

Dissertation Title: On the Ethics of Marketing: A Reading of Zygmunt Bauman's Writings on Consumerism

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Academic Year: 2012

ABSTRACT

Individuals in the era of capitalism live by and rely on their own choices, which are often influenced by marketing. This freedom of choice enables the subject to craft their own identity and pursue a range of opportunities for an improvement in their quality of life. However, marketing is criticized for its role in making people more materialistic and self-focused and creates social deskilling. Philosophically, the subject is passively transformed through capitalism, particularly that the subject has become passive, uncritical and subject to manipulation. This has reflected the subject's perception of reality. Bauman comments critically that the subject in the era of liquid modernity has to struggle with self-identification and uncertainty. He searches for an objective moral ground to stand on, saying that uncertainty is the ground for the moral development of human beings and social contact is necessary to empower this attribute. However, he sees deterritorialization, a phenomenon associated with capitalism, consumerism and globalization, as leading to isolated communities that disable the collective work of society and work against trust. I, on the other hand, propose a new platform of human contact being constructed via cyberspace. This interaction in cyberspace can produce openness in the marketing process, both for the producers and

the consumers. Bauman would undoubtedly criticize such an interaction as not constituting a “real” social bond, but I wish to argue that this interaction within cyberspace builds up a new ethical community that can satisfy what Bauman calls the “sovereign expressions of life,” thus allowing for the possibility of ethics in the consumerist society. Also, on-line interaction creates the possibility for subjects to maintain their autonomy, fosters the development of values through participation in marketing activities, and helps both consumers and producers to make informed, ethical decisions.

