

Generativity and How Consumers Express Concern About Legacy.

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Abstract

Many consumer decisions such as: extra long term investments, purchase of life insurances or expensive green products, NGO donations, etc are not understood with the classical utility maximization model. However the concept of generativity, (the consumer need to leave a positive legacy) can offer an alternative explanation to these decisions. Our research shows that generativity increases the purchase intention for transcendent products. Additionally communal-generative consumers show a higher purchase intention for socio-transcendent products.

Introduction

Generativity, the commitment for the well-being of future generations expressed by leaving a positive legacy, has been a crucial concern in most societies for many individuals (Erikson, 1950). Probably for this reason, a number of organizations promote the benefits that their products and brands can provide to the next generations. For example, the swatch maker Patek Phillipe's slogan is "*you never actually owe a Patek Phillipe you merely look after it for the next generation*", which focuses on the value of the product as a legacy.

Although generative communication examples can be found in many communication actions, there has been a lack of research on generativity in consumer behavior literature. However several consumer decisions concern products with important future outcomes such as houses, products that help preserving the environment, art works, photographs etc., and services such as high class education and life insurances. Therefore it is of interest for marketers to understand how generativity influences consumer behavior. In order to achieve this goal, in the first part of this research we discuss the concept of product transcendence. Secondly, we develop hypothesis about the relationship between different types of generativity agentic and communal and the purchase intention for transcendent products. Finally methodology, results and conclusions are presented.

Transcendent products.

Concerning product categorization in marketing, useful classification schemas have emerged over time focusing on consumer willingness to exert effort (e.g. Copeland, 1923), or on specific characteristics of the product such as durability or frequency of purchase (e.g. Aspinwall, 1962). Based on psychology literature we can suggest an additional taxonomy: transcendent vs. non transcendent products. Transcendence is a term used mainly in psychology although marketing literature has also used the term: "Consumer goods can have

significance beyond their utilitarian and commercial value” (McCracken 1986), and can become a vehicle of transcendence experience (Belk et al. 1989).

Product transcendence refers to products that can provide consumption experiences that go beyond the material experience of consuming those products. It has two dimensions: one relates to the product capacity to generate sensations beyond the material experience, (this is, having a deeper meaning beyond tangible attributes), while the other dimension relates to the product capacity to allow the consumer to go beyond his/her self-existence (the meanings of the product can survive the consumer) a need already identified by Kotre (1984). Moreover we can also distinguish between ego-transcendent products or goods and services related to being remembered through a more personal legacy, (e.g. running a marathon or a wedding ring) and socio-transcendent products or goods and services related to making a more social altruistic legacy (e.g. a trip as volunteer to a needed area, or buying recycled paper).

Generativity in consumer behavior

Erikson (1950) identified generativity as the defining psychosocial feature of middle-adult years. He stated that most people are likely to be concerned about the well-being of future generations and to be involved in various life projects, from parenting to political action, aimed at generating a positive legacy for future generations that will ultimately outlive the self. In this sense Kotre (1984) suggests that generativity involves extending the self beyond the end of one's own life. He distinguished four different forms of generativity: biological (adult nurse their offspring), parental (adult nurture and discipline offspring), technical (the adult teaches skills to those who require them), cultural generativity (the adult creates, renovates, or conserves a symbol system). McAdams and De St. Aubin (1998) developed a complete model of generativity made of seven elements from cultural demands to generative actions. Hunter and Rowles (2005) proposed that generative consumers will aim at the goal of passing a positive legacy of the self, in a more intense way than non generative people. They describe three kinds of legacy: biological legacy, material legacy and the legacy of values.

Two papers have considered the influence of generativity on consumer perceptions and actions. Hodge (2003) suggested that generativity should correlate with philanthropic actions, and Giacalone et al. (2005) showed that generativity was a significant predictor of consumer sensitivity to corporate social performance. Generative consumers are concerned about the wellbeing of future generations, this leads them to be concerned about their legacy (Hunter and Rowles, 2005). Legacy is what we leave behind when we die. Given the existence of transcendent products, products that have meaning beyond the existence of the consumer, we propose that generative consumers must have a higher purchase intention for these transcendent goods and services than non generative consumers. Therefore we propose the following hypothesis:

H1: Purchase intention of transcendent products is higher for high generative consumers than for low generative consumers.

Following Bakan (1966), Kotre (1984) identified communal modes of generativity (need for affiliation, care and cooperation) in nurturance and care for others, while especially agentic modes of generativity (desire of achievement and dominance) promote creative and/or powerful extensions of the self, as in some forms of leadership, entrepreneurial activity, scientific achievement, and so forth. Related to this Bagozzy and Dabholkar (1994) showed that consumer pro-environmental behaviors are driven by both egoistic (agentic) and altruistic (communal) goals, with altruistic goals prevailing. Later, Lee and Holden (1999)

demonstrated that benefits of environmental actions are perceived as having consequences in today's world, but more importantly in the future

Therefore if generative consumers prefer transcendent products, and there are two types of generative consumers, agentic and communal, they probably seek different types of transcendent products. As such, if agentic generative consumers are motivated by egoistic and dominance goals they will be more interested in products that allow them to pass a personal legacy to future generations, in order to control and dominate how they are going to be remembered. Ego-transcendent products seem to be more suitable for this purpose. On the other hand, communal-generative consumers are concerned about future generations in a more altruistic and cooperative way, and for this reason they will be more interested in goods and services that carry a more social and altruistic legacy, this is, socio-transcendent products. Therefore we propose the following hypotheses:

H2a: The purchase intention for ego-transcendent products is higher for agentic-generative consumers than for communal-generative consumers.

