The Sphere of Pure Consumption: Outsourcing the Production of Sacred Commodities

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Abstract
This paper explores the phenomenon of outsourcing of production of sacred ‘commodities’. The example of the international markets for adoption is examined as one manifestation of such outsourcing. The creation of distance and separation between the ‘production’ and ‘consumption’ cycles is offered as one of the ways consumer markets seek an utopian market where production does not taint consumption. The industrialised late capitalist economies are seen as becoming a sphere of pure consumption, while the less industrialised economies in transition are seen more and more as bearing the lion’s share of production of these ‘products’.

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in which object attachment was broad and deep and brands important, the broadness of the attachment as well as the importance of brands, is likely to decrease in the infatuation stage.

In the committed relationship stage consumers focus their attention on the relationship they have. In this stage, the breadth of object attachment decreases, as consumers are shifting their attention from objects to the relationship, and no longer feel the need to communicate a distinct identity. In contrast, the depth of object attachment increases, since the objects acquire bring additional symbolic meaning that is likely to be linked to the relationship (e.g., romantic dinners or holidays). Similarly, the importance of brands decreases, since consumers no longer need brands as much to reinforce their ideal-self.

During the relationship decline and dissolution stage consumers begin to separate themselves from the relationship identity, and start seeking a new individual identity. As a consequence, the breadth of their attachment to objects grows in view of the fact that consumers begin to experiment with new products. At the same time, the depth of the attachment decreases, as the objects are just trials, i.e., not meaningful per se. Simultaneously, brands are increasing their importance, since consumers start paying more attention to what brands can signal about their identity and use it for creating a new identity.

The existence of a link between a consumer relationship stage and his or her consumption pattern has several implications for both marketers and consumers. Consumers are likely to be more influenced by certain types of persuasive messages in particular stages of their relationships. Marketers could use this information to their advantage to better target those consumers who are likely to be most receptive towards the message. For example, consumers in the decline stage are more likely to be receptive towards innovations and products that involve excitement. As they seek for a new identity they are willing to experiment with a variety of products. Brands of the products, on the other hand, should be communicated to single consumers or those in the beginning of a relationship, as they are more susceptible to use a brand as a signal of status and quality.

Consumers, on the other hand, could overcome vulnerability associated with particular stages (such the decline stage), if they can link their feelings to a particular stage. Recognizing that consumption might be a reflection of a particular relationship stage that might leave the consumer insecure can help the consumer limit or control excessive spending.

Attributional Processes during Product Failures–The Role of the Corporate Brand as Buffer
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Michaela Waenke, University of Basel
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Information about product failures is expected to deteriorate brand attitudes. However, our research indicates that the harmful impact is attenuated if the responsibility for the failure can be assigned to a superordinate brand. We found a significant interaction between the favorability of product information and the strength by which a product brand is endorsed by a corporate brand. Negative information reduced attitudes towards the product brand but only when the product brand was not strongly endorsed by a corporate brand. These findings call for the incorporation of the corporate brand’s function as buffer into the models of brand architecture.

People We Love to Love and People We Love to Hate: Predicting Desired Outcomes of Reality TV Scenarios
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Julie Irwin, University of Texas, Austin

This study seeks to uncover the qualities of participants that people look for when deciding on a reality TV contestant to root for or root against. We examine the relationship between a number of respondent ratings (e.g., similarity to self, attractiveness, intelligence) and the respondents’ desire to see the contestant win or lose. We expected, and found, that preference for contestant success depended on the type of reality show (we tested four basic types: relationship drama, sadism, trickery and glamour).

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Market Agents’ Roles in the Maintenance and Transformation of Rituals

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Extended Abstract

Following Rook’s (1985) seminal work on ritualistic dimensions of consumption, numerous studies investigating the content, context, and major elements of different rituals appeared in the marketing literature (e.g. Lowrey and Ottes, 1994; Sherry and McGrath, 1989; Wallendorf and Arnould, 1991). These studies demonstrated symbolic significance of rituals and their dynamic nature. However, while it is noted that “the marketplace significanece of rituals … is striking” (Rook 2004, p.315), very few studies to date examined the role of market agents in the maintenance and transformation of rituals. The exceptions include the studies looking at the role of retailers (McGrath 1990; Ottes 1998; Sherry and McGrath 1989) and the relationship between advertising and consumption rituals (Ottes and Scott 1996). Motivated by this gap, this study seeks to identify the market agents and explore their roles in reproduction and transformation of rituals, using dowry practice—a form of marriage payment—in Turkey as a case study.

There are two reasons for our focus on the dowry practice. First, dowry is a long-standing and commonly performed wedding-related ritual in Turkey and many other Asian countries, including India and China (e.g. Tambiah, 1973; Croll 1984; Siu 1993; Bhopal, 1997). While the content of dowry varies from culture to culture, in general, it involves the gifts given to the bride, the groom, and the groom’s family by the bride’s parents. Irrespective of its content, it is a highly symbolic ritual that marks the transition from childhood to adulthood and from being a daughter/son to a wife/husband. Second, several studies report major transformations in the nature and content of dowry ritual in different cultures it is practiced (e.g. Rao, 1993; Caldwell et al., 1983; Banarjee 1999; Yan 1996). A recent study demonstrates that Turkish marriage dowries have undergone major changes as a result of the country’s economic development and urbanization (Sandikci and Ilhan 2004).

Traditionally, Turkish dowry is confined to the textile products such as embroidery, clothing, bed linen, and carpets that are manually manufactured by the bride-to-be (e.g., Çelik, 1987. Tezcan, 1997, Öztürk, 1983). However, as a result of the changes in the social roles of women, the weakening of traditional lifestyles, and the emergence of independent manufacturers, more and more daughters and their mothers began to either buy ready-made dowry pieces or outsource the artifacts. Today, a prolific and expansive dowry market, composed of different agents producing various dowry pieces exists in Turkey. Our analysis indicates that there are several players in this market, including independent women, retailers, schools and institutes, collective exhibitions, and media that have the power and the means to both reproduce and transform dowry ritual through their design, production, and marketing activities.

So far, we collected data through a series of semi-structured, “long interviews” (McCracken 1988), observations, photographs, and supplemental materials such as newspapers, web pages, and business flyers. Depth interviews were conducted with four dowry shop owners and four independent women who work as freelance manufacturers in Ankara. The informants vary in terms of the size of the businesses, type of dowry preparation service they provide, and number of years in the dowry market. We have also visited dowry and marriage planning fairs both in Ankara (May 2003, 2004) and in Istanbul (February 2005) where we had the chance to observe different players in the market.

Preliminary analysis suggests that the market agents play three different roles: to mediate, consult, and innovate. The market agents assumed the role of the mediator as a result of the proliferation of dowry meanings. Traditionally, dowry included a pre-determined, fixed set of artifacts. However, as a result of urbanization and changing lifestyles dowry preparation became increasingly subject to negotiation (Sandikci and Ilhan 2004). While market agents transform the rituals through new or modified artifacts, scripts, and performances, they also reproduce the ritual through marketing ‘classic’ pieces. Overall, our study indicates that market agents have the ability to transform the dowry ritual and also the means to control the rate and extent of the diffusion of new artifacts, scripts and performances.

References


