“Subcultures of Prosumption” – Prosumption As Distinction in Freeskiing
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The article seeks to develop a cultural explanation of prosumption (Toffler 1980, Kotler 1986) that focuses on the social environment of prosumption instead of the role of the individual prosumer. Expanding on the notion of Subcultures of Consumption (Schouten & McAlexander 1995), it suggests seeing prosumption practices as a functional equivalent rather than antagonist of commodity consumption in that it provides symbolic means of subcultural distinction. Prosumption is thus not understood as the spread of productive capacity to consumers (i.e. through technological change), but rather as a growing valorization of creativity which is displayed through performative practices of prosumption.

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**“Subcultures of Prosumption” – Prosumption as Distinction in Freeskiing**

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**Extended abstract**

Since about thirty years, the emergence and rapid growth of so-called lifestyle sports such as Skateboarding, Snowboarding or Mountain biking has profoundly changed the landscape of the sporting world. Since they encompass not only novel practices of athletic endeavor, but also include practices of consumption of specific clothes, music or media (Wheaton, 2004), these sport scenes have been identified as sport subcultures that allow participants to construct and foster a subcultural identity (Donnelly & Young, 1988). Primarily, these subcultures have been subject to analyses based on Bourdieu’s (1984) work, demonstrating their hierarchical structure through mechanisms of symbolic inclusion and exclusion (Kay & Laberge, 2004; Wheaton, 2000). However, since subcultural identities are largely based on consumption practices, participants are increasingly struggling over issues of authenticity (Beal & Weidman 2003) and commercialization (Wheaton & Beal, 2003), invoking new measures of distinction beyond mere sporting skill or the wearing of “right” sneaker brand (Wheaton, 2003; Beal & Wilson, 2004). As a reaction, within such subcultures of sport increasingly practices can be observed that aim at creative production or transformation (Woermann, 2009). As these practices are not pursued for professional purposes and are still part of the leisure activities of participants, they can be identified as prosumption (Kotler, 1986; Toffler, 1980).

The paper examines the prosumption practices within the specific sport subculture of Freeskiing—an emergent lifestyle sport akin to Skateboarding, Snowboarding, and Surfing—and suggests identifying it as a Subculture of Prosumption. This notion seeks to expand the category of Subcultures of Consumption developed by Schouten and McAlexander (1995) in that not only symbolic acts of consumption, but also skillful prosumption serves as a central means of constructing a subcultural identity, demarcating distinctions and organizing intracultural hierarchies.

The viewpoint I suggest thus runs partly counter to an interpretation of the trend towards Prosumption as the advent of an individualized ‘Craft Consumer’ (Campbell 2005) who stands in stark opposition to soulless mass-production and commodification. Instead, a focus on the subcultural environment of prosumption practices suggests that prosumption should be seen as a functional equivalent rather than an antagonist of commodity consumption in that both provide complementing ways of reproducing subcultural meaning.

The article draws on an ethnographic research project of the Freeskiing culture that is designed to grasp the multiple dimensions of the complex meaning system of the Freeskiers’ life-world (Gobo, 2008). The ethnographic fieldwork makes primarily use of participant observation as well as audio- and videotaping of naturally occurring situations, and to a lesser degree on in-depth interviews as a means of triangulation (Bleich, 1991). Especially when studying bodily practices, it seems not sufficient to rely on narrations of actions, but to observe and participate in the practices first hand. In order to grasp the multi-faceted nature of Freeskiing and in particular the intertwining of scene and industry, data was not only collected during the daily training of the athletes and from their social life at events or contests, but also with regard to marketing or entrepreneurial activities or on trade fairs.

Prosumption practices therefore encompass a much greater range than just those which include the usage of media: Members of the subculture might knit their own beanies, redesign equipment by spray-painting them, construct their own obstacles in the backyard, or organize semiprofessional events. Although at the core Freeskiing is a bodily sport, consuming and producing media content makes up an important part of ‘being a Freestyler’: In an intensive circle of recording, assessing, editing, distributing, and watching of pictures and videos of Freeskiing, members of the subculture engage in what Ferrell, Milovanovic, and Lyng (2001) termed media practices which enhance and elongate the meaning of ephemeral events.

Freeskiers using photo- or video-equipment are an everyday sight in snowparks—often including sophisticated tools such as helmet cameras, special fisheye lenses, or camera booms. From time to time, the Freestylers organize special shootings in especially scenic or symbolic locations. In such cases, the athletic challenge is often of secondary interest. Instead, the meaning of the event as well as of the resulting pictures stems from the production as a common accomplishment of imagination, organization, athletic capability, and photographic skill. That the scene members observe themselves not just as consumers of a leisure activity, but instead as creative producers becomes especially apparent in the videos they create themselves as well as in professional productions since both feature not only skiing, but also reflexively feature making ski movies. Being a Freeski one can learn from these movies—means more than just skiing.

Through a range of scene-specific practices, prosumption is deeply enmeshed into the cultural landscape of the Freestyle skiing community: At the core of the Freestylers’ aspirations lies—in their own understanding—the desire to express their own style, for example to develop one’s own way of doing a certain trick, to create a personal look in clothing or to design one’s own website in a certain manner. The degree freedom that defines Freeskiing in the understanding of its members is not just a freedom to choose—the foundational promise of the modern consumer society (Featherstone, 2001)—but a freedom to create something unique. Andreas Reckwitz (2007) has forcefully argued that the ability to create has become the signum of the postmodern subject since skillful creativity is seen as the true indicator of authentic subjectivity. The Freeskier thus seems to be a role model for the postmodern ‘creative subject’ he describes.
References


Two Defending Strategies of Threatened Brand Identity in Co-branding: The Moderating Role of Perceived Identity Fit

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Abstract

Brand identity is one of the most important drivers of a successful brand as it allows consumers to connect to a brand at deeper levels. However, little is known about whether a strong brand identity can hinder or facilitate a brand’s alliance with another brand. In this research, we investigate whether consumers with strong identification with a brand will perceive its alliance with another brand (co-branding) to be a threat to their own identity and how consumers address the threat by employing defensive strategies such as decoupling and biased assimilation.

Consuming Metaphors: Being a Consumer

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Extended Abstract

Consumption is a fundamental component of our society (Featherstone 1991 and Slater 1999). We find meaning in consumption, assert status through consumption (Veblen 1912), and define our relationships with consumption (Miller 1987). So common is our experience as consumers, that we use it as an analogy for understanding a wide array of other experiences (Phillips 2001). Metaphors and analogies regarding consumption are commonly used in popular discourse including medical patients as consumers, citizens as consumers, students as consumers, and dating as consumption. Medical patients are told they are consumers and must take charge of their medical treatment, weighing choices of treatment and demanding quality service from doctors and hospitals. Citizens are marketed political ideas and they consume through voting. Schools treat students as consumers of education who pay with tuition for degrees. The dating scene is a consumptionscape where individuals shop for partners.

But what is our experience as consumers? What does it mean to be a consumer? Consumption has been characterized by choice