An Identity Approach to Prosumption- a Case of Bacalhau Prosumption in Brazil

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This paper explores the phenomenon of prosumption from the perspectives of role-based identity and social identity. We draw upon qualitative focus groups interviews consumers in Brazil and found empirical evidence on role identity for every phase of the bacalhau prosumption and evidence on social identity as well. It provides novel understanding of the prosumption process—especially related to food-related prosumption.

[to cite]:

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/16134/volumes/v38/NA-38

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believe the extended conceptualization of risk acculturation within marketplace will generate great interest and discussion within the ACR audience which help us improve this study significantly.

References

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Extended Abstract
The phenomenon of “prosumption” has attracted substantial interest both among researchers and practitioners since this term was first coined by Toffler (1980). In existent research literature, the phenomenon has been addressed from different perspectives. Here we explore the phenomenon of prosumption from the perspectives of role-based identity (Burke 1991) and social identity (Turner et al. 1987), which is a rather novel approach to gain insight into the phenomenon.

Prosumption can be defined as “value creation activities undertaken by the consumer that result in the production of products they eventually consume and that become their consumption experiences” (Xie, Bagozzi and Troye 2008). Furthermore, prosumption can be conceived as a process consisting of two phases: production and consumption. All the activities before the beginning point of consumption are included in the production process, and those after the point are included in the consumption process. Both phases consist of a flow of behaviors, appraisal of those behaviors and emotional experiences. The inputs to the consumption process are time, effort and monetary resources. The outputs are experiences and values created through the prosumption process.

The prosumption process is embedded in a social world that is constituted not only by formal rules, but also by the wide variety of conventions, habits and styles from different people. That is why our theoretical perspectives of role-based identity and social identity are so relevant to a deeper understanding of the whole process. Key aspects of these theories are people’ self-views emerging from the reflexive activity of self-categorization or identification in terms of roles (role-based identity) or membership in particular groups (social identity).

For instance, from the perspective of role-based identity, a prosumer categorizes herself as an occupant of a role (i.e. a hostess), and incorporates into herself of the meanings and expectations associated with that role and its performance. A prosumption process can be, then, conceived as an identity control system that consists of a feedback loop (Burke 1991). The loop has four components: a standard (the set of self-meaning, a prosumer’s standard, e.g., to be a good hostess); an input from the social situation (including one’s reflected appraisal); a process that compares the input with the standard (a comparator); and an output to the environment (meaningful behavior) that is a results of the comparison. The system works by modifying output to the social situation in attempts to change the input (reflected appraisals) to match the internal standard. Prosumers increase their self-esteem and self-efficacy by performing a role well, because they go through a self-verification process by comparing what a person perceives in the situation (reflected appraisal) and the self-meaning held by the individual (standard) (Burke and Stets 1999).

A social identity is a person’s knowledge that he or she belongs to a social category or group. Such a group-based knowledge may account for the closeness of the social relations among persons who are involved in the prosumption process. Our empirical context is bacalhau prosumption in Brazil. Bacalhau is a Portuguese word for a particular preparation of cod fish and is synonymous with salted and dried cod. It is the tradition that bacalhau meal is served as a centerpiece of family celebrations and social solidarity during important holidays such as Easter and Christmas. Great part of such kind of social gathering relies on symbolic interactive activities that show mutual appreciation, respect, and esteem among the members, helping shaping social identities. To sum up, one way to understand such a prosumption process can be to conceive it as a process where prosumers carry out various production and consumption activities in order to create, maintain and regulate their identities.

We approached this empirical context in an explorative, discovery-oriented basis. Our paper draws upon 13 qualitative focus groups interviews that were developed with 104 consumers from different social classes, genders and geographic locations in Brazil. The guiding heuristic principle is that the informal discussion of all the phases of the prosumption process (namely, planning, shopping, desalting, cooking and serving) can bring to surface several aspects of role-based identity and social identity such as environments, perceived self-meaning, reflected appraisals from others and shared experiences and provide insights on how people interact in order to reinforce social identity in their groups assuming specific roles supported by rituals, behaviors and social connections.

We found empirical evidence on role identity for every phase of the bacalhau prosumption. We verified that for each phase several quality standards are established by a person when she assumes the role of host of the dinner. These standards are controlled once different tasks are performed; if consistency is found between what was established and what was observed the role identity loop is closed and the person experiences feelings of self-accomplishment, pride and satisfaction. For instance, we have found out that for the shopping phase of the bacalhau prosumption the most common standards established are size of the piece of bacalhau, color, kind of package and expiration date. These pre-established standards are checked during the purchase of bacalhau and if this purchase meets all the standards established the host feels that the loop is closed, reinforces her self-accomplishment feeling and passes to the following phase. We also found empirical evidence that the prosumption of bacalhau involves meanings and interactive processes that are deeply mutual appreciation, respect, and esteem among the members, helping shaping social identities. To sum up, one way to understand such a prosumption process can be to conceive it as a process where prosumers carry out various production and consumption activities in order to create, maintain and regulate their identities.
based on the reinforcement of the social identity. For instance, we found that although much of the prosumption of bacalhau is done by one person that assumes the role of the host of the dinner everything is done having in mind the rules and expectations of the group; if these rules and expectations are not met ingredients and attitudes are rearranged in order to conform to the groups' social identity.

