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Paradoxes of consumer independence: a critical discourse analysis of the independent traveller

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Abstract. *The ideology of independence lies at the very core of the marketing agenda. For the free market to operate as a legitimate means of social organization, the right to be independent and to be free to enact ostensibly independent choices is to all intents and purposes sacred. Independence is an especially critical concept for marketing academics and practitioners to understand given the need to reconcile consumer demand for a sense of individuality, freedom and self, with an organization's need to commodify consumption activities in order to realize market growth. This paper examines the ways in which a sense of independence is successfully offered to consumers within paradoxically mass-market communications. The study investigates what it means to be an independent traveller by implementing a critical discourse analysis of alternative guidebooks. Findings suggest that guidebooks construct independence by reifying inaccessibility, interpreting value, and constructing inauthenticity for consumers. This promulgates a powerful myth of the independent traveller as someone who defies inaccessibility, hunts for bargains, and avoids inauthenticity. Crucially, each of these cultural practices also acts to engender an implicit relation of dependency between the text and the tourist that is found to contradict, but ultimately not threaten, the whole notion of independence that the consumption experience itself is predicated on.* **Key Words** ● commodity ● critical discourse analysis ● guidebook ● independence ● Spain ● tourism



Introduction

The ideology of independence lies at the very core of the marketing agenda. For the free market to operate as a legitimate means of social organization, the right to be independent and to be free to make ostensibly independent choices is to all intents and purposes sacred. Without a well-developed sense of independence citizens cannot become individuals, and without individuality the modern idea of the consumer as an autonomous agent of choice is untenable. There is of course no essential reason why people involved in market place behaviour should valorize independence over conformity for instance, nor is there any justification for holding that making product choices independently of others will necessarily lead to better consumer outcomes. The signification of independence as a positive personality trait has however been long recognized as important in consumer mythologies, from Benjamin's (2002) nineteenth-century arcades *flaneur* all the way to contemporary images of American ruggedness (Hirschman, 2003).

In practice there are few mass-market situations where consumers are able to exercise unconstrained independence. In this regard mass markets are unavoidably paradoxical. All too often consumers appear independently to choose types of products very similar to each other. One consequence of this is that it appears that highly individualized consumer cultures can tend to look very similar to highly conformist ones. Here consumers can find themselves involved in a continual struggle to sustain their own sense of independence and individuality where they frequently realize that others are trying to express their own independence in exactly the same way, using the same products and brands.

In this respect the notion of independence in markets is problematic in a literal sense. The opportunity to realize 'individuality' by exercising various freedoms from the influence of another or others is frequently undermined. It is often argued that this is especially the case where 'individual' choices and practices are framed within modern market institutions (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995). Moreover, the notion of independence as a state or quality of being free from subjection or from the influence, control, or guidance of individuals, things, or situations is at best a contestable and/or paradoxical scenario (Holt, 2002; Schouten and McAlexander, 1995).

In light of these underlying inconsistencies, tensions and contradictions, this study proposes that it is analytically relevant to examine independence as a socially constituted discourse. From this perspective marketing is seen as both contributing to the construction of the idea of independence as a positive personality trait, as well as commodifying independence as a desirable quality and value of certain products and services. This approach is particularly apt for the study of goods and services which signify high social status and cultural visibility where it is often in the marketing of these commodities that the discourse of independence and individuality is especially prominent (Frank, 1999). Understanding the construction of discourses which promote the desire to stand out from the crowd, the longing for distinction (Bourdieu, 1984), the desire to be different, and the need to feel that one's choices are unique or special to one's self (Belk, 1988), is therefore of



particular relevance to marketing and for this reason worthy of detailed study.

This paper examines how one particularly prevalent discourse of consumer independence – that of the independent tourist traveller – is communicated and constructed for mass market consumption. We begin by discussing the notion of independence with reference to appropriate marketing literature and then expand upon the idea of a *discourse of independence* as a set of meanings organized within the cultural texts that circulate within the independent tourism market. Guidebooks, we suggest, must be understood as more than purely descriptive artefacts. In addition to providing various types of information about travel destinations guidebooks are also important as performative devices which direct and command the social parameters and identity of those consumers involved in the independent travel market (Jacobsen, 2004).

Understanding independence

The most obvious place to start a discussion on independence is with reference to the traditional consumer sovereignty model. A fundamental assumption of the model is that consumers *are* autonomous individuals, capable of freely rationalizing about and mobilizing choices in the market – they are free to choose (Friedman and Friedman, 1980). This model is morally sanctioned as the legitimate collectivization of individualism (Caruana, 2007) making consumers *independent* of any authoritarian control subjected by more centrally planned models of economic distribution. Patterns of consumption take place relatively independent of coercion from social or institutional ‘Others’. Here, autonomy is not questioned so long as the consumer’s individual subjectivity remains ring fenced. However, far from being independent subjects, consumers are autonomous only regarding choices between products and services that are originally provided by institutions (Galbraith, 1985; Miller, 1987; Schnaiberg, 1997; Schumacher, 1993).

