a middle-class looking woman with a child and using the same advertising text. By 1970, the same company's ad signaled a full recognition of African Americans, featuring a black model with an afro hair style and the messages tailored to them including "the Clairol frees the 'fro" at the center that evoked black struggles.

Unlike blacks excluded from the market, women had been its integral part as a purchasing agent for the family. But, like blacks, they were also subject to discrimination. For instance, despite the spread of credit purchasing in the 1950s, married women were denied getting their own credit cards even when they made money, as only husbands could have a charge account (Cohen 282). Yet, challenges to traditional gender roles and discriminations led to a segment catering to feminist sensitivity, while market segmentation meant that women were treated as consumers on their own right, apart from being merely the purchaser for family.

By the late 1960s, the elderly also came to be organized to secure their rights. Emboldened by this and attracted by possible advertising revenue, the media for the elderly, especially magazines, came to promote seniors as a distinct segment with money to spend, now being free of mortgage and family obligations (Cohen 322). Marketers readily recognized this, but were hesitant in fully embracing the senior segment. It was not only because their consumption habits were rather fixed, but because marketers feared turning away the wealthy elderly, those aged 50 and 64, by reminding them of their age (Turow 74-5).

Marketers and the groups they long overlooked thus became an unlikely ally in segmenting the mass market and creating what could be termed as multiculturalism of the marketplace. Given the unusual combination, the outcomes were often mixed. Marketplace recognition of the aforementioned groups as distinct segments was one way of honoring their assertiveness. It was a sign of paying them respect long overdue, no small achievement given a long history of discrimination and the neglect of them by mainstream marketers. Both through their struggles for recognition and then as a segment, these groups also came to shape consumer culture, however limited this could be. In this light, as Cohen argues, the shift to market segmentation helped “democratize” the mass market, “allowing subcultures to shape markets around their own priorities” (309).

Yet, such changes also signaled incorporation of protest movements into the marketplace as additional consuming positions. Paying respect often meant appropriating their aspirations, styles, and language for profit. Democratizing the market, or recognizing them as a segment, was a nod to their market potential, since market size and growth potential were important factors in segmenting decision. For African Americans, market segmentation was all the more ironic, since mainstream white companies often turned out to be more effective in catering to them than their black counterparts and thus harmful to black business (Cohen 327).

In the case of counterculture and its opposition to consumer culture, the outcomes were no less ambivalent. According to Thomas Frank, the tumult of the 1960s could only be understood within the context that the critiques of mass consumption of the 1950s became immensely popular and widely accepted (11). Given their strong appeal, marketers and advertisers came to appropriate the critiques as a new consumption position, i.e., expressing the opposition to consumer culture through consumption. As such, symbols of countercultural defiance such as blue jeans and organic food came to be incorporated into the market as a marker of anti-conformity and anti-consumption.

Given this, Cross argues that the countercultural attack on conformity and celebration of expressive individualism did far more to provide expanded consumption styles and another market segment than to undermine the economic and social order (167-9). In other words, the counterculture, while not revolutionizing American society, did liberate consumption from conformity and the confines of home and family of the 1950s.

In doing so, the counterculture movement facilitated the ongoing fragmentation and segmentation of the market, while its alternative lifestyles influenced the growing interest in consumption and segmentation by lifestyles (Turow 43). As a result, counterculture, probably more than protest movements, ended up helping consumer culture. If this indicates the limits of the countercultural challenges, it equally shows the strength and flexibility of mainstream marketers in accommodating and appropriating consumer culture critiques.

According to Frank, this was not a simple case of co-option of the counterculture. As he shows, the advertising industry, supposedly the leading purveyor of conformist consumption, underwent a creative revolution of its own against the deadweight of conformity and welcomed counterculture as an ally to its struggle (20, 27-31). Indeed, conformity did not necessarily help marketers or advertisers, as drab sameness limited consumption choices, which meant less compulsive desire to buy.