In sum, we develop and apply a model that integrates the prosumption process and the theoretical perspectives on role-based identity and social identity to better understand prosumption. It provides novel understanding of the prosumption process-especially related to food-related prosumption. Both theoretical and managerial implications are highlighted, and avenues for future research indicated.

References

I Show You Only Who I Am If Needed: Identity Signaling as a Result of the Interaction Between Personal Motives and Situational Factors
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Consumers often make choices that diverge from those of others to ensure that they effectively communicate desired identities. Teens, for instance, regularly want to distinguish themselves from their parents and therefore choose for music styles, clothes, … their parents dislike. Previous studies demonstrate this drive to differentiate from others through product choices to vary across individuals (Snyder and Fromkin 1977) and situations (Byrne and Griffitt 1969). Further, research shows that for product categories symbolizing one’s identity, individuals abandon product options which the majority prefers (Berger and Heath 2007).

In addition, identity signaling is partially driven by price and explicitness of brand logos. Consumers, for instance, who strive for broader public recognition like to show others they can afford expensive products. Therefore, they choose expensive products that are well known by a broad range of consumers. They further prefer loud or large brand logos because it helps them broadcasting their desired identity. Very expensive top-class products that are only recognizable by connoisseurs are for these consumers less suitable for identity signaling.(Berger and Ward 2009).

The data of our three studies, however, display a more nuanced pattern. In Study 1, we asked 56 undergraduate students to enumerate brands that are typically bought or avoided by students who strive for broader recognition by showing their possessions to others. When analyzing the product categories, product categories that are seen as symbolic of identity were, as expected, most frequently listed (i.e. clothes (n=36) and cars (n=30)). When analyzing brands, results were also straightforward. In general, the rather expensive well known brands that are still affordable by a rather broad range of consumers were top listed as typical signaling brands. These were BMW (n=16) and Mercedes Benz (n=15) for cars and Tommy Hilfiger (n=11) and Armani (n=6) for clothing. Further and in line with our expectations, lower priced well known brands were enumerated as brands these people rather avoid. For cars, these were Volkswagen (n=5) and Opel (n=5), and for clothing, Esprit (n=9) and H&M (n=5). So far, all results were in line with the existing literature.

In study 2 (n=137), we measured the degree to which undergraduate students strive for broader recognition by showing his/her personal wealth to others. The focal product category was clothing because it was top listed as identity signaling product category in Study 1. Surprisingly, we could not find any relation between the degree for striving for broader public recognition and the percentage of the clothes of signaling brands that the participant had in his wardrobe (r=0.07; p>.05). Based on previous studies as well as the results of our first study, we expected people high (low) in need for public recognition to own relatively more (less) clothes of signaling brands.

These unexpected results indicated that the activation of signaling related behavior is more complex than just the straightforward relationship between need for public recognition and an individual’s number of signaling brands. According to McClelland et al. (1989), behavior is the result of the interaction between motives and the environment. In brief, a person with a certain motive or need will only engage in motive relevant behavior under the presence of appropriate environmental stimuli. Without the presence of these environmental stimuli, motive relevant behavior is less likely to occur. In terms of identity signaling, this means that a consumer high in need for public recognition should be more likely to buy an expensive shirt with a large and loud imprint of a brand logo in a multi-brand store than in a mono-brand store. This because the presence of unwanted, cheap brands in the multi-brand store could act as an environmental stimulus that activates the consumer’s need for public recognition. Once this need is activated, the consumer’s purchase behavior should be channeled towards signaling brands with large brand logos. If this explanation is true, then the relationship between need for public recognition and intended purchase behavior of signaling brands must be higher in the presence of unwanted brands, certainly if the brands have explicit brand logos. To test this hypothesis, we set up a third study (n=131) in which we measured need for public recognition and intended purchase behaviour of two brands (within subjects): a signaling brand (Tommy Hilfiger) and an unwanted brand (Esprit).

Signal explicitness was manipulated between subjects. We created two conditions for each brand. In the first condition, all t-shirts had a short description and brand name. To assess intended purchase behavior, each participant (all females) got virtually 100 Euros...