Transmodern Metaphors and Consumer Spirituality

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This research explores transmodern metaphorical associations related to consumer spirituality, where transmodern is defined as a way of thinking that combines intuition and spirituality with rational brainwork. An initial study was conducted using visuals from advertisements with African Kente cloth that was targeted at African American consumers and reveals ‘meta-connections’ as an important metaphorical connectivity. The inclusion of meta-connections as a type of consumer metaphorical association captures the ontological perspectives embedded within many ethnic cultures and acknowledges the importance of these perspectives in understanding consumer behavior.

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Consumer response to stereotype threat related to a dissociative group was assessed in a pilot study and an experiment within the context of a gift-wrapping task—a context found to be a gender-related stereotype, which males would like to be dissociated with. Undergraduate business students at a major mid-western university participated in the study for course credit.

The results of a pilot study showed that participants who were told that the task was designed to test the wrapping materials (stereotype threat absent) were more satisfied with their own performance and felt more competent while wrapping the gift box than participants who were told that the gift-wrapping task was designed to test their artistic ability (stereotype threat present).

An experiment was then designed to investigate the interactive effects of gender and stereotype threat on consumers’ performance and enjoyment, and their satisfaction with their own performance in the gift-wrapping task. Seventy-eight students (50% males) participated in this study. The design was similar to that of the pilot study. With the exception of task performance that was evaluated by independent judges, all of the dependent variables of interest (task enjoyment and satisfaction with own performance) were self-reported measures.

Results revealed a significant two-way interaction of gender and stereotype threat on task performance (F(1,74)=10.18, p<.01), task enjoyment (F(1,74)=6.79, p=.01), and satisfaction with own performance (F(1,74)=7.03, p=.01). Simple effect tests revealed that there was a significant effect of stereotype threat on the performance of male participants (Mabsent=5.50 vs. Mpresent=4.84; F(1,74)=6.03, p<.05), on how much they enjoyed the task (Mabsent=4.91 vs. Mpresent=4.03; F(1,74)=4.58, p<.05), and on their satisfaction with their own performance (Mabsent=4.24 vs. Mpresent=3.24; F(1,74)=4.43, p<.05). In addition, within the present stereotype threat condition, compared to female participants, males performed significantly worse (Mmale=4.84 vs. Mfemale=6.21; F(1,74)=24.48, p<.001), enjoyed the task much less (Mmale=4.03 vs. Mfemale=5.75; F(1,74)=12.07, p<.001), and evaluated their own performance much lower (Mmale=3.24 vs. Mfemale=5.10; F(1,74)=10.21, p<.01). Male and female participants performed and enjoyed the task equally well when they were told that the gift-wrapping task was designed to evaluate the wrapping materials (p>.10).

Conclusion

Overall, results suggest that male participants could perform well but needed an excuse to do so, a finding that is consistent with Argo, Zhu, and Dahl (2007) who demonstrated that males needed an excuse to get involved in an emotional melodramatic story. When we gave males the excuse that the gift-wrapping task was designed to evaluate the wrapping materials, they performed as well as females. Our findings contribute to the literature on stereotype threat by demonstrating that the threat can also take place even when the person is highly disidentified with the stereotype relevant domain. This research also adds to the consumer literature related to dissociative groups by showing that a product perceived to be associated with a dissociative group might not only reduce consumers’ preference for that product but also negatively impact consumers’ performance and enjoyment in using that product, and personal satisfaction with their performance. From a public policy standpoint, this research can also partly explain the effect of gender stereotypes on females’ and males’ performance in and enjoyment of domains that are stereotypically gender-related such as arts, and household work.