In the case of protest movements, co-optation may be even more unlikely, as they struggled for the recognition as segments in the mainstream marketplace. Yet, be it co-optation or not, the end result was the same; marketers' embrace of protests and countercultural critiques provided them ways to expand and deepen the reach of consumer culture.

During the 1960s, the shift to market segmentation, as both a harbinger and manifestation of changes in consumer culture, continued. As American society became multicultural, plural and individualistic, this gave a further boost to market segmentation. At the same time, marketers' embrace of changes and difference through market segmentation accorded them flexibility to take advantage of such developments as protest movements and counterculture that could have been a threat under mass consumption. Either way, consumer culture and larger developments in society complemented each other nicely in breaking up and diversifying America.

IV. Lifestyle Segmentation in the 1970s

During the 1970s famously dubbed as the "Me Decade," Americans turned more inward, individualistic, and self-absorbed. They pursued the self with intensity, leading to what Peter Clecak terms as the "democratization of personhood" or "many facilitating conditions for fulfillment of the self" (6). Meanwhile, economic stagnation further set Americans apart by broadening the gap between the rich and the poor.

Given this context, it seems only appropriate that individualistic consumption and market segmentation accelerated in the 1970s. *Business Week*, for example, asserted in 1970 that market segmentation had proceeded to such an extent that the "terms 'mass market' and 'mass media' have almost become misnomers" (Cohen 298).

From the start, marketers not only targeted existing segments or responded to the demand from below, but created their own. Lifestyle segmenting represented one such instance of segmentation created and led by marketers. In particular, it emerged as the leading segmenter during the 1970s and after. Arguably, lifestyle segmentation, as it developed in the 1970s, showed the features of market segmentation at its logical end or at its most advanced stage. As such, it also revealed the problematic aspect of market segmentation.

Lifestyle mattered to marketers, as rising income levels enabled people to buy what they preferred, not simply what they could afford. In the 1970s, interest in lifestyle grew further, reflecting the decade's preoccupation with the self and individuality as well as the influence of the counterculture movement.

In this context, the economic condition and the nature of lifestyle segmenting itself contributed to the prominence of segmenting by lifestyle. As the U.S. economy stagnated in the 1970s, heightened competition increased the pressure for marketers to locate new profitable segments beyond existing categories (Turow 32). Lifestyle provided such segmenting opportunities, ones with greater flexibility.

Unlike demographic categories based on more or less fixed, concrete features, lifestyle categories were based on the "psychographics" that combined demographics and psychological traits like consumer values and attitudes (Cohen 299). As a result, if demographic categories were rather limited in segmenting possibilities, lifestyle categories, being more subjective, flexible and even arbitrary, made it possible for marketers to divide consumers almost endlessly and in ways they saw fit.

In regard to this, the "Pepsi Generation" marketing campaign by Pepsi between 1961 and 1966 provides some insights. Unlike mass marketed Coca-Cola, Pepsi targeted the "Pepsi Generation," not a specific age segment but a group of "those who think young" and "wanted to feel youthful." Looking at this, Franks thus argues that market segmentation, at its most advanced stage, is not concerned with actual characteristics of products. Rather, it is concerned with constructing brand image and consumer subjectivity, attempting to "call group identities into existence where before there had been nothing but inchoate feelings" (23-5). Unlike the old segmentation based on realities, the new one relies on "the imagination of the marketer" (Tedlow *New and Improved* 371-2).

Arguably, lifestyle segmenting also represented such an advanced stage of segmentation, enabling marketers to constantly divide Americans into consumer subjectivity out of their particular take on realities of users, not product characteristics. Turow's examination of lifestyle segmentations by three leading market research firms—the SRI International's VALS (Values and Life Styles), Claritas Corporation's PRIZM (Potential Rating Index For Zip Markets) and the Yankelovich Monitor—provides a case in point. Developed in 1970, 1974, and 1978 respectively, they came to be widely used in the 1980s and 1990s (44).

