Restrained Pursuit of Luxury: Wealthy Shanghainese Attitudes Towards Upscale Consumption

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In order to examine the Chinese perception of luxury, we visited Shanghai in September 2008 and interviewed four families there with annual income of more than 100,000 US Dollars. Our finding was the restrained perception of luxury shared by wealthy Shanghainese. Their perception was restrained compared to their Western counterparts, probably because by the traditional Confucian values. They are still under the influence of their parents’ generation which had undergone the atrocious hardship during the Great Cultural Revolution. They also feel luxurious when they are filled with nonmaterial gains.

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“POV: Point of View... Consumers and Ethnographers in Perspective...”
Wendy Hein, University of Edinburgh, Scotland, UK
Annmarie Ryan, Lancaster University, UK
Robert Corrigan, Limerick Institute of Technology, Ireland, UK

This film is based on a female ethnographer’s research exploring young Scottish men’s consumption practices. It shows how applications of mobile phones helped overcome some of the challenges the ethnographer faced in the field to generate data in a less invasive way. It also describes consumers’ own use of mobile phones to record their experiences, legitimising and authenticating their masculinity. This emphasised the importance of consumer experiences for constructing gender identities through culturally situated consumption. We suggest that the role of mobile phones advances the researcher’s capability for reflexivity and creates a richer understanding of consumers’ points of view.

“Does Green?”
Gary J. Bamossy, Georgetown University, USA
Basil G. Englis, Berry College, USA

In recent years the American market place has seen the re-emergence of a vigorous public discourse around the issues of what are variously called “Environmentalism,” “Global Warming”, “Sustainable Consumption”, “The Environment”, or in its simplest and most generic term, “Green”. National surveys regarding U.S. consumers’ awareness regarding “things green” consistently report that over 80% of the American population is aware of Green issues (Mintel, 2008; American Environics, 2008; Makower, 2009; Englis and Bamossy, 2009). Levels of consistent commitment in terms of actual green behaviors, however, do vary greatly across segments of American consumers, with lifestyle variables tending to be better predictors of green behavior than demographic variables (Makower, 2009; American Environics, 2008; Englis and Bamossy, 2009). In short, American consumers know about Green, but do not always act on that knowledge. Given the tremendous Green push from both the public and private sectors, along with the never ending coverage of Things Green from the media, it seems reasonable to predict that while forms of the Green discourse are likely to change over time, they are not likely to wane.

One of the recurring perspectives that characterizes Green and sustainability research from both the academic and commercial research sectors is to begin with descriptive statistics that are meant to shock us by describing our (potentially disastrous) consumption and disposition behaviors, and then use these research findings as a basis for developing communication strategies which are meant to motivate consumers to become more involved. The orientation of the research is to make action seem perfectly rational, in fact so rational, it can NOT be resisted. The inner logic of the argument assumes that once people understand what is happening to the environment, they will act in positive, constructive ways. The assumption is that once people process this information, their best alternative will be Green action. “Any sane person will adjust their consumption lifestyle once they learn this,” seems to be the rationale underlying Green strategies of persuasion.

The video, “Does Green?” critiques this logic in a very subtle way, and suggests that this approach is not working. “Does Green?” points the viewer in a number of theoretical directions that may lead to new ideas of how to combine green awareness with green action. Capturing consumers’ reactions to products as diverse as hybrid cars, light bulbs, and tote bags, this video explores the gaps between consumers’ attitudes and behaviors, and sheds light on the strong connections between our sense of Green coupled with fashion, and Green coupled with self representation. Currently, the role of cultural discourse and social change around Green is often seen as a countervailing discourse. We need a new paradigm to frame our thinking about how to motivate acts of green and sustainable consumption, and the intent of this video is to help get this dialogue started.

References