The consumer sovereignty model frames independence in terms of the rational capacity of individuals. This assumes the locus of autonomy to encompass the consumer’s cognitive abilities and ultimate power to translate cognition into (purchase) behaviour. An understanding of the notion of independence here depends on the extent to which one interprets marketing discourse as flows of (passive) information between consumers and producers. This is because under the consumer sovereignty model, the consumer’s capacity to (re)interpret information when formulating choices would afford them a good degree of independence. Yet this ignores the constitutive and political status of information.

The post-structuralist inspired cultural consumption literature frames independence more explicitly in terms of the liberation of the individual subject (the self) from the market institution. Independence is viewed not in terms of individual rational choice, but as an identity project, shaped and constrained by (confined) consumers in the context of potentially constraining social and institutional structures. Here a fundamental tension between the free versus confined individual self is invoked. Firat and Venkatesh (1995), for instance, argue that modern



markets are essentially totalizing, offering to consumers grand narratives that reduce the prospect of forming one's self-identity to a narrow and homogeneous set of structurally determined choices and behaviours. Postmodernity, by contrast, manifests infinitely fragmented, contradistinctive and countervailing sets of meanings by which consumers can potentially narrate a sense of self-identity that is less constrained by homogenizing narratives and become an ostensibly (more) 'liberated self'. This theme of the liberated self is extended into the various writings on compensatory consumption, whereby individual consumers are seen to engage in liberating sub-cultures of consumption that are seemingly independent of mainstream, dominant institutional mechanisms (Belk and Costa, 1998; Celsi et al., 1993; Schouten and McAlexander, 1995). In this tradition independence is often taken as a proxy for liberation from mainstream values and social structures that seemingly confine a person's subjectivity. For example, the individual consumer is often depicted as celebrating 'the values of freedom and independence, removed from the cares of conventional status competition, mainstream materialism, and mortgage payments' (Belk and Costa, 1998: 233). Many studies written from this perspective (for example, Schouten and McAlexander, 1995) also recognize a fundamental paradox between cultivating an independent identity free from social and institutional control of the market, and at the same time, the normalizing and institutional background in which becoming an 'independent self' necessarily occurs.

The tension between individuals and the institutions that shape and confine them, and the subverted contradiction between a notion of an 'independent' or 'authentic self' and a 'social self', raises a structure–agency type debate. Notably, Holt and Thompson (2004) critique the compensatory consumption thesis and, putting aside the structure–agency issue, focus on how consumers (re-)construct a sense of self through different ideological models of masculine identity prevalent in American social discourse. Rather than escaping from oppressive institutions, they argue that individuals appropriate and manipulate different social discourses in their everyday consumption in an attempt to narrate a positive masculine identity. Interestingly, the extent to which subjects are independent of the market is not at stake here in this more dialectic view. Accepting of the dialect between self and ideologically shaped social discourses, the question is more of *how* consumers construct a positive sense of self rather than from where they seek independence.

The discussion on independence can be extended into the more Foucaultian inspired literature that considers the 'consumer self' as an identity project relevant to an ongoing resistance to mainstream, dominant and powerful institutional discourses (Dobscha and Ozanne, 2001; Holt, 2002; Moisander and Pesonen, 2002; Thompson, 2004; Thompson and Haytko, 1997). Along similar lines to Moisander and Pesonen (2002) and Foucault (1972), Dobscha and Ozanne (2001) consider dominant market discourses to confine the actions, choices and identity of consumers. This position supports the idea of independence as a discursive expression of identity, related closely to resistance and non-conformity, rather than a rational choice or an innate state of autonomy. This is further echoed in Thompson and Haytko (1997), who observe how consumers appropriate and manipulate fashion



and anti-fashion discourses. Recognizing tensions and contradictions in their individual agency and awareness of social norms, consumers use countervailing discourses about fashion in the process of constructing and affirming a positive sense of self. The core question is not whether consumers are independent, but rather through what processes do they establish an 'independent' self-identity within a given context of paradoxical and institutionalized fashion discourses. Holt (2002) somewhat pessimistically notes such paradoxes where he observes consumers attempting to express resistance to brands in the market.

It is necessary to consider that discourses used by consumers to construct a sense of independence free from coercion, commercialism or other forms of confinement, extend well beyond the marketplace and evolve around a multitude of institutional discourses related to such ideals as being a good parent, a trusting friend or a caring partner. Furthermore, rather than attempting to establish whether consumers can experience or attain authentic emancipation or, conversely, a paradoxical confinement, we are invited to look at the processes by which notions such as independence are constructed, given meaning, contested and rejected by various actors (Thompson, 2004). These processes have a constructive consequence in that they serve to produce legitimacy for marketing activities by the very fact that they provide reasons for why market actors should accept current norms and expectations (Marion, 2006).

