Consumers Tripping Over Their Roots

Dale Russell, INSEAD, France

This research introduces the concept of ancestral tourism within the greater realm of cultural tourism. Ancestral tourism refers to those experiences when consumers seek a sense of self by returning to the lands of their ancestors. A conceptual model for the phenomenon is proposed that draws from the aging, authenticity and experiential consumption literatures. Participant observation, interviews and survey data collected from consumers of British and Irish descent on a tour to their ancestral land provide support for the proposed relationships between age, perceptions of authenticity, cultural and overall tour satisfaction and tangible and intangible consumption of ancestral experiences.

[to cite]:

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/12655/volumes/v34/NA-34

[copyright notice]:
This work is copyrighted by The Association for Consumer Research. For permission to copy or use this work in whole or in part, please contact the Copyright Clearance Center at http://www.copyright.com/.
that their new notebook has no bad pixel, or their chances of defective sheet of paper in a new textbook are lower than those of others. These phenomena can be widely observed from trivial goods to costly service such as lasik or plastic surgery.

However this bias causes many problems for both companies and consumers. Despite companies’ efforts to make consumers’ attention to possible risks associated with the products, consumers seldom think a problem ever happens to themselves. Because of this bias, the cost which both consumers and companies should pay increases. Consumers may have to visit a store again. Or they may face a fatal accident without replacing a defective product with new one(e.g. ignoring expiration date in daily products). Automakers may lose their chance of early recall and even face a fatal lawsuit together with bad brand image.

As a follow up study of previous research on self-positivity bias, this study assumes that consumers perceive those products they possesses to be better than those possessed by others, and other same products. They think that the chance of negative outcome associated with their possessions will be less likely than that associated with products owned by others.

Because self-positivity bias originated from the wrong perception of self-risk, we can seemingly assume that this kind of bias will be related to products we have. In addition previous studies on the cause of self-positivity bias show that the bias also occurs in case of products. That is, the product-level bias can also make people deny possible risk(Raghuir and Menon, 1998), reduce anxiety associated with uncertainty of outcome(Taylor and Brown, 1988) and make self-esteem maintenance(Weinstein, 1980). Moreover many studies of both psychological and qualitative studies in consumer behavior indicated that much of our psychological mechanism has carryover to our product by possession. McClelland(1951) suggested that external object become viewed as part of self when we are able to control over them. And Belk(1988) argued that possessions give us magical psychological identification. With Weinstein’s view, self-concept theory and identity theory can also be applied to our hypothesis that the more people own familiarity with self-allied product, the more they may have a psychological bias associated with their products. Therefore we can also hypothesize that the more familiar or self-closer product which satisfies higher self-esteem maintenance has more bias similar to ours. If consumers consider their own product is more familiar, they believe their possessions will not be associated with negative events.

Experiments were employed to demonstrate the bias and to find the effective moderators of this increasing my-own-product risk perception. In the first experiment which was disguised as a blind test, we used 3(target owner)*3(products by familiarity rating) design to test that people judge (a) their possessions as being at lower risk than other’s and (b) possessions they consider to be more familiar to them to be at lower risk than those less familiar to them. Our new familiarity rating was designed by scales used in previous studies of familiarity scale, self score and intimacy scale, including expected use time and perceived closeness, etc. After offering a newspaper article of a rare but critical error about a product, we gave them a sample and asked them to write down the chance of error of their own. Other groups were offered the same article but asked to write down the chance of error before getting product.

The results of this study indicated that people who had his own product estimate the chance of defectives to be lower than those who didn’t. A product highly scored in familiarity rating was perceived to have lower risk. These results supported our hypothesis that consumers project some biases to their owned product.

The subsequent experiment in progress focuses on how to develop an effective “notice” for reducing the product positivity bias. In a pilot study using a new textbook (“Consumer Behavior”) in our class, we found that noticing a negative event which occurred to a similar group member reduced the bias and eventually increase risk-perception.

From the view of Lin and his colleagues(2003), perceived controllability will be considered to be designed. By showing the notice which says that the end of refund period is coming soon, controllability condition will be manipulated. The effects of some moderators, framing message cue(Chandran and Menon, 2004), information accessibility(Raghuir and Menon, 1998) -will be examined in the experiments.

This paper suggests that self-positivity bias can also occur in case of products and explores how the bias will be reduced. Future study will focus on what and how biases of consumer are carried over to product and its effective method to reduce it.

