Exploring Consumer Risk Across Multiple Domains

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Consumer live in a world filled with risk and various streams of literature suggest that consumers are faced with a vast array of competing demands that they try to deal with simultaneously. Yet existing research on risk focuses on single and isolated risk discourses and we are unequipped to answer how people perceive and assess risks across various and domains. This research attempts to examine consumers’ practices of assessing and managing multiple risk discourses that surround their daily lives.

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This study, then, uses qualitative data gathering methods to explore television programme product placement from the subjective perspective of young consumers in the UK and Thailand. This perspective is supplemented by a detailed account of managerial practices of product placement offered by leading agencies in the field. In-depth interviews with agency practitioners, and discussion groups and elicited auto-ethnographic passages with consumers were the main data-gathering methods. All data were fully translated and transcribed. Data were then subject to an interpretive thematic analysis which, drawing on elements of discourse analysis, focussed on the ‘interpretive repertoires’ which seemed to constitute the major themes drawn upon in articulating experiences of product placement.

The UK and Thailand were chosen because the UK is an advanced economy with a relatively immature television product placement industry while Thailand is a developing economy in which television product placement is a well-established practice. The intention of the study is not to compare the respective cultures as such, since culture is not a fixed entity which allows direct comparison, although it is important to consider product placement within its local media infrastructure and consumer culture. Rather, the intention is to juxtapose two contrasting contexts in order to add contrast and shade to the respective findings.

The findings offer a thematic interpretation of some 40,000 words of transcribed data with consumers and practitioners focusing on three main areas: 1) the managerial practices and strategies surrounding the use of television product placement as an aspect of marketing communications management 2) the ways in which consumers engage with, understand and interpret brand placements in television shows and 3) the ways in which these interpretations feed into ideas of self identity and consumer culture. The study concludes that product placement on television is a sophisticated managerial practice which constitutes a powerful discourse of brand consumption. Consumers are highly attuned to this discourse and draw on it reflexively in their expressions of self-concept.

References

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Extended Abstract

Consumer live in a world filled with risk which has become a big debate in the last decades in various areas such as destruction of nature and environment, pollution of air, water, and food, health problems, national security issues and politics, crime, and technology (Beck 1992, Giddens 1992, Furedi 2002). Within psychology and its manifestation in consumer research (e.g., brand preference, product choice), decision making and information processing under risk and uncertainty has been of considerable interest to both judgment and decision making literatures. So far consumer researchers have created a useful yet incomplete picture of consumer risk since consumers are largely viewed as responding individually to risks according to various “heuristics” or frames of perception that structure their judgment According to Paul Slovic (2000), one of the foremost theoreticians of the psychology of risk, “the perception and acceptance of risk have their roots in social and cultural factors” (p. 221). Similarly, Lopes (1997) argues that attempts to explain all of risky choice behavior in the narrow terms of purely perceptual, purely cognitive, or purely motivational mechanisms will necessarily miss much of what impels people toward or away from particular risks. Douglas and Wildawsky (1982), for instance, explain that risk is a constructed idea and that humans act less as individuals and more as social beings that have internalized social structures. Socio-cultural aspects of consumers risk perceptions and risk-taking behavior offer significant contributions to consumer risk studies along with economic and cognitive approaches to study risk. Yet, despite their widely acknowledged significance, particularly in the context of consumption, social and cultural contexts have been largely ignored in our field [see few notable exceptions. Thompson (2005)’s study on birth practices reveals how people’s risk perceptions are culturally constructed. Celsi, Rose, Leigh (1993) investigated cultural motivations and dramatic worldview that effect people’s risk taking behavior in the case of high-risk leisure activities].

These prior studies, focus on single and isolated risk discourses around issues such as product or brand choice, health, finances, and leisure, among some others. Various streams of literature, however, suggest that modern day consumers are faced with a vast array of multiple and competing demands that they try to deal with simultaneously. Building on Beck and Giddens, Furedi (2002) for instance argues that we now live in a culture of fear and discourses around risks of life produce what he calls a cautious individual. Consumers are embedded in social systems and in their day-to-day lives they encounter multiple foci on risk. Examples of various domains may include financial (e.g., investments, future considerations, debts to pay), environmental (e.g., pollution, global warming, depletion of natural resources), social/cultural (e.g., changing society, changing needs, relationships), terrorism (e.g., terrorist attacks, bombings, hijackings), crime/safety (e.g., security systems, gated communities), health (e.g., organic food, holistic approaches), and natural (e.g.,