The discourse of independence

Most notably related to the terms 'independent traveller' and 'backpacker' an *independent* discourse of tourism consumption can be seen to derive its meaning from a range of historically located texts and activities. Popularized in films such as *The Beach* and *The Backpacker*, independent travel enjoys a history that stretches back at least into the nineteenth century, when the young and wealthy of Europe travelled around foreign countries in search of adventure and the exotic with only the assistance of a guidebook (Sillitoe, 1995). Notably, the title of Sillitoe's book *Leading the Blind* draws attention to the underlying tension between independence and dependence within this cultural mode of consumption. More than just following a set of instructions (information) about where to visit, independent travel has often been seen as a cultural phenomenon whose practice is closely related to a particular set of lifestyle guidelines (Friend, 2005). Noy (2004) contends that the notion of independence can be interpreted as an expression of backpacker identity:

The trip's 'non-conventional' manner, its destinations, lying 'off the beaten track', and its itineraries, typically taking place in 'Third World' regions, are all 'form' (structural) features which are ideally suited to socially construct 'type' (experiential) features, relating to the profound experiences of authenticity and adventure. (Noy, 2004: 85)

Similar themes are outlined by Elsrud (2001), who notes that the narrative constructions of independent backpackers aim to create a sense of adventure and risk in which to locate their own independent traveller identity. Often this is achieved



by articulating the places that they visit and the people they meet as ‘untouched’, ‘authentic’ and seemingly hard to reach (accessibility). More than this though, these themes appear to be manifest also within the travel literature aimed at this cultural group. Not only does the discourse of independence constitute a cultural category by (re-)producing certain meanings but it can be seen to distinguish one category from another. These themes are made explicit by Huxley (2005), who notes not only that independent travellers express a desire for the authentic ‘Other’ but they articulate with equal force a desire to simultaneously overcome a superficial ‘Other’, in the form of the mass, package tourism product. She notes that her respondents routinely saw what they called ‘tourist traps’ as placing inherent barriers to the experience of authenticity. In this sense, not only is the discourse of independence about an authentic and largely inaccessible ‘Other’, but it is in some measure about an inferior, problematic, and confined ‘Other’. Echoing MacCannell (1976), Shepherd (2003) notes the presence of a key binary between the (good) traveller and the (bad) tourist. Through independent discourse: ‘Travellers are assigned a series of positive traits (independent, risk-taking, inquisitive, active) whose negative oppositions (dependent, safety-conscious, uninterested, passive) are framed as characteristics of tourists’ (Shepherd, 2003: 137). He goes on to argue that independent identity is formed more closely in relation to tourists other than the authentic ‘Others’ whom they are constructed as seeking out.

Distinctions between the authentic and the inauthentic are (re-)produced through travel texts that act as cultural repositories of meaning for independent travellers. They form part of a range of texts in which discourses that have previously been given their meanings at a societal level are intentionally re-articulated for the reader (Borgerson and Schroeder, 2002; Bruner, 1991). Bhattacharyya (1997) notes that the discourse running through guide books to India act to construct this destination as a dangerous and difficult place to access, implicitly constructing itself as a survival toolkit, and thus its user – the independent traveller – as a heroic, risk taking and adventurous survivor.

Study methods

The study employs *critical discourse analysis* (CDA) to understand the way in which the notion of *independence* is constructed and made meaningful for consumers of independent travel and to examine the underlying context of consumer dependency upon the market to achieve this.

Our approach to CDA aligns with studies that view reality as socially constructed (Berger and Luckmann, 1966) but specifically with those that recognize the discursive relationship between knowledge, subjectivity and power (Chiapello and Fairclough, 2002; Foucault, 1972; Ibarra-Colado et al., 2006; Medved and Kirby, 2005; Thompson, 2004). Here discourse simultaneously constructs ‘ways of knowing’ and ‘ways of being’ for subjects like consumers, providing a useful framework for examining the processes involved in the construction of an ‘inde-



pendent' consumer identity. Moreover, in framing knowledge of cultural identity and practice, power is assumed to be implicated where discourse authorizes, privileges and marginalizes various modes of subjectivity. Discourse is taken in this study to produce localized and context-dependent meanings (Hatch, 1993) specifically relevant to an intended interpretive audience. Along with most other forms of discourse analysis, CDA has moved far beyond a naïve structuralist position where discourse is taken as surface indication of 'deep structures' or underlying social mechanisms. Contemporary use of CDA recognizes the dynamic, dialectic and strategic processes by which knowledge, subjectivity and power are organized, managed and subverted within discourse itself (Oswick et al., 2000; Phillips and Hardy, 1997). CDA here enables an understanding of the construction of an 'independent traveller' identity in the context of potentially threatening tensions between individual autonomy and institutional authority. Consequently, in attempting to organize cultural knowledge about independence, we anticipate a general constructive process that defines both the subject and object of consumption, relates objects to subjects and institutionalizes consumption.

Defining subjects is a discursive process in which consumer's concerns are set out, subjects are defined and values are collectivized. The way in which subjects are defined in both text and images is integral to the process of defining the subject of a particular consumption culture. This feature of discourse attempts to characterize the subject, to show and to articulate to the consumer what type of person they might want to be(come). Schroeder (2006) discusses the powerful role of the *visual* in constructing meaning, identity and power within a fragmented 'consumerscape'. Visual representations of female subjects in advertising, for example, can be interpreted to both construct consumer subjectivity in ways that conform to popularized conventions of femininity, but that also conceal and promote sexualized relations of power (Schroeder and Borgerson, 1998). Similarly, Mill's (1995) textual analysis of British Airways' internal marketing communications recognizes the powerful role of text and images in defining male and female subjects. Analysing images of pilots and stewardesses, it becomes clearer how subjects are being defined in the context of historically situated and locally reconstructed gendered discourses of power. A key feature of the process of defining subjects stems from processes that simultaneously construct concerns and collectivize values.

