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COMPENSATORY CONSUMPTION WHEN SAYING GOOD-BYE

BACK GROUND

Liquid times:
ambiguity and instability in life...

motivate to „try out“ alternative ways of organizing life

examples: divorce, migration, switching/losing job

consumers are exposed to frequent losses of familiar contexts, like significant places and people

sources: BAUMAN (2000), LIPOVETSKY & CHARLES (2004), MARQUARD (1991)

RESEARCH QUESTION

How does consumption compensate for the lack of familiarity in „liquid times“?

topic can be linked to research in

- ▶ „consumption and loss“ (BONSU & BELK 2003, CURASI et al. 2004, ...)
- ▶ „life transitions“ (SCHOUTEN 1991, THOMPSON & TAMBYAH 1999)

METHODS

„bottom-up approach“

ten cases on important losses in life

data collection during four occasions with each participant:

- ▶ written participant introspection
- ▶ narrative interview about the loss
- ▶ dialogical experience (in a second round after a first pattern elicitation)
- ▶ feedback exercise (our findings were discussed with each participant)

FINDINGS

two consumption strategies to face loss of familiar contexts

TEDDY-BEAR EFFECT

a coercive force aiming at preserving the personal past that may otherwise be forgotten

a reassuring strategy when times become uncertain and challenging

REBOUND EFFECT

anticipating and accelerating novelty in life

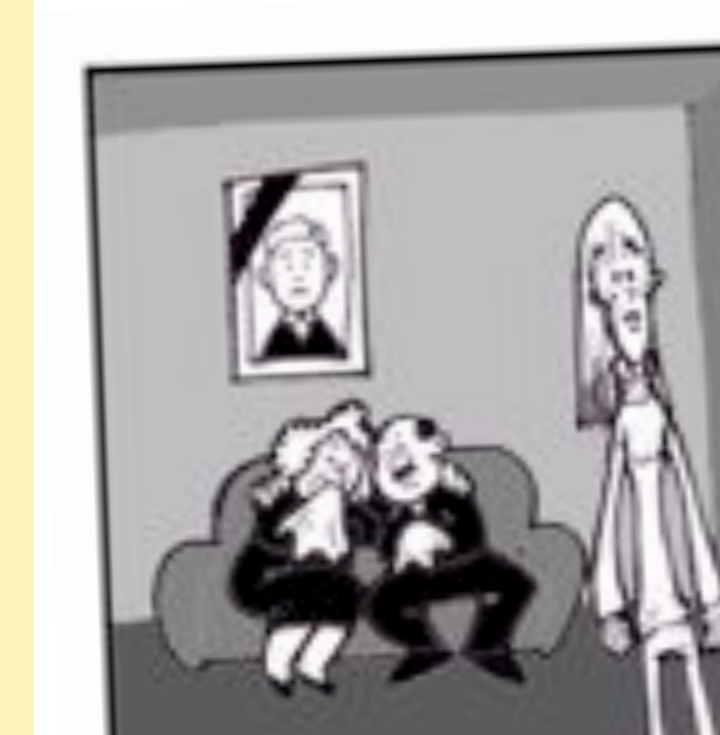
ILLUSTRATIONS



PRESERVING AN ITALIAN BACKGROUND



Bruna is 100% Italian, as she defines herself. She has been in Belgium for six years, and has started feeling she was losing her core Italian character. As a consequence, she has engaged herself in multiple Italian-related consumption activities: buying furniture in Italy (and bringing it by car to Belgium), purchasing mainly classic Italian food at supermarkets she feels could match with her Italian cooking background, traveling back to Italy each time she needs to celebrate a professional success... A daily call to Italy makes part of her personal routines.



RECOVERING FROM ANOREXIA AND „CARPE DIEM“

Caroline is 28 years old and works as a police agent in Belgium. Her transformation story started four years ago when her brother passed away in a motor bike accident. Caroline believes that her life gets reconstructed in multiple ways after having faced this disruptive event. Caroline also changed herself by completely recovering from anorexia, a sickness she had been suffering for almost ten years. She explains her recovery based on the idea that she now has the responsibility of taking care of her life as she does not want her parents to lose another child. Recovering from sickness represents various changes in consumption as it implies not simply eating but also experiencing the pleasure of being free to trip with friends or go to restaurants with other people.

CONCLUSION

Its challenging for consumers to adapt to the liquid times. Mundane consumption experiences are used as compensation for the loss of comfort.

SOURCES

- BAUMAN, Z (2000), Liquid Modernity.
- BONSU & BELK (2003), Do not Go Cheaply into That Good Night..., JCR 30, 1, 41-55.
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- MARQUARD (1991), In Defense of the Accidental.
- SCHOUTEN (1991), Selves in Transition..., JCR, 14, 4, 412-425
- THOMPSON & TAMBYAG (1999), Trying to be Cosmopolitan, JCR, 26, 3. 214-241.