



Academy of Marketing Conference 2025

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CONTINUE

**Submission ID**

332

**Title (required)**

The Anti-Mythical Myths of TikTok's #Underconsumptioncore: The Market Capture of Gendered Sustainability

**Summary Statement (required)**

This Žižek-Fisherian analysis of TikTok's '#underconsumptioncore', a trend that aestheticises conscientious individual consumption, illuminates how consumer counter-mythologies underscore the contestations of resisting capitalist realism within its cultural and digital ecosystems. Despite providing a performative forum for questioning several myths inherent to marketplace ideologies, #underconsumptioncore deflects systemic critique by reifying the social phenomenology of consumer culture it purportedly resists. Underconsumption's post-political attachments to feminised personal responsibility and "ethical elitism" risk entrenching individualistic-narcissistic subjectivities and socio-economic hierarchies.

**Track (required)**

6. CCT

**Competitive Short Paper (required)**

Taking anti-consumption movements as "partial, flawed, or contradictory critiques of consumerism...from within" (Wood, 2020:2756), this conceptual paper critically analyses the socio-environmental affordances of online anti-consumption movements against the backdrop of post-political market fundamentalism. While critical consumer research underscores the power differentials underpinning individuals' and groups' resistance to market omnipotence, less is known about how resistance efforts can themselves feed market capture and rejuvenation (Hoang et al., 2023; Jones and Hietanen, 2023). Grounded in TikTok's #underconsumptioncore: a gendered social media 'trend' showcasing minimalist lifestyles, thrifted, reused and recycled items, and other modes of domestic (non)consumption, we use critical feminist insights to analyse how #underconsumptioncore visualises and valorises often obscured routines of feminised care and social reproduction (Chatzidakis and Maclaran, 2022). Nonetheless, in absence of a shared political locus and clear adversary, we argue that digital anti-consumption movements, while offering alternative

myths of capitalist realism (Fisher, 2009), including fantasies of 'infinite growth', 'accumulation as self-edification', and 'neophilia', thus providing opportunities to overturn the fatalistic belief that there is no realistic alternative to market fundamentalism. We therefore consider #underconsumptioncore as a form of "feminist care": offering a progressive politics of gender, sustainability, and inter-species living that foregrounds the transformative potential of quotidian routine (Wide and Parry, 2022). Nevertheless, by critically rethinking Kristensen et al.'s (2011) concept of 'consumer counter-mythologies', we identify how underconsumption—when aestheticised, moralised, and tribalised—deflects systemic critique by reifying the social phenomenology of consumer culture.

Using critical insights from Mark Fisher and Slavoj Žižek, we argue that '#underconsumptioncore', as a network of feminised-domestic consumer counter-mythologies, fetishises individual action while obscuring the necessity of collective structural change. Following Fisher's (2009:13) assertion that 'capitalism...relies on [a] structure of disavowal', #underconsumptioncore can be understood as an "anti-mythical myth", whereby the rejection of conspicuous over-consumption operates as a strawman for lack of a viable political-economic alternative to the capitalist status-quo. Though it supplants proximal mythic structures of consumer culture with its own ostensibly subversive counter-myths, including reifying socially reproductive ecologies usually obscured from mainstream market systems (Chatzidakis and Maclaran, 2022:159), #underconsumptioncore nevertheless ossifies the single most destructive arch-fantasy of capitalist realism: that individual consumer choices are enough to mitigate the excesses of the market. Recognising Žižek's concept of *jouissance* (enjoyment), we also suggest #underconsumption's co-optation of thrift as a marker of cultural capital and moral virtuosity risks entrenching systemic inequalities and perpetuating socio-economic hierarchies and gendered divisions of labour.

This paper contributes to literatures on market capture by identifying the inherent misdirection—or "obscene underside" (Žižek, 2002)—of consumer counter-mythologies: while counter-myths may offer alternatives to established marketplace ideologies, they nevertheless function in support of, rather than against, capitalism's overall administration of life and subjectivity. We conclude that #underconsumptioncore obscenely supplements capitalist realism, and that the true fetish in consumer counter-mythologies lies not in the counter-myths themselves, but in the social relations and ideologies they mask.

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## Keyword 1 (required)

Consumption

## Keyword 2

Online Communities

## Keyword 3

Gender

## Doctoral Research (required)

☒ Yes

☐ No

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