University of Chester Business School Research Seminar Series 2014/15

SYNOPSIS AND BIOGRAPHY – Terry Smith

Title: The Meaning of Consumption

Date: Tuesday 11th November 2014

Abstract: Marketing, according to Firat (1993:76), is the “ultimate social practice of postmodern consumer culture”. Indeed, Miller’s claim that “marketing is not just one of the most important ideas in business, but has become the most dominant force in human culture” (2009:37), places marketing as the driving force of capitalism, the force majeur being the consumption of brands.

Consequently, the “un-contestable hegemony of consumer capitalism” (Gabriel and Lang, 2006:2) as the prevailing ideology of our times therefore locates consumption as the primary creator and driver of production, competition, innovation, value and, latterly, values. Company and consumer are locked in symbolic symbiotic relationships of bonded loyalty, not merely centred on the creation of ‘value propositions’ and ‘lifetime customer value’, but very much about the consumerist consumption of values. The exchange value has become the exchange of values; the meaning of consumption is the consumption of meaning.

This first Seminar in this term’s Chester Research Forum will examine what Holt (2002) refers to as the “cultural authority narrative” where marketers are portrayed as cultural engineers seducing consumers to “participate in a system of commodified meanings embedded in brands” (p.71). The discussion presents a critical examination of the dominant academic, political, cultural and ecological discourses which constitute and contribute to this debate. At its heart is a delusion of choice, an illusion of freedom and the imperative of control, shifting priority from conspicuous consumption to conscientious conscience consumption.

Biography: Terry Smith has been a Senior Lecturer in Marketing at the University of Chester Business School for nearly 10 years now, teaching across the full Marketing spectrum but specialising in Marketing Communications, Buyer Behaviour and Service Marketing. Currently completing a PhD, his research and writing focuses on branding, consumer behaviour, marketing communications and critical marketing. Terry has had over 18 years’ experience in a number of senior B2B Marketing positions and an equivalent time in Higher Education. He has a particular research and writing focus on the “Marketing of Meaning” and has published a major text book, book chapter and a number of journal articles which reflects this:

• “Context into text into context: marketing practice into theory; marketing theory into practice” Smith et al (2014). Journal of Marketing Research and Planning
• Brand salience not brand science: a brand narrative approach to sustaining brand longevity’ published in the Marketing Review March 2011.