References


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This study on transmodern metaphors is positioned at the nexus of consumer spirituality, where transmodern is defined as “a way of thinking that combines intuition and spirituality with rational brainwork” (Luyckx, 1999, 971). The term metaphor refers to associations that relate abstract concepts to physical things and are used to construct conceptual understandings (Lakoff 1987; Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). Existing consumer research has focused on the cognitive linguistic, psycholinguistic, literary and cultural views of metaphors (Dodd 2002; Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Denny and Sunderland 2005; Coulter and Zaltman 2000; McQuarrie and Mick, 1996; Hirshman 2000; Zaltman and Coulter 1995; Zaltman 1997); yet, limited attention has been given to spirituality and metaphors. This provides the basis for our research, which examines the use of transmodern metaphors associated with consumer spirituality. We contribute to theory by introducing ‘meta-connections’ as an important metaphorical connectivity relating to consumer spirituality.

Today’s global contemporary society finds consumers increasingly interested in and influenced by their own spirituality. Spirituality concerns one’s personal quest for understanding answers to ultimate questions about life, meaning, and relationships with the sacred or transcendent (Koenig et al. 2001). Spiritual awareness leads consumers to not only consider secular, rational and scientific approaches to understandings, but to incorporate transmodern considerations. The marketing literature has discussed metaphor and meanings...
extensively, drawing on two traditions concerning what metaphor represents and how it may be used within a culture (Hirschman 2007). The first tradition is grounded in literary theory and linguistics, while the second draws from symbolic anthropology and is grounded in cultural images (Hirschman 2007). Although anthropological construal of metaphor is grounded in human experience, it is usually meant to reflect phenomena experienced in the natural or social world. The question then becomes, “What about phenomena that fall outside the realm of the natural or social domain, such as the spiritual?” The current study builds on this question and explores metaphorical associations related to consumer spirituality.

To examine consumer use of transmodern metaphors, an initial study was conducted using visuals from advertisements featuring African kente cloth and targeted at African American consumers from the period of 1980 to 2000. The varied properties embedded in a textile (e.g., social, personal, spiritual, cultural, political, historical, etc.) make it a potent symbol, enabling it to say things that words often cannot (Schneider and Weiner 1986). Further, the African kente cloth, in addition to being the most well known and commercially successful African fabric (Rabine 2002), often features woven patterns and symbols associated with spirituality (Ross 1998). Advertisements were compiled from a variety of businesses ranging from the food and beverage, fashion, insurance and communication industries. The intent was to incorporate a broad set of kente product and industry usage, thus yielding a diverse set of consumer interpretations.

Initial research indicates consumer interpretations of kente involve metaphorical spiritual associations, which we refer to as meta-connections. The term ‘meta’ captures those experiences that reflect the metaphysical; that is, those features of reality that exist beyond the physical world and our immediate senses, but nonetheless are part of the consumer’s everyday life. In this study, meta-connections are captured in consumer interpretations and spiritual sensing of the vivid colors, geometric symbols and proverbial messages embedded in the advertisement. An example is a Disneyworld advert featuring Mickey Mouse and Miss Collegiate African American 1993, wearing kente textiles with patterns that are interpreted with metaphorical associations of spiritual purity.

The introduction of ‘meta-connections’ offers a number of advancements. First, it extends the current literature to include metaphorical associations of spirituality that are interpreted and acted on by consumers in their everyday lives. It therefore throws light on transmodern approaches open to consumer spirituality and related belief systems. Second, spiritual aspects of traditional societies continue to be prevalent in many of contemporary ethnic communities. The inclusion of meta-connections as a type of consumer metaphorical association captures the ontological perspectives embedded within many ethnic cultures and acknowledges the importance of these perspectives in understanding consumer behavior.

References

Consumer Creativity During Unconstrained Consumption Tasks
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Abstract
Interest in consumer creativity reflects an emerging trend in consumer research to understand how consumers themselves construct meaning, create value, and participate actively in every part of the consumption process. Building on creativity theory, consumer researchers have focused on antecedents and consequences of consumer creativity in constrained consumption situations. The present research adds to the literature on consumer creativity by demonstrating high variability in creative processing and creative production.