Collins’S Interaction Ritual Theory: Using Interaction Rituals to Conceptualize How Objects Become Sacred Symbols

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Numerous marketing articles have been published on special possessions emphasizing the roles that objects play in constructing identity or self. While these articles emphasize the importance of special possessions, there has been a dearth of theory and understanding as to how these objects are commissioned as “special” by the consumer. Currently unbeknownst to marketers, Collins’s Interaction Ritual Theory provides a new conceptual tool by which marketers can investigate this consumer selection process. By examining consumer’s interaction rituals, marketers can gain a better understanding of the process by which objects become sacred, that is to say how material objects become special possessions symbolically representing previous positive interactions.

[to cite]:

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/12536/volumes/v34/NA-34

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Temporal strategies were the most common (127), followed by probabilistic (85), spatial (21), and social/self (3). These results indicate that temporal and probabilistic strategies are the most commonly used strategies. Specifically, budgeting was by far the most common self-control strategy used by consumers.

The data collected in study 1 also allowed for a test regarding the number of self-control strategies used by individuals differing in their level of self-control. Responses to Tangney et al.’s (2004) 13-item self-control measure were averaged to form an index (?=0.83). The sample was then split three ways to represent low, medium, and high self-control groups. A one-way ANOVA revealed the predicted curvilinear relationship among the three groups, with the greatest number of different strategies being used by those in the moderate self-control group (MLowSC=2.77, MMediumSC=3.44, MHighSC=2.69, F=2.82, p=.066).

Summary
Although previous research has investigated the ability of various self-control theories to explain a variety of consumer behaviors, only limited research has focused on understanding the strategies used to combat self-control failure. The present CLT based approach for organizing and understanding self-control strategies serves to enlighten previous research on self-control and provides a foundation for future related work. Increasing understanding of how, when, and why particular self-control strategies are used provides an important avenue for enlightening the problems associated with self-control failure.

References

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Abstract
Numerous marketing articles have been published on special possessions emphasizing the roles that objects play in constructing identity or self. While these articles emphasize the importance of special possessions, there has been a dearth of theory and understanding as to how these objects are commissioned as “special” by the consumer. Currently unknown to marketers, Collins’s Interaction Ritual Theory provides a new conceptual tool by which marketers can investigate this consumer selection process. By examining consumer’s interaction rituals, marketers can gain a better understanding of how objects become sacred, that is to say how material objects become special possessions symbolically representing previous positive interactions.

Summary
It was not until the late 1970s that sociologists like Heise (1979), Hochschild (1979), Kemper (1978), and Shott (1979) undertook the systematic study of emotions. In retrospect, this late date is remarkable in spite of the fact that emotions permeate virtually every aspect of human experience. How could a majority of sociologists have turned a blind eye to emotions all this time? Not all of them did, but with relatively few exceptions, sociologists had studied just about every aspect of human behavior and somehow given comparatively little attention to the dynamics of emotion (Turner & Stets 2005). Historically, it seems that Western thought has juxtaposed emotion or affect and cognition. Cognition is often associated with rational thinking, such as information processing models. However, research on the neurology of emotions now demonstrates that this is simply incorrect. Data clearly indicate that when areas of the cerebral cortex, particularly the prefrontal lobe, are disconnected from subcortical emotion centers of the brain, individuals have difficulty making decisions of any kind and almost always make what appear to be irrational or at least suboptimal decisions (Damasio 1994, 2003). Thus, human rationality and, more generally, decision making are dependent on emotions, and without them, individuals cannot attach valences or utilities (Turner & Stets 2005). Therefore, emotions make individual decisions, social structures, and systems of cultural symbols viable. Conversely, emotions are also what can drive people apart and push them to tear down social structures and challenge cultural traditions (i.e. Berlin wall). Thus, experience, behavior, interaction, and organization are connected to the mobilization and expression of emotions and greatly need to be
more understood at the individual level of consumption. Randall Collins (2004) argues that emotions are the common denominator of rationality because rationality depends on assessing the utility (or capacity to bestow positive affect) of alternative lines of conduct. Hence, in general, sociological theories of emotion assume that people pursue lines of conduct that bring about positive emotional outcomes and try at all costs to avoid experiences that lead to negative emotional consequences. Using this assumption of emotional behavior, it is the purpose of this paper to bring to light Collins’s Interaction Ritual Theory and its possible impact on marketing literature in understanding how emotions transform symbols (objects) into sacred artifacts for groups and individuals.