Defining objects refers to a process whereby the object of consumption, that to which the subject is to be related, is simultaneously and strategically idealized and made problematic. Marketing draws upon wider social discourses and reconstructs them to infuse an object of consumption with a particular meaning or set of meanings. In their analysis of gender identity, for example, Thompson and Hirschman (1995: 147) comment 'media images have normalised cultural ideals of physical beauty and, conversely, problematize any deviations from these ideals'. Thompson (2004) notes a similar process in the discursive construction of the natural health market. Processes of idealization and problematization serve to frame objects of natural health consumption in dramatic myths that aim to reinforce the use of natural health products:



Natural health media construe the most likely revenge-of-nature to be increased susceptibility to chronic illnesses and premature degeneration. This background of anxiety-inducing mythic meanings supports the advertising claim that the immune system is under constant and increasing siege and must be strengthened accordingly. (Thompson, 2004: 168)

A significant feature of the discourse of independence will involve some form of idealizing process around themes of autonomy or authenticity. At the same time, we might also expect the discourse to strategically synthesize threats to those ideals, all of which serve to provide a plausible basis of affirming an independent self.

Relating subjects to objects is the process through which discourse attempts to establish, manage and maintain a certain type of relationship between the subject and object of consumption. Relationships could be framed in any number of ways depending on the desired rhetorical effect (e.g. participative, antagonistic, responsible, caring, trusting, autonomous). The two key features of this process are the articulation of appropriate relationships and the managing of boundaries. While it is self-evident that in order to enable consumers to infer sensible, plausible and meaningful identities, the relationship between objects and subjects needs to be defined in an appropriate manner, the reason for managing boundaries around identity is more complex. If we accept (if only in part) the thesis of fragmentation offered by postmodern commentaries (Bauman, 1995; Firat and Venkatesh, 1995), then we can anticipate that the constellation of alternative consumer identities and countervailing cultural meanings (Thompson and Haytko, 1997) is a breeding ground for paradox, tension and contradiction. Consumer identity is anything but static or homogenous even if consumers appear to tend towards coherence and unity. In this context, it would seem necessary to draw attention to the way in which consumption discourse attempts to manage 'identity boundaries' so as to provide space for coherent self-cultivation devoid of problematic contradictions. For example, while Medved and Kirby (2005) note that the social category of 'professional motherhood' is articulated as a professional type of relationship by drawing upon discourses from the corporate sphere (budgeting, planning, managing, mission statements, career), the identity of 'professional mother' necessarily conceals an important contradiction. Underlying this discourse is the assumption that mothers have taken the *choice* to become professional stay-at-home mothers. The fact that many mothers cannot afford to leave work to stay at home and that doing so would result in serious economic consequences is strategically concealed by the corporate mothering discourse. A positive and coherent corporate mothering identity is successfully managed by negating reference to the economic issues or related circumstances involved in choosing to become a 'professional' stay-at-home mother. Shepherd (2003) records a similar process of articulating appropriate relationships and managing boundaries around identity for tourists versus travellers: 'Travellers are assigned a series of positive traits (independent, risk-taking, inquisitive, active) whose negative oppositions (dependent, safety-conscious, uninterested, passive) are framed as characteristics of tourists' (Shepherd, 2003: 137).

This kind of juxtaposition forms the basis of articulating appropriate relations



between objects and subjects of consumption by defining both appropriate (e.g. independent and active) as well as inappropriate relations (e.g. dependent and inactive). Shepherd (2003) also observes the more recent construction of responsible tourism consumption as embodying a similar juxtaposition between the good and bad tourist. In this case, the superior 'responsible tourist' is articulated within appropriate kinds of relationship with local people and ecosystems. To maintain these identities, boundaries are drawn to prevent the consumer's interpretation of problematic issues surrounding the confrontation of other cultures and consuming (touching) of 'untouched' environments: 'What remains in the end is eco-tourism's reliance on an idealized absence of self, which underpins the popular concept of "leaving nothing but footprints, taking nothing but photos"' (Shepherd, 2003: 139).

Institutionalizing consumption is the implicit process whereby the institutional context in which the discourse is embedded serves to produce a coherent and 'unconflicting self', channels choices and mediates potential dilemma. Without taking the structural view that 'active' marketers produce 'passive' consumers, we can begin to appreciate the importance of these three discursive processes in light of the evidently institutional background in which consumption discourse is situated.