H2b: The purchase intention for socio-transcendent products is higher for communal-generative consumers than for agentic-generative consumers.

Method

A first study was carried out to find out if consumers identify some products as more transcendent than others. Two different dictionary meanings of "transcendent" were given to five marketing experts:

1. extending or lying beyond the limits of ordinary experience
2. the act of surpassing usual limits

Firstly, we asked them to agree on a concept definition for transcendent products. The result was: "goods and services that are being perceived as having significance beyond the material experience and/or the consumer self-existence". Secondly, we asked each of them to write down 10 products very transcendent and 10 non transcendent. We obtained a total 100 products, 50 of them were classified as transcendent products and the other 50 as non transcendent. We put the products together and asked the experts to choose a total selection of 16 of each category, transcendent and non transcendent.

In stage two, we distributed a self-administered questionnaire to a convenience sample of 50 undergraduate students (aged 18-28, 24 males, 26 females). The questionnaire included the following heading: "Transcendent products are those that have significance beyond the material experience and/or the consumer self-existence". We asked subjects to rate the degree of transcendence of the 32 proposed products from 1 "Non transcendent product" to 7 "Very transcendent product". The goal was to test if the two sets of products actually rated differently in "transcendence".

A second study was carried out to understand the relationship between generativity and transcendent products. A questionnaire was sent to 1500 random email addresses. Three rounds were done reaching a total sample of 238 valid questionnaires (51% females and 49% males, age ranged from 19 to 73 years old, with mean equals to 36). We used a convenience sample. Our primary interest was to examine the nature of the link between generative consumers and their purchase intention for transcendent products. The questionnaire included 48 items to measure generativity, agency, communion and purchase intention, based on the scales used by Mcadams and St Aubin (1992) and Dohi and Hirokawa (2004). Cronbach Alfa

test shows high reliability for each of the three concepts used as independent variables (generativity 0.897, generativity by agency 0.882 and generativity by communion 0.879), and for the purchase intention (0.812). Socio-transcendent and ego-transcendent products were included in the questionnaire.

The sample was divided into generative consumers and non generative consumers using a median split. Moreover the generative consumers were classified as predominantly agentic or mainly communal. If generativity by agency scored higher than generativity by communion we classified the individual as agentic-generative consumer. If it was the other way around we classified the individual as communal-generative consumer.

Results

When testing the degree of transcendence of two sets of products results showed that the products supposed to be less transcendent (e.g. renting a house, making a boat cruise, buying a car) scored 2.9 in the Liker scale, while the proposed transcendent products (e.g. recycled paper, running a marathon, or buying a house) scored 5.5. Transcendence score is significantly different ($p < 0.01$) for both groups of products. Consumers do differentiate between more and less transcendent products.

In H1 we posited that high generative consumers would have a higher purchase intention for transcendent products than less generative consumers. Results allows us to confirm a positive effect of generativity on purchase intention of transcendent products ($F(1,237)=25.55$; $p < 0.01$). Generative consumers have a higher purchase intention of transcendent products (4.57) than less generative consumers (3.94). See table 1.

Table1. Purchase Intention of Transcendent Products

Generativity Level	Mean	N	St.Dv.
LOW	3.94	116	1.02
HIGH	4.57	122	0.90
Total	4.26	238	1.01

In H2a we proposed that agentic-generative consumers would have a higher purchase intention for ego-transcendent products than communal generative consumers. Results show that there is no difference in purchase intention between agentic and communal generative consumers ($F(1,121)=0.008$; $p > 0.10$). H2a was not confirmed. See table 2.

Table 2. Purchase intention for Ego-Transcendent Products.

Generativity Style	Mean	N	St.Dv.
Agentic-Generatives	4,42	40	1,19
Communal-Generatives	4,40	82	1,01
Total	4,40	122	1,07

“Primum vivere deinde philosophari” is a saying attributed to Hobbes. This sentence can explain the fact that communal-generative consumers have the same purchase intention for ego-transcendent products than consumers with an agentic-generative style. Me first then the other appears to be the way in which the generative need is expressed.

In H2b we posited that communal-generative consumers will have a higher purchase intention for socio-transcendent products. Results show significant differences ($F(1,121)=3.31$; $p < 0.05$)

that confirm H2b. If communion is about cooperation, affiliation and nurturance, it seems reasonable that the communal-generative consumers are more interested in the socio-transcendent products (4.61) than de agentic-generative consumers (4,25). See table 3.

Table 3. Purchase Intention for socio-transcendent products

Generativity Style	Mean	N	St.Dv.
Agentic-Generativity	4,25	40	1,11
Communal-Generativity	4,61	82	0,99
Total	4,49	122	1,04

Conclusions

This research, as a first formal approach to this topic in marketing, makes both a conceptual and an empirical contribution. First we have deepened into an underdeveloped concept in marketing literature “consumer generativity”. Second, we have empirically tested the influence of consumer’s generativity on the purchase intention for transcendent products. Furthermore, we have also tested the influence of two styles of generativity in consumer decision making; agency and communion.

Our results are of high interest for market research and market segmentations. Marketers can get useful information analyzing where the highest generative consumers are and which are their needs of transcendent products. Moreover in the area of product development research could be focus on finding which attributes make a product more transcendent. Finally, when carrying out communication activities, marketers can segment markets, focusing on the transcendence character or attributes of the product for generative consumers and on ordinary attributes for non generative and materialistic consumers. In summary, there is a broad field of work to be developed by marketers who want to satisfy their customers’ generativity needs.

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