Collins explains that the interaction ritual is an emotional transformer, turning some transient emotions (e.g. joy, happiness, fear) into other enduring emotions (privilege, power, status acceptance or rejection) as outcomes representing emotional energy that is carried across situations. Collins gives us a model by which this emotional transformation process occurs. For a ritualistic situation to produce emotional energy, there are some necessary ingredients required of the situation. First, there must be a co-presence of bodies or a group assembly (more than one). According to Collins, an interaction ritual cannot occur by one’s self. Next, barriers to outsiders must be established. These can be physical barriers like house walls or a group of girls standing in a tight circle, or these barriers can be psychological. Either way, a person commonly knows whether they are on the inside or outside of the interaction circle. Thirdly, there must be mutual focus of attention by all persons in the ritual. People focus their attention upon a common object or activity, and by communicating this focus to each other become mutually aware of each other’s focus of attention. Finally, there must be shared common mood or emotional experience among the individuals. Ingredients three and four become a feedback loop that intensifies through rhythmic entrainment, meaning that as the persons become more tightly focused on their common activity, more aware of what each other is doing and feeling, and more aware of each other’s awareness, they experience their shared emotion more intensely, as it comes to dominate their awareness.

This feedback intensification then produces collective effervescence, or what Durkheim called collective consciousness, which is the collective situation engrossment or participation in the moment that results in shared common excitement. This process then produces very specific ritualistic outcomes that become important only to the group who experienced the collective effervescence. The first outcome is group solidarity or group identity, which is a feeling of membership to each person. Secondly, each member receives emotional energy, or a feeling of confidence, elation, strength, enthusiasm, and initiative in taking action, which is able to be transferred beyond just this interaction ritual. Thirdly, emblems or other representations (object, visual icons, words, gestures even) become sacred symbols of social relationship. These artifacts are representative of the group interaction and only the interaction. These objects are not sacred to those who did not experience the interaction ritual, but only to the participants. And finally, the group develops standards of morality or the sense of rightness in adhering to group norms, especially concerning the sacred symbols. Participants respect these symbols and will even defend them against group transgressors or outsider’s violations of the symbols. Therefore, it is clear to see how Collins’s IR Theory describes the process by which symbols or objects become sacred to a group or individual, and how these objects become symbolic representations of positive emotional rituals.

Within a marketing context, numerous articles have been published on special possessions and the roles that these objects play in constructing identity or a sense of self (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton 1981; Belk 1988; Curasi, Price, & Arnould 2004; Ahuvia 2004). While these articles emphasize the importance of special possessions, there has been a dearth of theory and understanding as to how these objects are commissioned as “special” by the consumer. Currently unbeknownst to marketers, Collins’s Interaction Ritual Theory provides a new innovative conceptual tool by which marketers can investigate this arena of the consumer selection process. By examining consumer’s interaction rituals, marketers will be able to gain a better understanding of the process by which objects become sacred, that is to say how material objects become special possessions symbolically representing previous positive interactions.

References
Increasing Persuasion, Reducing Resistance: Maximizing the Efficacy of Persuasive Appeals for Esthetic Product Consumption

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Consumers are inundated with messages via print, television, Websites and interpersonal conversations—all with the purpose of inducing a certain behavior or eliciting attitude change. The choice decision process has increased in complexity as consumers are presented with more and more options in today’s marketplace. In some cases, the consumer may have difficulty in arriving at a decision.

Knowles and Linn (2004) propose that there are two different ways to persuade people to accept alternatives. Using Dollard and Miller’s (1959; Miller 1944, 1959) approach-avoidance conflict model as a conceptual framework, Knowles and Linn (2004) introduce two different strategies for promoting movement toward a goal: Alpha and Omega strategies. Alpha strategies activate the approach forces, thereby increasing motivation to move toward the goal. Alpha strategies have a long tradition in the marketing literature. Offerings are made more attractive by adding incentives, creating more convincing reasons, and finding more credible sources (Knowles and Linn 2004).