The first issue to note is that identities, constructed purposely for consumers either by marketers or other agents involved in cultural production, necessarily provide consumers with an 'unconflicting self'. Distinct from consumers' own constructions of self, consumption discourse aims to provide a space for self-cultivation that is devoid of contradiction and is therefore facilitative of choice or participation in consumption practices. Consumption discourse can reproduce the possibility of an 'ideal self' (Holt and Thompson, 2004; Thompson, 2004) via the construction of compelling narratives and powerful cultural myths. It is the dominance of these ideals and the frequency and intensity with which consumption discourse constructs and re-articulates them that serve to facilitate choices in a way that removes problematic tensions from the consumer's 'gaze' that could threaten the appropriation of an ideal self-identity. More significantly, through this process of offering a well-defined and stable space for self-cultivation, consumption discourse simultaneously acts to remove any dilemma. If we accept that discourse offers an ideal interpretive position, we also allow that in so doing, the identity boundaries set out limits the interpretation to a narrow set of pre-defined relationships and corresponding modes of consumption. The discourse defines, for example, consumer responsibility, constructs the cultural modes appropriate for becoming and acting as a responsible consumer and thereby confines wider interpretations of responsibility e.g. caring, justice, stewardship, fairness, rights (Bauman, 1993, 1995; Bhattacharyya, 1997; Caruana and Crane, 2006; Shepherd, 2003).



Constructing independence

The focus of the discourse analysis was *The Rough Guide to Spain* (Ellingham and Fisher, 2002), a self-proclaimed alternative guidebook for independent travellers. This is part of a larger series of books covering a wide range of county and city destinations around the world. The Rough Guide series is for 'independent-minded visitors on any budget' (www.roughguides.com). Each book in the Rough Guide series is written in a similar style, and so a single text can be taken as illustrative of the series. The discourse in this publication reflects themes of a wider discourse of independence that runs through similar 'alternative travel' guidebooks aimed at this market of independent travellers. The selection of the Spain title ('the ultimate handbook to one of Europe's most vibrant countries') consolidated our attempt to explore independent travel in its broadest sense. This is because the position of Spain as one of Europe's top holiday destinations suggests a very diverse readership of independent travellers for this title. Before considering our single text in specific detail it is useful to briefly locate the text within its wider genre. Table 1 summarizes samples of text taken from the websites and books of leading alternative guidebook competitors and highlights thematic similarities in the nature of an independent discourse of tourism consumption. From our extensive reading within this genre the recurring themes of *value* (e.g. 'on-a-shoe-string'), *authenticity* (e.g. 'the real Spain') and *accessibility* (e.g. 'an out-of-the-way location') are especially evident. Although this is not an empirical statement it is, we contend, relatively uncontroversial. All forms of discourse analysis are limited by the tension between depth and breadth, which necessarily result from everyday research constraints. In many cases CDA is most effective when close, careful and considered analyses are directed at a small number of sources, or often a single source, which can be taken to be in some way broadly indicative of broader representations. This is because more general, superficial analyses of larger quantities of texts is not likely to overcome the basic question of representativeness, but are far more likely to fail to produce subtle insights.

Independence is a central idea running through the sample text and our analysis suggested that it could best be understood in terms of three underlying themes that characterize what the book serves to achieve for the reader. By analysing these themes – reifying inaccessibility, interpreting value, and constructing inauthenticity – the independent traveller can be characterized as someone who defies inaccessibility, practises bargain hunting, and avoids inauthenticity.

Reifying inaccessibility

An important theme in the text was identified as the construction of destinations as inaccessible. The text consistently articulated the destinations as being generally 'hard to reach', 'tucked away', and 'remote'. The concept of inaccessibility is manifest throughout the entire text and is evident within clauses such as 'Vacancies are extremely *thin on the ground*' [emphasis added] (Ellingham and Fisher, 2002: 959) and 'Although the options are *very limited*' (emphasis added, p. 960). Typical



Table 1

Illustration of key themes within an independent discourse of tourism consumption

The Rough Guide (from a range of Rough Guide sources)	The Lonely Planet (from website)	Footprints (from Spanish guide)
*Value:	*Value	*Value
<p>'The bulk of Palma's budget accommodation is in the centre and, fortunately enough, this is by far the most engaging part of the city' (p. 72 of RG Mallorca)</p> <p>'great portions and unbeatable prices, the antipasti and fish are excellent value' (p. 320 of RG New York)</p>	<p>'They're a motley bunch, but they're cheap and useful' (LP – China)</p> <p>'If you're into saving and are not attached to a specific place, it's worth shopping around on site' (LP – India)</p>	<p>'Good value set menu' (p. 284)</p> <p>'Look out for special deals . . . which offers rooms for less than . . . ' (p. 660)</p>
*Authenticity:	*Authenticity	*Authenticity
<p>'You can't get more authentically Chinese than this' (p. 303 of RG New York)</p> <p>'some serve up mediocre food with the package tourist in mind, others are more authentically <i>Mallorquin</i>' (p. 130 of RG Mallorca)</p>	<p>'Once away from the holiday costas, you could only be in Spain' (LP – Spain)</p>	<p>'Rates about midway on the authentic scale, and offers the traditional menu <i>sidrería</i>' (p. 436)</p>
*Accessibility:	*Accessibility	*Accessibility
<p>'Going to the police, finding your hotel room double-booked, or simply needing to make an urgent phone call can prove to be frustratingly complicated, making a certain determination and a laid-back attitude essential requirements for a pleasant trip here, particularly for exploring less visited parts of the country' (Roughguides.com – Cuba)</p>	<p>'Passable roads' (LP – China)</p> <p>'I discovered a little explored village . . . and it's well off the beaten track . . . for now' (LP – India)</p>	<p>'The Picos are easily accessed' (p. 527)</p> <p>'It's not the best walk if you're not a fan of heights or enclosed spaces . . . It's incredibly popular' (p. 533)</p>



sentences read: 'Unless you're travelling on a rail pass, buses will probably meet most of your transport needs; many smaller villages are *accessible only by bus*, almost always leaving from the capital of their province' (emphasis added, p. 30). The continued manifestation of such clauses and extended sentences prompted the coding of inaccessibility as a potentially significant theme, one that involved a process of idealization and problematization in an attempt to articulate a particular kind of relationship between the traveller and the object of their activities.

