A Family Systems Interpretation of how Subsistence Consumers Manage: The Case of South Africa

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Abstract
How do people with few material resources manage their consumption lives? We address this question by investigating the consumption practices and processes of 27 subsistence consumers in South Africa. These individuals are economically active, underserved consumers who either had in the past or have today few resources in terms of income, employment, and education; most of these consumer-informants grew up in and/or live in urban townships populated by poor black South Africans. Our interpretation is based on family systems theory and centers on analyses showing that subsistence consumers enact strategies to cope with the chronic stress of resource allocation needs for the family that outpace resource generation. The repertoire of strategies includes: (1) adhering to resource generation opportunities, (2) accessing new resources, (3) talking to family members, (4) trying and striving, (5) sacrificing, and (6) risking. These strategies are discussed in light of family systems theory, consumer behavior research, and marketing to subsistence consumers.

Citation

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