References

Consumers Tripping Over Their Roots
Dale Russell, INSEAD, France

“I really did the tour as a ‘roots’ exercise and to fit many parts of the jigsaw puzzle that is my heritage, the considerable reading and conceptual development of a lifetime of being New Zealand / British in outlook, and to enjoy the ‘green, green grass of my ancestral home’ so to speak.” (Male, 60, New Zealand)

The growth in global tourism is fueled in part by retirees, primarily from developed countries, born immediately following World War II and now entering retirement age. The premise of this research is that these consumers are using their savings to not only explore
the world, but also to seek a sense of self by returning to the lands of their ancestors, a phenomenon we call ancestral tourism. Where hedonic tourism has been deemed a “nonrational” expenditure as it provides only pleasure to the tourist, ancestral tourism can provide a sense of self by glimpsing at one’s ancestral past (MacCannell 2002, 150).

This research documents the phenomenon of ancestral tourism using a multi-method approach and tests a conceptual model that integrates the extant research on aging, the consumption of authenticity and satisfaction. As consumers grow older, they become reflective on life and develop a need of personal fulfillment that cannot be satisfied by tangible goods. Older consumers often enter a phase whereby they look to dispose of their possessions, which have both sentimental and monetary value, while seeking satisfaction from intangibles (Price, Arnould and Curasi 2000), a process likely to be reflected in the consumption of ancestral touristic experiences. Previous research has attributed a consumer’s search for authenticity as a trek for fulfillment, comparable to that of a religious pilgrim seeking enlightenment (Goulding 2000). This is even more salient for cultural tourists, especially those from western cultures, whose desire to partake in authentic cultural experiences is often the primary objective of their trip (Grayson and Martinec 2004; MacCannell 2002; 1999).

The research was conducted in the context of a 25-day guided bus tour of the United Kingdom (UK) and Ireland; a tour selected because nearly all customers who bought this package in the past were of British or Irish descent and generally resided in former colonies. Therefore, this group of consumers would most likely seek ancestral cultural experiences. The methodological approach was threefold, comprising interviews, observations, and surveys. The triangulation of data served as a validity check while also adding a better understanding to the social behaviors and meanings invoked from the experience (Grayson and Martinec 2005; Hammersley and Atkinson 1995; Arnould and Wallendorf 1994). In an effort to better observe the tour phenomenon, the author actively partook in the tour and optional excursions. The researcher’s direct participation in the tour allowed for better understanding and appreciation of the ancestral tourism phenomenon, as well as detailed observations (Belk, Wallendorf and Sherry 1989).

The tour was designed to expose participants to as much of the UK and Ireland as possible in a short period of time. It was led by a professional tour guide with nearly 20 years of experience. The group consisted of 39 people (18 males / 21 females, mean age of 59), all of them from former British colonies, namely Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the US. The interviews were conducted individually, at the onset of the tour. Exploratory in nature, they sought information regarding the pre-trip planning process, tour expectations, and general background and demographic data. The contents of interviews were then assessed to identify themes to develop a survey instrument. Participant observation was conducted throughout the tour with the researcher maintaining an unobtrusive profile as not to detract from the natural tour experience or bias later survey responses and to maintain the ability to observe from the distance (Palmer 2001; Arnould and Wallendorf 1994). The researcher was able to take detailed notes and pictures of events without drawing attention as such activities are normal for tourists. The survey was administered on the final day of the tour to all participants. The constructs captured the themes identified during the interviews and items to measure them were intermixed. The constructs in the model included: pre-trip expectations, perception of tour as ancestral pilgrimage, perception of tour experience as authentic, cultural experience satisfaction, overall tour satisfaction and likelihood to recommend tour. The last series of questions captured the number of optional tours, the number of souvenirs bought for oneself and the number of those bought for someone else. Finally, demographic information was collected, including age, gender, country-of-origin, country-of-residence, and whether the ancestors emanated from the UK or Ireland.

The survey data along with the qualitative interviews and observations provided rich insights into the phenomenon of ancestral tourism. All participants whose ancestors hailed from the UK or Ireland reported that they considered the trip as a pilgrimage, as the opening quote illustrates. Correlational analysis supported the relationships proposed in the conceptual model. For instance, age was significantly and positively related to the overall number of tours options purchased but negatively related to the number of souvenirs purchased for oneself while positively related to the number of souvenirs purchased for other people. Many participants’ comments reflected a detachment from material possessions at the approach of death, some with a humorous view, others with a more pragmatic one. In turn, the consumption of intangible experiences, such as the optional tours, positively affected perceptions of authenticity and, in turn, overall cultural satisfaction. Among the most important findings was the crucial role that perceptions of authenticity and cultural experiences play in assessing the value of the ancestral tourism experience. Albeit limited by the relatively small size of the group studied, this research provides insights into consumers in search of authentic ancestral experiences.