Mallorca is at its scenic best in the gnarled ridge of the Serra de Tramuntana, the *imposing* mountain range which stretches the length of the island's western shore, its rearing peaks and plunging sea cliffs intermittently *intercepted* by valleys of olive and citrus groves and dotted with the most beguiling of the island's towns and villages. There are several *possible routes* which take in the best of the region, but perhaps the most straightforward if you're reliant on public transport is to travel up from Palma to Soller, in the middle of the coast, and use this town as a *base*, making *selected forays* along the coastal road, the C710; not far away to the southwest lies the mountain village of Deia and the monastery of Valldemossa, while within *easy striking distance* to the northeast are the monastery of Lluc, the quaint town of Pollenca and the relaxing resort of Port de Pollenca. (emphasis added, p. 959)

In the above passage, key words and clauses have been highlighted that constitute the presence of a particular type of language use in the text. At the outset, the word 'imposing' articulates a daunting, oppositional force standing in front of the reader's path. The use of a similarly military word 'intercepted' further suggests that the imposing area lying in the path of the reader is *like a battlefield*. Then, the use of the clause 'possible routes' compounds the emerging battlefield scenario by suggesting that most routes are impossible and that finding a way through the front line will be a difficult feat. The text then suggests that towns should be used 'as a base' from which 'selected forays' can be made across the metaphorical front line. Finally, the use of the clause 'striking distance' makes a potential journey to the destination Lluc seem like mounting a short military mission.

The representation of an ostensibly military discourse in the text functions to suggest that travelling to this destination is *like* waging a war or going into battle. This metaphorical device acts to define the nature of the relationship between object and subject as difficult, challenging and requiring defiance and strategic thought. A sense of impenetrability or inaccessibility has been conveyed. However, the text, having erected this metaphorical barrier, does not steer the reader away from the battlefield, for it is actively directing the reader to towns, monasteries and resorts on the other side of the apparent front line. Significantly, through the invocation of a military discourse to convey a strong sense of inaccessibility, the would-be traveller is at the same instance semantically woven into the metaphorical position of something like a guerrilla fighter; the very character that could tackle the metaphorical battlefield and gain access to the otherwise inaccessible destinations.

A subject position is offered to the reader of the text as someone whose role as an independent traveller is to defy inaccessibility. Consequently, remote locations become idealized objects of interest, whose accessibility is made problematic for



the subject, so as to construct the relationship between object and subject in terms of defiance, adventure and guile.

Interpreting value

The text frequently articulated accommodation, eating and drinking, transportation and most other activities featured in the book in terms of the financial value imparted to the traveller. Like accessibility, getting good value was constructed as a thematic concern as well as an underlying value for the independent traveller. Reflected in the example below, this theme was invoked from the beginning of the guidebook in the 'basics' section and repeatedly played itself out in the rest of the book: 'Simple, *reasonably priced* rooms are still very widely available in Spain, and in almost any town you'll be able to get a no-frills double for around €15–21, a single for €9–15' (emphasis added, p. 42). The following extract is typical of discourse constructing the subject as someone who seeks 'good value': '*The best place to eat* is at the Hotel El Guia. *It may be a little formal* for some, *but the prices are very reasonable*, with a delicious menu del dia for around €15' (emphasis added, p. 960).

This sentence embodies a concession and counter-argument structure whereby one piece of discourse is tactically marginalized and subjugated by the other. The opening clause begins with the factual statement 'The best place to eat is . . .'. However, the text then places the discourse marker 'may' signalling a concession with regard to this factual statement – 'It *may* be a little formal . . .'. Immediately following this concession is the second discourse marker 'but', which signifies the counter-argument whose purpose it is to return the reader to, and harmonize them with, the initial factual statement – '*but* the prices are very reasonable'. The overall discursive effect of this structure is to resolve an anticipated contradiction in the text where readers might associate eating in a formal hotel with conspicuousness and high prices; a case of managing identity boundaries. If left unresolved, this statement could be seen to contradict the prevalent discourse of 'good value'. The statement, 'but the prices are very reasonable' acts to resolve this tension and return the reader in the direction of the initial statement 'The best place to eat is . . .', reaffirming the thematic proposition of good quality at low prices.

This passage operates a strategic juxtaposition between the 'good traveller' and 'bad tourist' by synthesizing a struggle between two alternative discourses seemingly in conflict – good value versus conspicuous tourism. The point is that in line with the normal, prominent discourse forwarded in the text one would not expect readers to eat in formal and potentially expensive hotels – beach shacks serving inexpensive tapas are clearly the order of the day. Here travellers are prepared, on occasion, to utilize establishments that appear to deviate from the norm so long as they resonate with the interpretive repertoire offered by the role of bargain hunter. Therefore, we can extend this interpretive position to incorporate a notion of independent traveller as utilitarian.



