The Role of Techniques of Neutralization in Using Double Standards

Tine De Bock, Ghent University
Patrick Van Kenhove, Ghent University

Despite the growing number of studies dealing with corporate and consumer ethics, empirical research about double standards remains scarce. The few studies dealing with this topic indicate that people rate corporate unethical actions as less admissible compared to similar consumer actions. However, little is known about the processes underlying the double standard concept. This research investigates whether the techniques of neutralization, indicated as having much potential explanatory power in the ethics area but, however, rarely investigated, could provide a meaningful way of approaching this phenomenon.

[to cite]:

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/1006740/eacr/vol9/E-09

[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/.
The Role of Techniques of Neutralization in Using Double Standards
Tine De Bock, Ghent University, Belgium
Patrick Van Kenhove, Ghent University, Belgium

Abstract
Despite the growing number of studies dealing with corporate and consumer ethics, empirical research about double standards remains scarce. The few studies dealing with this topic indicate that people rate corporate unethical actions as less admissible compared to similar consumer actions. However, little is known about the processes underlying the double standard concept. This research investigates whether the techniques of neutralization, indicated as having much potential explanatory power in the ethics area but, however, rarely investigated, could provide a meaningful way of approaching this phenomenon.

Analyzing Consumer Culture Dynamics through Text Analysis of Media Discourse: A Sociological Approach
Takeshi Matsui, Hitotsubashi University, Japan

Extended Abstract
This paper, inspired by cultural sociology (Spillman 2002) and cognitive sociology (Zerubavel 1997), aims to show the strength of text analysis of media discourse for grasping the dynamics of shared meaning in consumer cultures. In the 1980s, several consumer researchers, now mostly known as proponents of Consumer Culture Theory (Arnould and Thompson 2005), analyzed social values in consumption through content analysis of visual data such as advertisements (Belk and Pollay 1985; Gross and Sheth 1989; Tse, Belk, and Zhou 1989) and comics (Belk 1987; Spiggle 1986). This paper tries to revitalize the research tradition using a sociological approach.

This paper raises three reasons why analyzing text data of media coverage is one of the best ways to grasp cognitive changes shared among media, marketers, and consumers in a macro context. First, recent technological innovations in freeware software enable researchers to conduct reliable morphological analysis of the Japanese language (Jin 2009). Second, text analysis allows measurement of the dynamics of consumer culture in a quantitative manner. The author agrees with cultural sociologists’ contention that culture is no more intrinsically difficult to measure than other social phenomena (Jepperson and Swidler 1994; Mohr 1998). Third, text analysis is an appropriate strategy for understanding the role of language in the formation of consumer culture. As cognitive sociologists argue, language constitutes the way we see our life worlds (Berger and Luckmann 1966; Cerulo 2002). People can share their personal experiences with others only when language is available; with language, memories can actually pass from one person to another even when there is no direct contact between them (Zerubavel 1997). Therefore, text data, which shows how people use language to interpret their lifeworld, can serve as a faithful mirror of cognitive changes shared in a society.

This paper argues these points by analyzing the “healing boom,” the largest consumer culture in Japan at the turn of the century. Since the late 1990s, many firms in different industries have launched a large number of “healing” products and services. This boom drastically changed the shared meaning of healing in Japan. According to K?jien 5th edition (1998), which is the most authoritative Japanese dictionary, the verb iyasu (heal) means to cure somebody’s disease or injury, satisfy hunger, or mitigate emotional pain. However, Gendai Y?go no Kiso Chishiki (Encyclopedia of Contemporary Words) 2003 Edition explains that iyashi shijo (the healing market) is a market of goods and services that are useful for creating psychological security, and nowadays, various kinds of consumer goods such as books, music, paintings, movies, massages, drinks, food, and clothing, which are intended to help people relax, fall under this rubric. From these differences, it can be seen that the linguistic meaning of healing has changed.

The data is based on 8,033 magazine article titles from 1988 to 2007 from 465 magazines collected from the database of Oya S?ichi Bunko Magazine Article Index that covers almost all popular magazines published in Japan.

This paper shows that four findings from the text analysis of magazine article titles support the change of language usage regarding healing. First, while these words had been largely unknown outside the psychiatric profession, the noun form of iyasu (heal), and iyashi (healing), are now frequently used in conversations. Second, the unusual passive voice expressions such as iyasarera (I am healed) or iyasareta (I want to be healed) are now common. The number of appearances of each conjugated forms of the verb iyasu and the irrealis form, iyasa that constitute such a passive voice outreach other forms since 2001. Third, the new expression iyashi-kei (healing type) began to be used frequently for describing certain kinds of things that relieve stress as well as laypersons who just help others to relax but are not religious persons or healers. Fourth, the meaning of healing differs between women and men: the meaning is diversified. For women, healing means relaxing their body and mind, while for men, it means sexual image of females. This is from a correspondence analysis between the top five magazine genres and the top thirty keywords in titles.

CCT defines consumer culture as a system that makes consumers’ collective sense of consumption environments and orients their experience and lives (Kozinets 2001). Cultural sociologists define culture as processes of meaning-making (Spillman 2002). These definitions resonate with each other. To understand how consumer cultures make the collective sense, consistent measures must be applied. Quantitative analysis can shed light on such dynamics and can be expected to complement rich findings from qualitative analyses.