The Tiger Roars: Tribalism in a Non-Traditional Australian Sport

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Abstract

This paper explores the concept of tribalism in the martial art of karate. Shotokan Karate a traditional Japanese martial art form has been practiced in Australia for less than 30 years, therefore is not considered a traditional Australian sport, but does have a significant following. Using an ethnographic approach this paper introduces and highlights elements of tribalism and of the subculture of consumption which are evidenced by following and interviewing the Australian team over three days of competition at the last World Championships in Durban South Africa.

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that people will form negative impressions of individuals deliberately attempting to misrepresent their social status to others. The current research applies SIT to investigate perceptions of individuals that choose to purchase and display counterfeit products.

Social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner 1979) focuses on explaining the dynamics of intergroup relations, and has been applied to better understand the strategies members of low status groups use to increase their status both individually and collectively. According to this theory, people gain self esteem from their membership in social groups, and will pursue goals they believe will increase or maintain the status of their social groups. According to SIT, one way this is manifested is in the evaluations people make of in-group vs. out-group members. Individuals tend to favor or make more positive evaluations of members within their social group (in-group members) than members of other groups. Although the misrepresentation of one’s social status through the purchase of counterfeit products violates social norms, people’s judgments about counterfeit consumers, according to SIT, will depend on whether those counterfeit consumers are in-group or out-group members. This study tested the hypothesis that individuals will make less favorable evaluations of counterfeit consumers when those consumers are members of an out-group, compared to an in-group.

The sample consisted of 304 undergraduate students from a large Southeastern university. Respondents were asked to complete a survey, ostensibly about an online dating service, and evaluate an online dating profile containing a photo of either a Caucasian or African-American male target and information about his hobbies, likes/dislikes, and income. In addition, the passage also contained information about one of three possible products that the target had recently purchased (high status: Rolex watch, lower status: Seiko watch or counterfeit: replica of a Rolex watch). After reading the passage, respondents were asked to evaluate the target on a number of attributes: desirability as a date, desirability as a marriage partner, physical attractiveness, social status and trustworthiness.

As expected, MANOVA revealed a significant main effect of product status, such that targets portrayed as having recently purchased, and wearing, a counterfeit Rolex watch were rated significantly less favorably on all five dependent variables than those wearing either a Seiko or authentic Rolex watch. Consistent with our main hypothesis, a significant three-way interaction of participant race x target race x product type was observed when analyzing Caucasian and African-American respondents. In other words, when the subject’s race matched that of the target, respondents rated the target wearing the counterfeit product more favorably than when the race of the target differed from their own. Results were similar for both the Rolex and Seiko watch. Now tell the reader in words what the three-way means. The results provide support for the efficacy of Social Identity Theory in understanding status consumption, and the hypothesis that perceptions of consumers of counterfeit products depend on the respective group memberships of the consumer and the observer. This study also suggests that consumers of counterfeit products are actually not acquiring the prestige and status they are seeking. In fact, their choice of counterfeit products may actually negatively influence the image these consumers project to others.

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Extended Abstract
The decline individualism and the rise of tribalism have now been noted by many researchers. (Maffesoli, 1996; Cova, 1997; Cova and Cova, 2001; Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001). Tribes according to Maffesoli (1996) are held together through shared emotions, life styles, moral beliefs and consumption practices. Additionally there has been much research, building on the idea of the “subculture of consumption” as defined by Schouten and McAlexander, (1995) as “a distinct subgroup of society that self selects on the basis of a shared commitment to a particular product class, brand or consumption activity”. The definition was further expanded by Kozinets (2001) to groups whose members define themselves within a broader cultural context, finding meaning and community largely in terms of holding contrasting positions against that cultural background.

The traditional idea of community has also been challenged in today’s world with increasing geographical mobility (Thompson and Holt, 1996) in a sense blurring the boundaries. What we are now seeing is the tribes or community being formed with no geographical boundaries (Tambyah, 1996). Many tribes today are based on sport and other leisure pursuits. Belk and Costa (1998) refer to these as transient consumption communities which result from serious leisure pursuits and are defined by shared experiences objects and actions.

This paper explores tribalism in the martial art of karate. Shotokan Karate a traditional Japanese martial art form has been practiced in Australia for less than 30 years, therefore is not considered a traditional Australian sport, but does have a significant following. Using ethnographic evidence gathered at the last World Championships in Durban South Africa, this paper introduces and showcases elements of tribalism and of the subculture of consumption which are evidenced by following the Australian team over three days of competition. Over the three days of competition we see evidence not only of tribalism in karate in general but clearly see it manifesting in the behavior of the national teams of various countries. These competitors and spectators share a passion for the sport. It gives them a sense of identity. The spectacle of the sport is enhanced by the opening ceremony. We see evidence of rituals, flags, chants setting the tribes apart, but conversely we see the shared meanings in rules of competition, karate gi (uniform) and an overall passion for the way of life.