Constructing inauthenticity

The emergence and idealization of authenticity as a key theme in the text's construction of independent travel was identified through the recurring manifestation of words such as 'traditional', 'authentic' and 'real'. These words were often found to work in conjunction with the key cultural identities 'Spanish', 'Mallorcan', 'Balearic' or 'Catalan'. Significantly, many of these clauses such as 'authentically Mallorquin' (961) appeared juxtaposed against an inauthentic reality of Spain: evidencing discursive attempts to define appropriate and inappropriate kinds of relationships with objects of independent consumption. Not only did the text appear to invoke a tension between the inauthentic and authentic, but in all cases it formulated authenticity as the preferred option for readers.

The analysis of the excerpt below reveals more fully the purposefulness of the linguistic functioning of authenticity-related text.

In central Palma, especially along the harbour front and around Placa Llotja, *many restaurants are unashamedly geared to the tourist trade*, with menus in a babble of Euro-tongues. *Most serve perfectly reasonable food*, mainly grilled meats and fish, *but away from these enclaves you'll find that prices are a little lower and menus more exclusively Catalan and Spanish.* (emphasis added, pp. 955–6)

This paragraph embodies a linguistic structure in the form of a concession and counter-argument device. As mentioned previously, the general effect of this structure is to harmonize the reader with one piece of discourse by weaving it in and then subjugating an anticipated contradictory piece of discourse. In this case, the opening statement can be seen as the formulation of the dominant proposition: '*many restaurants are unashamedly geared to the tourist trade, with menus in a babble of Euro-tongues*'. This statement proposes that because of the (shameful) tourist trade, restaurants in this area do not reflect indigenous cuisine. This is an opening problematizing strand of discourse. Then follows something of a concession – the food is of a reasonable quality – which represents an anticipated contradiction to the previous sentence. Swiftly following this concession is the counter-argument, the effect of which is to subjugate this previous concession and return the reader to the initial proposition. Here, the discourse marker 'but' cues the counter-argument which, in line with the opening proposition, maintains the central proposition that 'authentic' (Spanish) cuisine can only be found away from these enclaves that appear to be unashamedly geared towards the tourist trade.

On a different level, the text can be seen to constitute a process by which authenticity is idealized and inauthenticity is actively constructed as a problematic issue. Within the text, this issue is elevated to constitute a potential barrier to travellers experiencing the 'real', 'authentic' Spain. Significantly, mirroring the discursive dynamics identified under the theme of 'reifying inaccessibility', the text simultaneously offers the reader the opportunity to surmount this perceived inauthenticity. This possibility for transcendence is evident where the texts actively direct readers away from 'staged' cultural experiences and towards ones that seem to represent more closely the cultural practices of the indigenous Spaniards.



Consequently, the repeated textual situations in which the authentic and inauthentic are juxtaposed and which see, in the end, the reader's transcendence over inauthenticity, implicitly suggest the reader as someone whose social role as an independent traveller is to avoid inauthenticity.

Discussion

In constructing knowledge about 'how to be' and 'how to act' as consumers, marketers and other actors in the culture industry significantly influence processes of consumption (Miller, 1987; Moisander and Pesonen, 2002; Schnaiberg, 1997; Shepherd, 2003; Venkatesh and Meamber, 2006). This raises fundamental concerns about the ability of the marketplace to accommodate or promote consumer autonomy, freedom and independence; ideals at the heart of the 'free market' and its model of consumer sovereignty. Accepting this position, the study aligned with those that anticipate the marketplace to put certain constraints upon consumer autonomy and in particular the potential for attaining an independent and liberating self-identity (Belk and Costa, 1998; Firat and Venkatesh, 1995; Schouten and McAlexander, 1995). However, it sought to extend these debates by illustrating how a specifically 'independent' discourse of consumption manages paradoxical tensions underlying consumers' attempts to become independent through the market.

In the previous section, we saw how the alternative guidebook helped to construct independent travel through three main explicit themes, and explored the concomitant practices that were identified as constitutive of the role of the independent traveller. We now turn to consider how these themes can be seen to engender relations of power by implicitly promoting a form of dependency between the reader and the guidebook itself. The key argument presented here is that by referencing the explicit instructions of the guidebook, the tourist, as a text practitioner, effectively 'becomes' an independent traveller, and is therefore inherently reliant upon the product for this transformation. Therefore, while apparently reflecting the market's ideology of independence, the three social processes highlighted by the analysis come to represent authorization, control and power over what independent travel is about and what independent travellers should do as part fulfilment of this role. The consumer of independent travel is implicitly situated in a position of inherent subjectivity to, and disempowerment by, these mediated market processes. This leads to the conclusion that independent travel is enacted, albeit contradictorily, in a context of security, reassurance and, ultimately, dependency.

