Behind Closed Doors: Opportunity Identification Through Observational Research (9:00, Re-Run)

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To thrive in today’s competitive marketplace, businesses constantly need to search for opportunities to develop and be tuned into consumers as innovators. The short film "Behind Closed Doors" incorporates videography with naturalistic observations to expose the creativity, problem solving, and variety seeking behaviors of one family. Trace analysis and usage behaviors are presented in five themes: "Fresh Ideas", "Storage", "Playing", "Repairs" and "Food Combinations". Results exemplify the distinctive ways in which mundane, household products are transformed through novel applications.

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Conclusion

Why is overseas trip luxury for wealthy consumers? It was found that overseas trip has binomial meaning structure. Binomial means contrasting, competing concepts appear during their overseas trip experiences and creates luxurious feelings. As business implications, manufacturers and service providers of luxurious products tend to believe that they have to provide something gorgeous and deluxe looking. We would like to suggest that luxury is created not just from gorgeous appearing things, but luxury is created from internal meaning structures of consumers. All in all, luxury is produced not just from one pillar of this two pillar diagram but also from another side of the diagram.

“Everything You Always Wanted to Know About the Pre-Party*
(*But Were Afraid To Ask)”
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This videography focuses on a distinct social and cultural phenomenon in Sweden commonly known as the pre-party. This consumption phenomenon is familiar to virtually all Swedish youth from the age where people start familiarizing themselves with alcohol to the age where they have formed more or less stable relationships. There are some unique institutional characteristics that foster a milieu in which the pre-party is a necessary form for youth eager to engage in nightlife activities. First, the legal drinking age is 18 for drinking in a bar or at a restaurant and 20 if you wish to buy alcoholic beverages in the state-owned liquor store, Systembolaget. As most Swedish youngsters feel an urge to drink alcohol before the age of 18 they have to do so outside of bars or restaurants. A second institutional characteristic is the extremely high taxation on alcoholic beverages in Sweden; especially if you buy the beverages in a restaurant you have to pay more money than most youngsters can afford. Consequently the pre-party attendants save money by drinking cheap, often privately imported alcohol before going out. Previous studies on alcohol consumption has tended to emphasize the negative aspects of alcohol consumption and have, we would claim, disregarded potential positive aspects of social drinking (cf. Banister and Piacentini 2006).

Reading previous studies on youth and drinking thus leaves one confused over the apparent popularity of this consumption activity; if drinking only leads to unwanted social encounters, is fueled by negative peer pressure, and has negative consequences for one’s self and social identity, why is it such an enormously popular consumption activity?

To learn more about the consumption phenomena of the pre-party, ethnographic research methods, focus groups, and an Internet survey have been used to gather empirical material. This material has been analyzed using the framework of ritual consumption (Rook 1985; Wallendorf and Arnould 1991). The study thus illuminates and enhances the understanding of the symbolic aspects of the consumption culture phenomena. Findings suggest that the pre-party can be understood as a consumption ritual containing an artifact, an audience, performance roles, and script phases: the meet & greet, the synchronization, the intoxication, the critical phase, and the ending. The ritual becomes meaningful to its participants by providing security, community and a possibility to escape everyday life.

We have chosen to structure the videography as a fictional story rather than the conventional documentary style (Kozinets and Belk 2007). The reason is that we would like to push the boundaries of the video format and explore its potential for representing consumption phenomena in creative non-fiction style (Brown 2005; Sunderland 2007).

References

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To thrive in today’s competitive marketplace, businesses constantly need to search for opportunities to develop. Organisations frequently draw on consumers’ experiences, creative thoughts and usage behaviours for inspiration. The rationale for using consumers for creative solutions is that different individuals have different experiences, abilities, beliefs and needs (Shane and Venkataraman 2000). Such differences lead to unique interpretations of existing functional capabilities, possible product transformations to develop new solutions and novel conjectures for applications in new product areas (Henderson and Cockburn 1994; Kirzner 1997; Zahra and Nielson 2002).
In his seminal work on innovation, von Hippel (1986, 1988, 2005) emphasises the importance of those outside the organisation, especially “lead users” in identifying opportunities for innovation. von Hippel argues that new product concepts generated through consumer discussions or within artificial environments, as in a laboratory or computer simulations, are limited as real usage situations typically are not encountered. Along with other consumer researchers, von Hippel (2001) advocates an observational approach to opportunity identification, focussing on the ways in which users in authentic, real world situations modify and interact with products and services (Griffin and Hauser 1993; Leonard-Barton 1995). With this in mind, the purpose of the short film “Behind Closed Doors” is to:

1) further our understanding of the ways in which consumers transform ordinary products to serve their everyday needs, and
2) broaden our appreciation of the role observational research and videography play in opportunity identification.