Conversely, Omega strategies promote change by minimizing the avoidance forces, reducing the motivation or resistance to move away from the goal. Omega strategies have appeared less frequently in the influence literature. Examples of Omega strategies, as codified by Knowles and Linn (2004), include sidestepping resistance, addressing resistance directly, addressing resistance indirectly, distracting resistance, disrupting resistance, consuming resistance and using resistance to promote change.

The purpose of this study is to examine the effectiveness of using both Alpha and Omega persuasive message appeals in a consumption domain where consumers express or exhibit some resistance—attending the symphony orchestra.

Attendance at Symphony Orchestras

The symphony orchestra, one of the oldest artistic institutions in America, is facing declining audiences (Wang 2003). Nationwide, the average age of consumers who attend orchestra performances is 57; sadly, audiences of many local and regional orchestras are dying off (NEA 2002; Winzenreid 2004; Page 2005). Critics admonish that as the segment that appreciates this art form dwindles, the local orchestra may cease to be a beacon of civic pride. (Brooke 2005).

Symphony orchestras face a challenge in finding convincing ways to communicate to younger consumers the affordability and enjoyment of attending the symphony. In order to ensure survival, marketing managers should look to develop innovative marketing practices to attract new and younger audiences. Subsequently, this involves tailoring elements of the marketing mix to meet the needs of younger audiences. One way marketing managers can go about targeting younger audiences is by developing marketing communications with the goal of reaching this segment. In addition to emphasizing the benefits of attending a symphony orchestra performance, the resistance that younger consumers might have to such an experience should be addressed.

Two studies in this paper assess the efficacy of various persuasive appeals directed toward younger adults in encouraging them to attend the symphony orchestra. In Study 1, Alpha and Omega influence strategies as well as self- and other-referencing techniques were examined for their efficacy in engendering favorable attitudes and strong behavioral intentions towards attending the symphony orchestra. The moderating role of affect intensity (Larsen 1984) was also examined to ascertain whether individuals that have more favorable attitudes toward attending a symphony orchestra performance possesses this trait in greater magnitudes.

Study 2 complemented Study 1 by further examining the effectiveness of Alpha and Omega influence strategies, but in the context of temporal framing. Additionally, ego-control (Block 1980, 2002), or the inhibition/expression of impulse, was examined for moderating effects on temporal frame.

Study 1

Study 1 was a between-subjects experiment that included manipulations of advertisements using both Alpha and Omega influence strategies as well as self- and other-referencing. The experiment was a 3 (Alpha/Alpha-Add Incentive/Omega- Acknowledge-Validate Resistance) x 2 (Self/Other Referencing) x (High/Low Affect Intensity) between subjects design. A total of 119 students from a southern university participated in the study.

The Alpha condition was a “traditional” advertisement that made the symphony orchestra experience appear “enjoyable, exciting and dramatic;” the benefits of attending the symphony orchestra were emphasized. The Alpha-Add incentive condition included the same enticing appeal but also offered a free T-shirt with each ticket purchase. The Omega-Acknowledgement/Validation condition confronted resistance by acknowledging that one “might think that the symphony is dull and boring”. All three conditions referenced the self by use of first person (i.e., “you want to be sure to experience this enjoyable evening”) or referencing others, by use of third person (i.e., “everyone should be sure to be a part of this enjoyable evening”). All ads indicated that student tickets were available.

In study 1, it was found that individuals that possessed greater magnitudes of the emotional component of affect intensity expressed more favorable attitudes (M=4.48 and M=4.01, p<.05) and behavioral intentions ( M= 3.96 and M=3.52, p.05) toward attending the symphony orchestra. Additionally, in the Alpha: Add Incentive and Omega: Acknowledge/Validate conditions, individuals that exhibited high levels of affect intensity expressed stronger intentions toward attending the symphony orchestra than those in the traditional Alpha condition. Furthermore, self-referencing played an important role in increasing the persuasive impact of the advertising appeals, particularly for those that exhibited high levels of the intensity component of affect intensity.

Study 2

A total of 110 students from a southern university participated in Study 2. The experiment was a 2 (Alpha-Discount/Omega-Guarantee) x 2 (Proximal/Distal Temporal Frame) x 2 (High/Low Ego-control) between subjects design.