Turow examines PRIZM in more detail. PRIZM—based on the view that people with similar cultural backgrounds and circumstances tended to cluster geographically—classified every zip code into forty lifestyle groups under such revealing titles as Bohemian Mix, Blue-Blood Estates, and Shotguns and Pickups. For example, Shotguns and Pickups, supposedly representing the lifestyle of "small rural towns with more mobile homes than the norm, more large families with school-age children, and more blue-collar workers with only a high school education," included zip codes of such far-off areas as 46772 in Molalla, Oregon, and 43701 in Monroe, Indiana (45).

Turow's following quote on Shotguns and Pickups with its startling details provides glimpse of how far marketers pushed segmentation.

> In Shotguns & Pickups, even the smallest home can come equipped with a giant-sized TV, wood stove, a ceramic bird collection and a dusty pickup in the driveway...With their large families and modest means, Shotguns and Pickups residents like to stretch their budgets with frozen pizzas, dry soups, TV dinners and powered soft drinks. They also install their own mufflers and repair their brakes on their Mercury, AMC and Subaru cars. For leisure, women enjoy needlepoint, men enjoy woodworking and husting, and the family likes gardening; residents buy canning jars 79 percent more often than average Americans. In Shotguns and Pickups, no one has to pretend a fondness for outdoor living: deer season ranks up there with Christmas for favorite holidays (1997, 46).

Aside from the hint of condescension and certain class bias, these detailed accounts raise questions about the realness of "real lifestyles" that PRIZM clusters supposedly depicted (Turow 46) and what such categorizing ultimately means.

Market research firms attempted to make their segments as precise as possible in order to pinpoint people's buying habits and help their corporate clients customize goods accordingly. The SRI's four VALS categories even provided the percentage of each in the U.S. population; need-driven (about 11% of the population), outer-directed (66%), inner-directed (21%), and integrateds (2%), and these were further divided into subcategories like survivors, sustainers, belongers, emulators, and achievers (Turow 46-7). These labels were value-laden, showing where SRI's values lie (integrateds, combining inner and outer directedness, were likely those at the top).

Ironically, as these segments were so precise and narrow, they were more likely to be divergent from realities. A cartoon published in the *New Yorker* in 1993 reveals such a point. A male figure in the cartoon says that, according to his zip code, "I prefer non-spicy foods, enjoy tennis more than golf, subscribe to at least one news-oriented periodical, own between thirty and thirty-five ties, never buy lemon-scented products, and have a power tool in my basement...but none of that is true." Not only the gap with reality, the cartoon, according to Cohen, also shows that market segmentation, now so elaborate, became a material for mockery (300).

However, the problem may not be one of incongruity with reality. In fact, not all aspects of lifestyle segments may spring from the marketers' pure imagination. Marketers poured enormous resources into consumer market research in an often futile effort to figure out what people wanted. In this light, marketers and their agencies were far more likely to create consumer subjectivity from bits and pieces of reality, or "inchoate feelings" as Frank says, gleaned from market research and other sources, however inadequate this might be. PRIZM categories were also devised from the U.S. census and databases of other market research firms (Turow 45).

Yet, the problem is that marketers would focus on certain bits and pieces. As economic competition continually pressured them to find new profitable segments, they tended to look for the aspects of American life that could be segmented lucratively. As such, they were more likely to engage with those bits and pieces that divided, or could divide, Americans than those that brought them together, giving weight to divisive elements out of a complex reality.

Competition also meant that numerous market research firms came up with their own ways to separate people. Existing segments such as men and women were subdivided by lifestyles that marketers thought separated them like whether they were married, working outside, or having children. One consulting firm divided women into eight clusters including the "Good Life (working, married, no children), the Challenge (working, married, children), and the Dependent (not working, unmarried, children). In addition, marketers competitively divided the upscale market, a new preoccupation amid a slow economy, by factors such as the way people made money—dual paycheck, inherited wealth, retired wealth—and personality types—discriminating, conservative, sophisticated, trendy, adventurous (Turow 58, 64).