As videography is a precise way to vividly document the “lived realities of every day consumption” (Belk and Kozinets 2005, p.128), it is ideal for the purposes of opportunity identification. Within consumer research videographic methods are increasingly being used both to provide rich sources of data and as a dynamic format to present results. Not only does videography compliment other methods by providing stimuli for support and analysis, it extends research because the recordings can be viewed repeatedly and analysed from multiple perspectives, stimulating further insights and adding another layer to the research. Videography also is consistent with von Hippel’s (1986, 1988, 2005) lead user approach to innovation in that recorded images of observed behaviour document the actual ways in which participants use objects within social environments. Observation of existent behaviours is important as studies show that what people say and what they do are two different things (Bernard, Killworth, Kronenfeld and Sailer 1984; Freeman and Webster 1994; Webster 1994). Moreover, some groups of individuals, such as children, do not have sophisticated verbal skills and as a result are unable to provide comprehensive explanations of their behaviours (Valkenburg and Buijzen 2005). Finally, the entrepreneurial research points out that people do not report innovative behaviours, in part, because they do not have full information and so do not realise what is unique (Shane 2000). Videography, therefore, is a valid technique to manage such difficulties.

In this film, results from trace analysis and usage behaviors are presented in five themes: “Fresh Ideas”, “Storage”, “Playing”, “Repairs” and “Food Combinations”. Results exemplify the distinctive ways in which mundane, household products are transformed through novel applications. In each category ordinary, everyday products are shown to have unusual applications. For example, in “Fresh Ideas” bull clips are used to preserve food items, yogurt is placed in the freezer, baking soda keeps the freezer and shoes smelling fresh and clothes are put on hangers before placing them on the clothesline. Under “Storage” the same type of plastic box is used to store shoes, videos and toys while metal stands are used in place of beside tables and bookcases. In “Playing” items such as stickers, yarn, bracelets and plastic string are used to decorate walls, windows, dresser drawers, musical instruments and toys. The social play of two children reveals multiple uses for a trampoline. Not only do the children jump, but they introduce soft toys to the jumping. Play is then extended with the toys to underneath the trampoline. Video boxes are used as blocks to build enclosures for a pretend zoo. With “Repairs” many items are not repaired, instead a quick fix occurs. Tape is used to hold the washing machine hose in place, Blu Tack keeps bathroom tiles on, ties fasten foam padding to the trampoline and frozen peas are used as an ice pack for a hurt arm. In “Food Combinations” the mother manually inserts corn into pasta tubes for her son, the young girl wraps a gelatine snake around a banana, she also modifies a biscuit into a form to be eaten with hommons. The social interaction between the two children is highlighted through the making of their ice-cream sundaes. They obviously are in a state of excitement showing off to one another adding unusual ingredients such as Milo (a chocolate milk powder) and various cake decorations while creating their masterpieces.

Understanding of innovation and innovative organisations is relatively limited (Salaman and Storey, 2002). Very low success rates of innovation suggest that ‘successful’ companies can expect around one third of their innovations will fail, yet it is not always clear why these new products fail (Cooper and Kleinschmidt, 1987; Poolon and Barclay, 1998). The challenge for practitioners and researchers alike is to develop methods that will lead to a ‘pipeline’ of potential project innovations that are consumer-driven, and ‘understood’ clearly within and across the innovating organisation. “Behind Closed Doors” highlights how naturalistic observations incorporated with videography are able to expose the creativity, problem solving, and variety seeking behaviors of one family. This research suggests alternative approaches for future research into opportunity identification, making use of observation and videography. Moreover, the current work emphasises that innovation and creativity require consideration of the relational rather than just self-seeking behaviours, needs or events.

References