References
Affect Without Cognition

Jingjing Ma, Peking University, China
Li Zhang, Peking University, China
Xinxin Ma, Central University for Nationalities, China

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Do you find young fellows emotional? Do you think that their decisions are often whimsical? Have you noticed that they often buy brands and products that they have no idea of? Then why do they buy? These are the questions regarding brand attitude formation mechanism that is universally accepted as a concept model: cognition-affect-conation. This study tests the model using Chinese young consumers as a sample.

Hypotheses

One question this study seeks to answer is whether brand personality identification, as an affective factor, significantly influences brand buying intention, a conation factor. Nowadays Chinese young generation’s value system has changed dramatically. Traditional Chinese notions, such as “Restraint and Obedience” and “Connotation and Introversion” have been replaced by “Do what you like” and “Show your own personality”. As a result, the consumption notion of Chinese young generation has also changed. Young consumers pay much attention to products that can show their own personality and demonstrate their own life styles. Then our first hypothesis is: For Chinese young consumers, brand personality identification significantly influences their brand buying intention.

The second question this study seeks to answer is whether Chinese young consumers’ buying intention of foreign brands is influenced by brand personality cognition. Since late 1970’s, Chinese have more contacts with the west and therefore known more about western world. Chinese young generation has grown up with western products and values. As frequently pointed out by both media and academia, foreign brand personality cognition significantly influences Chinese consumers’ brand buying intention. Therefore our second hypothesis is: Chinese young consumers’ cognition of foreign brands personality significantly influences their foreign brand buying intention.

Method

Thirty college students enrolled in a well-known university located in Beijing were randomly chosen as participants. In-depth interviews were conducted before a questionnaire was developed. The purpose of the interviews was to identify a pair of brands that could best reflect American culture and Chinese culture respectively. Questions were asked for each of the interviewees: 1) Which American drink/restaurant/apparel brand do you think that can best reflect American culture? 2) Which Chinese drink/restaurant/apparel brand do you think that can best reflect Chinese culture? Results showed that Coca Cola (90% responses) and Xihulongjing tea (70% responses) were thought to best reflect the two distinct cultures by the interviewees. Thus Coca Cola and Xihulongjing tea were finalized as the stimulators for the following survey.

A draft questionnaire was developed based on the interviews and relevant literatures. A pilot test was conducted to check the wording and time span for filling up the draft questionnaire. A questionnaire was then finalized. It comprises measurements of brand personality cognitive strength, brand personality distinctiveness and brand personality identification of both Coca Cola and Xihulongjing tea (independent variables), and measurements of buying intention of both Coca Cola and Xihulongjing tea (dependent variables).

Questionnaire survey was conducted in six major universities located in Beijing. A total of 1,000 questionnaires were distributed and 932 usable ones were returned, with a response rate of 93.2%.

Results

Our first hypothesis is supported. The regression results show that brand personality identification significantly influences buying intention of both Coca Cola and Xihulongjing tea. Young consumers would like to buy the brands that can reflect their personality. This result is consistent with many psychology and marketing theories and research findings. Meanwhile it reveals that popular values of Chinese young generation such as showing their own personality, having their own life styles and expressing themselves influence their buying intention significantly.

Our second hypothesis is rejected. Results show that brand personality cognitive strength and brand personality distinctiveness, as cognitive variables, do not have significant influence on buying intention of foreign brand Coca Cola. It is generally accepted by the academia that cognition is the premise of affect and cognition and affect influence conation. However, buying intention of Coca Cola is only influenced by the affective factor, brand personality identification, not by cognitive factors. Here affect functions independent of cognition. On the contrary, buying intention of Xihulongjing tea is significantly influenced by both cognitive and affective factors, fitting the cognition-affect-conation model perfectly.

Discussion

This research comes up with two very interesting findings: brand buying intention of Chinese young consumers is significantly influenced by their brand personality identification, no matter whether the brand is foreign or domestic. However their brand buying intention is significantly influenced by their cognition of the domestic brand but not the foreign brand. The findings suggest that for Chinese young consumers, the impacts of brand cognition and affect on buying intention may vary between domestic and foreign brands. In the discussion section we will explore the underlying reasons of these findings and the conditions under which they happen. We will also discuss theoretical and managerial implications of this research for consumer behavior and marketing strategies.

References

Fishbein, Martin and Icek Ajzen (1975), Belief, Attitude, Intention, and Behavior: An Introduction to Theory and Research, Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
Peng, K. P. (1999), Cultural Psychology, Department of Psychology, University of California, Berkeley.