The Value of Ritual Theory For Understanding Alcohol Consumption Behaviours

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This paper explores how theories of ritual can lead to a richer understanding of alcohol consumption behaviours. The research challenges studies of drinking patterns which reduce the phenomenon to volume measures of consumption alone. It is proposed that reported increases in binge drinking amongst young adults can be explained by a change in ritual forms with the onset of postmodernity. Ritual theory is shown to provide a conceptual framework for understanding how the symbolic meanings of material goods are made manifest in consumption practices.

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A Longitudinal Study of Product Attachment and its Determinants
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ABSTRACT
This paper investigates how the emotional bond a consumer experiences with ordinary durables varies over time. We found that product attachment is affected by the degree of self-expression, memories, and perceived pleasure. Over time, the determinants of product attachment can be added or lost, or their impact on product attachment can change. Our research shows that product usage is essential to maintain the impact of memories on product attachment. For users, the impact of the determinants was stable over time. For non-users, however, the impact of memories on product attachment decreased to non-significance, whereas the impact of the low pleasure ratings increased.

INTRODUCTION
Consumer behavior research has focused primarily on purchase behavior. However, to understand consumers’ replacement behavior, more knowledge is needed of the relationship that consumers experience with products during ownership. Specifically, how does the consumer-product relationship evolve over time?

Product attachment is defined as the emotional bond a consumer experiences with his/her product (Schifferstein and Pelgrim 2004). This definition implies that an emotional tie exists between the owner and the object and that the specific product has a deep and important meaning to the owner. People experience more protective behaviors toward these objects (Belk 1991) and often develop long-lasting relationships with them. Product attachment is concerned with specific objects. This makes it conceptually different from two other constructs: product involvement and consumer-brand relationships (Kleine and Baker 2004). These constructs are generally conceived as the importance of a product category to a person (e.g., Costley 1988) and the relationship to a brand (e.g., Fournier 1998), respectively.

Several qualitative and survey studies on product attachment have investigated the degree of product attachment at one specific moment in time (e.g., Ball and Tasaki 1992; Kleine, Kleine, and Allen 1995; Wallendorf and Arnould 1988). Although these studies are clearly valuable for understanding the concept of product attachment, they have some apparent shortcomings. Attachment tends to develop over time as a result of recurring interactions between an individual and the attachment object (Baldwin et al. 1996; Kleine and Baker 2004). These interactions encourage the development of meaning in reference to the object. Accordingly, several scholars have acknowledged the importance of longitudinal research to examine consumers’ dynamic relationships to their possessions to deepen our understanding of product attachment (Ball and Tasaki 1992; Kleine and Baker 2004). This research provides a first attempt to investigate the concept of product attachment using a longitudinal approach.

DETERMINANTS OF PRODUCT ATTACHMENT
The experience of attachment to a product is related to the degree to which this product is used to define and maintain a person’s self (Ball and Tasaki 1992; Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981; Kleine et al. 1995). Based on the different facets of the self (Greenwald 1988), we distinguish four possible determinants of product attachment: self-expression, group affiliation, memories, and pleasure.

Self-Expression
The first determinant stems from people’s need to express their personal identity. People are motivated to establish and communicate a personal identity, distinct from that of others. The use of products is one way by which an individual can symbolically display one’s individuality to oneself and to others (Solomon 1983). For example, a person’s clothing expresses who (s)he is as an individual. People tend to develop stronger attachments to products that are used to express and maintain a personal and unique identity (Kleine et al. 1995; Wallendorf and Arnould 1988).

Group Affiliation
The second determinant stems from people’s need for affiliation. People experience a need to be connected, joined, associated and involved with others. The products that support group affiliation define to what groups of people an individual belongs to. They symbolize a person’s desirable connections to family members, friends, or social groups. For example, a sweater can show a student’s connection to a fraternity. People become more attached to products that symbolize an important person or social group, because these products enhance that part of the self that needs to feel connected (Kleine et al. 1995; Schultz, Kleine, and Kernan 1989).

Memories
A product can remind a person of people, events, or places that are important to that particular individual. It can help him/her to maintain a sense of the past, which is essential to define and maintain one’s identity. Part of who we are today is the result of who we were in the past. For example, a souvenir can remind someone of a favorite past travel experience. Several studies concluded that people become more attached to products that serve as a reminder of the past (Belk 1988, 1990; Kleine et al. 1995; Wallendorf and Arnould 1988).

Pleasure
According to Greenwald’s (1988) conceptualization of the self, the self contains a component that strives for hedonic satisfaction: the diffuse self. This component has its roots in the body’s innate pleasure and pain responses. It includes pleasure experienced during usage as a result of superior functionality, aesthetic pleasure derived from the product’s appearance, or pleasure resulting from its benefits, like entertainment or relaxation. An example is a person who enjoys his high-quality stereo, because it provides a great sound. Schifferstein, Mugge, and Hekkert (2004) found empirical evidence for the effect of pleasure on product attachment. Moreover, past studies distinguished pleasure (or enjoyment) as a reason to consider a product as special, cherished, or treasured, which indicates the presence of an emotional bond (e.g., Dittmar 1991; Kampner 1995; Richins 1994).

DYNAMIC CHARACTER OF PRODUCT ATTACHMENT
In some cases, the experience of an emotional bond to a product can be relatively static over time (Kleine and Baker 2004). For example, heirlooms tend to have deep, symbolic meanings of family and self-continuity that are passed from one generation to the next (McCracken 1986; Price, Arnould, and Curasi 2000). How-