The importance of karate as a way of life for the karateka was further evidenced in post competition interviews that were carried out, which reaffirm Maffesoli (1996) idea that “the accent is on that which unites, not that which separates”. So while we clearly find differences between nations in their pursuit of competitive success they still define themselves based on their sport, showing a shared commitment to the sport. Many respondents spoke of their karate family, which for most was a global family, crossing many national boundaries.

References
Experiencing Motherhood: The Importance of Possible Selves to New Mothers

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Long Abstract

Background

We report a small-scale exploratory study that investigated the interrelationships between consumption, identity and choice using the theoretical lens of possible selves. Mothers-to-be and new mothers are faced with important choices, as consumers, at a major transitional stage in their lives. We examine the impact that women’s experiences of consumption choices had on the processes of their identity formation and stabilization as mothers (‘the kind of mother I want to be’, ‘the kind of mother I don’t want to be’).

The transition to motherhood (Goldberg 1988:2) is a time when women learn about their new role and identity as mothers, experience changes in patterns of consumption as well as significant changes in their work/life balance (e.g. Fursman 2002). Identities may be challenged as different roles are experienced in competition (e.g. Fursman 2002), along with changes in women’s relationship with others (Smith 1999ab) and difficult consumption decisions (Prothero 2002).

New motherhood as a transitional stage can be linked to ‘possible selves’, which describe future possibilities not central to our current identity (Antonacci and Mikus 1988:69-73). Possible selves provide consumers with goals, aspirations, motives, fears and threats and the self-relevant information that individuals need to organize and give direction to their lives (Markus and Nurius, 1986). Women may have preconceived ideas about their ‘possible selves’ (Antonacci and Mikus 1988: 69-73) as they approach pregnancy and motherhood—‘what kind of mother do I want to be?’ and just as importantly, ‘what kind of mother do I not want to be?’ This study provided an opportunity to explore how women’s choices in the early stages of motherhood are used to manage this process.

Method

Women were recruited for a small-scale pilot study on the basis that they had recently given birth to their first child. We used semi-structured interviews to identify the main themes and patterns of interest, and explore the choices made by our participants and the context in which these decisions were made.

We plan to develop our methodology on the basis of this pilot study and use a quasi-longitudinal approach. We hope to recruit twenty-four expectant new mothers and interview them at key stages in the transition to motherhood. Our qualitative approach will also incorporate diaries and projective techniques. Using a quasi-longitudinal approach will capture experiences of maternity and support services, as well as evolving experiences of mothering linked to consumption and identity as they are made, rather than relying on retrospective accounts, which could provide inaccurate accounts of pregnancy.

Findings

Our preliminary findings identify some of the key ways in which women’s hopes, fears and expectations of mothering (possible selves) have impacted on the choices and decisions they made. We identify some of the key choices that our participants made at certain stages of their pregnancy/motherhood and identify the role of possible selves: in terms of the mother/parent that they wanted to be (ideal), their thoughts about the kind of mother they did not want to be (negative self), balanced with the pressure to fit with others’ expectations (ought self).

The issues explored included pregnancy, birth, breastfeeding, attitudes towards immunization, specific consumption activities (for baby and/or for mother) and the interplay of actual experiences relating to new mothers prior attitudes and beliefs in the form of possible selves. New mothers’ hopes and fears were exhibited in consumption decisions such as whether to purchase particular products (e.g. dummies/pacifiers), and whether to fit in with society’s expectations (e.g. gendered products and colors) but also key experiences associated with motherhood such as the wish to breastfeed, yet the experience of difficulties in establishing breast-feeding. Our participants found themselves balancing their needs and expectations with those from a variety of sources (e.g. friends, family, work colleagues, health service professionals) and this was particularly challenging in some circumstances.

Discussion

The concept of possible selves provided a useful means to explore our first time mothers’ experiences and the way in which they negotiated their way around some key decisions associated with new motherhood. This approach provides the potential to highlight women’s expectations and the sources from which they take advice. Our research could demonstrate how women cope when their actual experiences of mothering (actual self) do not align with their hopes and expectations of mothering (ideal self), or the kind of mother I think I should be (ought self), and sometimes involve aspects of mothering they had originally hoped to avoid or reject (undesired self). These