

Emotional Style Creation and Emotional Consumer Practices: Insights from the Rise of Romantic Love in Indonesia

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Prior work on emotions in marketing has created useful and visionary insights into a range of research areas, including emotional branding (e.g., Giesler 2012; Thompson, Rindfleisch, and Arsel 2006), human-object relations (e.g., Batra, Ahuvia, and Bagozzi 2012; Fournier 1998), and the influence and measurement of emotions in consumer behavior (e.g., MacInnis and de Mello 2005; Mogilner, Aaker, and Kamvar 2012; Richins 2013). However, this work has largely refrained from analyzing emotions as evolving phenomena and instead understood emotions as relatively stable and enduring characteristics of the consumer, thereby assuming that consumption ultimately reinforces prevailing emotional styles. Aiming to provide a theoretical corrective to this dominant perspective, this study addresses the issue of emotional change and the role the market therein and asks how new forms of emotionality are established. Needless to say, such change processes should matter to marketing because they interact with and may engender new consumption behaviors and market systems. Building on sociological and historical scholarship on emotions, I propose that the establishment of new forms of emotionality in consumer society can be understood as a socio-historical, market-mediated process of emotional style creation involving changing discourses of emotions and four emotional consumer practices – naming, communicating, regulating, and mobilizing.

Method and Data

To interrogate the theoretical proposition, I conducted ethnographic research on the contested rise of romantic love in Indonesia, an emerging market country in Southeast Asia that provides an excellent context to study how new forms of

emotionality are established. Data was collected in Yogyakarta, Java, from 2006–2013 and comprises a total of 3,439 pages of text, including 100 questionnaires and 51 interviews (2,928 pages), observational data (232 pages), and archival materials (279 pages), and also more than 1,000 photos and several popular cultural books, films, and music albums connected to love. 35 in-depth interviews (Thompson, Locander, and Pollio 1989) were conducted with a younger population (aged 17–36, $M = 24$, 14 male and 16 female) and 16 interviews were conducted with middle-aged informants (aged 39–70, $M = 51$, 50% female) to elicit detailed stories about close relations, romance, and related consumption behavior. I analyzed the interviews using the established hermeneutic analysis method (Thompson 1997). In the final iteration between the conceptualization of emotional styles and practices and the patterns revealed through the data, a theoretical account was formulated on emotional style creation through the cumulative effect of consumers' emotional practices, new market offerings, and discursive changes.

Summary of Findings

The findings demonstrate that in our context, a new style of romantic love is being established, a system of patterned relationships among a discourse of romantic love, romantically charged market offerings and related objects, and a new set of emotional practices. This emotional style organizes the experience, display, and fostering of romantic love in Indonesian society. I show how young consumers, in spite of the objections from proponents of traditional and religious models of love, catalyze the establishment of the new emotional style by cumulatively engaging in and converging upon a new set of four emotional practices. In the new nam-

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ing practice of emotion confessing, they employ a variety of couple merchandise to openly express their emotions, a rare occurrence among previous generations. In regard to communicating emotions, gift giving is a novel emotional consumer practice that includes market offerings such as roses, couple accessories, and chocolate. With regard to regulating emotions, young consumers elevate romantic happiness through consumption moments and promote their individual emotions as acceptable criteria for their mate selections. In the new practice of dating in romantic servicescapes, commercial environments targeting young couples in search for togetherness, they mobilize romantic emotions in the public sphere of consumption.

Key Contributions

Several theoretical and managerial contributions are made. First, by developing an alternative socio-historical approach to consumer emotionality, I offer a critique and extension of the psychologically oriented theorizations of emotions in marketing. Second, by exploring the ways in which new con-

sumption activities revolving around emotionally charged market offerings and atmospheres foster the establishment of a new emotional style, I shed novel theoretical light on the role of consumption in the constitution of emotional life. Third, I highlight the important role of emotional styles and emotional consumer practices in the establishment of market and consumption systems. The contribution of this work for marketing managers is (1) to demonstrate that different emotional styles enable different ways of incorporating marketplace offerings within relationships between the self and others and (2) to show that emotional styles can be influenced by marketing efforts addressing discursive patterns on emotion and the four types of emotional practices. Parallel to recommendations of scholarship on market creation (e.g., Giesler 2012; Humphreys 2010), the study suggests that managers can build on this knowledge to better detect tensions in a society's emotional repertoire and enhance the emotional fit of market offerings with particular emotional styles.

References are available upon request.