Lifestyle segmentation thus allowed marketers to divide Americans constantly and in ever more minute ways separating them between, as well as, within groups. As Turow points out, there were different kinds of women, men, and so on (55). If these ever-increasing, elaborate lifestyle categories well served marketers to locate profitable segments to fuel consumption, it is also quite possible that they could lead Americans to see each other more by differences of narrowly-defined consumer subjectivity than by commonalities.

Given this, through lifestyle segmentation, marketers not only tended to magnify differences and fragmentation of American society that they would exploit in the pursuit of profit, but could reinforce and fixate such differences in doing so.

V. Conclusion

Consumer culture in the U.S. had long been centered on mass consumption, reaching its height in the immediate postwar years. Most marketers, seeing consumers largely unified and undifferentiated, also based their success on catering to the mass market. Yet, this began to change from the late 1950s. Marketers' concern with the saturation of the mass market, the demand for recognition and diversity from consumers, and favorable social contexts in the 1960s and 1970s all paved the way for the shift to market segmentation.

As a major change to the mass consumption practice, market segmentation signaled the market's embrace of difference and diversity in line with larger changes in American society, giving recognition to groups that had long been discriminated and thereby offering greater choices. At the same time, such changes helped extend the reach of consumer culture, as marketers learned to take advantage of social turmoil and divisiveness through market segmentation, incorporating developments that could have threatened a consumer culture under mass consumption.

Lifestyle segmentation also indicated continued power of consumer culture. It showed the extent to which marketers were willing to push the logic of market segmentation in an effort to sustain consumption and profit, as marketers seized lifestyle segmentation to divide Americans in almost every conceivable way. In particular, given the competitive pressure to find new and profitable segments beyond the existing distinctions, they highlighted the divisive developments they could utilize in profitably segmenting people and, in doing so, helped reinforce divisions and fragmentation of American society.

It is certainly true that market segmentation or consumer culture did not necessarily start fragmentation, as social developments in the 1960s and

1970s would have led to greater diversity and the fragmentation of American society. This context also shaped marketers' perceptions of reality and affected the shift to market segmentation. Besides, fragmentation and diversity were not necessarily problematic, as it could mean greater choices and the recognition of those long excluded from the market.

Yet, marketers seized these developments with divergent possibilities as an opportunity to sell and, through market segmentation, channeled them as an occasion to be different and differentiate with an overriding concern with profit. Accordingly, consumer culture did not simply respond to the larger developments in society, but came to shape American society in a particular way and with some unsettling implications.

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Abstract

Postwar Consumer Culture and the Rise of Market Segmentation in the U.S.

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This paper examines the shift to market segmentation in the U.S. between the late 1950s and the 1970s. It looks at market segmentation as an important development in consumer culture that helped sustain consumption and respond to changes in society.

The shift to market segmentation began in the late 1950s amid the concerns over the saturation of the mass market. As a major change to mass consumption, market segmentation signaled the market's embrace of difference and diversity in line with larger changes in American society, giving recognition to groups that had long been discriminated and thereby offering greater choices. At the same time, such changes only strengthened consumer culture, as marketers came to take advantage of social turmoil and divisiveness through market segmentation, incorporating developments that could have threatened a consumer culture under mass consumption.

Lifestyle segmentation, as it developed in the 1970s, also indicated continued power of consumer culture. Marketers seized lifestyle segmentation to constantly divide up Americans. In particular, faced with the ever growing pressure to find new profitable segments beyond the existing ones, they came to highlight the divisive developments they could utilize in segmenting people. As this helped reinforce ongoing divisions and fragmentation, consumer culture did not simply respond to larger changes in society, but came to shape American society.

Key Words: Market Segmentation, Lifestyle Segmentation, Consumer Culture, Counterculture, Mass Consumption
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