Reifying inaccessibility, interpreting value, and constructing authenticity are explicit social processes that, in defining the appropriate meanings for the consumer, act to promote dependency between reader and guidebook. In this sense, *The Rough Guide* text can be seen both to make independent travel meaningful through a certain set of tourism practices and, at the same time, cement the tourist's dependency upon the text itself. This hegemonic bond is expected where



discourses of power unavoidably act to locate subjects (e.g. the traveller) within normalized 'ways of knowing' and 'ways of being' (Chiapello and Fairclough, 2002; Foucault, 1972; Ibarra-Colado et al., 2006; Medved and Kirby, 2005; Thompson, 2004). This resonates with other studies that contend that guidebooks play a key role in shaping how travellers are to engage with destinations (Bhattacharyya, 1997; Siegenthaler, 2002), but extends this line of reasoning to show how the identity of independent travellers, and the meaning of independent travel itself, are inextricably bound up in the discourse of alternative guidebooks.

How, though, is this contradiction between independence and dependence successfully maintained for the independent traveller to the attainment of an unconflicting self? The alternative guidebook offers tourists a *self-image* of risk, adventure and autonomy – an independent travel identity (Huxley, 2005; Noy, 2004; Sorensen, 2003). It also offers protection from the concomitant uncertainty, unfamiliarity and fear that independence in travel might be expected to bring. The modes of practice that confer this identity are characterized by a specific and idealized 'tourist gaze' (Urry, 1990) upon bargains, inaccessibility and authenticity, yet are underlined by a dependency embedded in the implicit instructions and normative values that construct this identity. By focusing the gaze upon a specific set of cultural practices we see how the text itself manages and reinforces important boundaries around subjectivity (Mills, 1995). Like Shepherd (2003), we observe a process in which the text strategically constructs binary opposites between appropriate and inappropriate modes of being. By continually redrawing boundaries around appropriate and inappropriate kinds of relationships, the text locates the consumer firmly within an ostensibly non-commercial, active and shrewd self-identity. Uniformly framed in these terms, the focus of the independent consumer gaze is squarely upon the available modes of 'freedom from' commercialism. As such, the notion of the independent traveller represents a powerful cultural myth to anchor understandings of tourist experiences and to give meaning to otherwise potentially contradictory tourism behaviours (Belk and Costa, 1998; Stern, 1995; Thompson, 2004). Here then, we see identity wrapped up not so much in tourist possessions (e.g. Belk, 1988) but in a set of meaningful, but in many ways quite mundane, social practices.

Conclusion

This study delineates the nature of independent travel as a cultural practice and explores the processes and paradoxes of marketized forms of independence. The alternative guidebook is a key repository of cultural knowledge and signification about independence, and discourse analysis illustrates how independence is constructed and given meaning for consumption by the independent traveller. These observations are particularly significant given that independent travel, by definition, is typically identified as a tourism practice that is more autonomous, empowered and free than other types of tourism. Our analysis offers an alternative interpretation that suggests independent travel is simultaneously a controlled and



constrained tourism practice. The study contrasts with Hyde and Lawson (2003), who characterize independent travellers as experiencing an evolving itinerary, a willingness to take risks, and having a desire to experience the unplanned. The discourse of alternative guidebooks suggests a tightly defined set of predetermined itineraries that enable the traveller to defy inaccessibility and avoid inauthenticity; a comforting security in knowing how this can be achieved, and in the most cost-effective way; and offering a thoroughly mediated travel experience. CDA's dual concern with the explicit and implicit meanings of text is well-placed to enable enquiry into the hegemonic nature of the relationship between the producer and consumer of independence at a deeper, more critical level. This identifies the nature of consumer freedom within a market predicated upon and largely justified through an ideology of independence. At the same time, CDA, as with all modes of text-based enquiry, leaves a number of perspectives available for further scrutiny. It is not simply a matter of seeking to establish whether there is sufficient evidence of these themes in expressed or manifest behaviour. Indeed, were such observations to be recorded in actual consumer action it would be necessary to move towards a more ironic, cynical and playful account of the use of text.

But these types of actions and readings would not, in and of themselves, represent action outside of the parameters discussed here. Constructive developments could usefully explore the symbolic role that alternative guidebooks play in the on-going identity construction of independent travellers, both in terms of their positive and negative contributions to a sense of personal independence. Here, more critical approaches may support such inquiry, especially where there is call for closer examination of the negative, disempowering and marginalizing features of market-based relationships both for the consumers who take part in them and for society more broadly (Denzin, 2001).

The analysis serves to further highlight the socially constructed nature of independence in marketing discourse. It also throws further light on the power of the market over consumers, even within consumption practices that are most obviously concerned with being autonomous and free. The myth of independence is shown to operate as a powerful marketing differentiator that allows consumers a viable space in which to construct a positive and valued sense of self. Highly opposing experiences are able to co-exist in a kind of mutual consumer symbiosis, whereby the myth of the independent traveller, and the romantic search for the authentic (Campbell, 1986) are able to sit alongside the realities of mass-produced independent tour guides and commodified destinations. As this contradiction, which lies at the heart of many consumer encounters, becomes more prolific, critical discourse analysis is able to illustrate how consumers are able to mediate tensions in such a way as not to diminish the value and meaning that can be enacted.



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