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**LES ATTENTES TRANSFORMATIONNELLES ET LES RELATIONS MAGIQUES AUX PRODUITS :
CONCEPTUALISATION ET MESURE DU FETICHISME VIS-A-VIS D'UN PRODUIT**

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Résumé : Cette recherche s'intéresse au concept peu exploré de fétichisme du produit en tant que relation magique/irrationnelle du consommateur au produit. Le fétichisme du produit est conceptualisé comme un construit multi-dimensionnel, mettant en exergue l'attribution d'une aura et d'un pouvoir extraordinaire au produit. Nous présentons trois études visant 1) à construire et valider une échelle de mesure du fétichisme du produit et 2) à tester un modèle mettant en relation fétichisme du produit, attentes transformationnelles vis-à-vis du produit, implication vis-à-vis de la catégorie de produit et attachement au produit. Les résultats satisfaisants de ces études suggèrent que le fétichisme vis-à-vis d'un produit peut-être suscité en favorisant le développement d'attentes transformationnelles, par exemple à travers la communication publicitaire.

Mots-clef : fétichisme ; attentes transformationnelles ; échelle de mesure

**SELF-TRANSFORMATION EXPECTATIONS AND MAGIC RELATIONSHIPS TO PRODUCTS:
CONCEPTUALIZING AND MEASURING PRODUCT FETISHISM**

Abstract: This paper discusses the concept of product fetishism as an important but understudied kind of magical/irrational relationship to objects. Product fetishism is conceptualized as a multidimensional construct underlining the attribution of an aura and extraordinary power to a product. Three studies were conducted 1) to develop and validate a product fetishism scale, and 2) to test a model relating product fetishism to transformation expectations, product category involvement and attachment to products. This research shows that product fetishism may be of managerial relevance as it is rooted in consumers' expectations towards the product.

Keywords: Fetishism ; transformation expectations ; scale development

SELF-TRANSFORMATION EXPECTATIONS AND MAGIC RELATIONSHIPS TO PRODUCTS: CONCEPTUALIZING AND MEASURING PRODUCT FETISHISM.

Introduction

Consumers sometimes bind themselves to objects in a very irrational fashion. They might also grant magical powers to products that are particularly precious to them. Even in a rationality-driven modern society, consumers seem to resort to magical thinking in order to live more meaningful lives (e.g. Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry, 1989 ; Fernandez and Lastovicka, 2011). This research focuses on the concept of fetishism as a way to create magical relationships to products. The seminal works of Belk, Wallendorf and Sherry (1989) and Fernandez and Lastovicka (2011) highlighted many essential facets of fetishes. They demonstrate that fetishism is far from being a mere delusion or a pointless fantasy, as it allows consumers to reduce their anxiety and enhance their performances in various activities on a daily basis. However, these researches, relying on context-bounded phenomenological approaches, shed little light on the role that marketing could play to influence fetishist relationships to products. This research aims at contributing to the field of marketing by proposing and testing a model relating product fetishism with one of its potential driver in the notion of « transformation expectations » (Richins, 2011, 2013), product category involvement and attachment to the product. The next section briefly discusses the literature on fetishism, provides a definition for the construct and introduces the model. The sections that follow introduce and discuss three studies. Two studies were conducted to build a four-dimensional scale of product fetishism through exploratory and confirmatory analysis. The last study tests the hypothesized relationships between transformation expectations towards the product, product category involvement, product fetishism and attachment to the product.

Theoretical Framework

Construct definition. In this paper, product fetishism is defined as the attribution of an aura and magical powers to a product in order to fulfill specific aspirations. A multidisciplinary review of literature reveals that fetishism has two important facets that may be relevant to a marketing approach : the instrumental and aspirational dimensions of fetishism. Fetishism is instrumental in the sense that fetishes are magical entities created for specific purposes (e.g. enhancing guitar performances, Fernandez and Lastovicka, 2011), which are discarded if they are not perceived as efficient (Hume, 1757). Literature shows that fetishism is also deeply intertwined with one's aspirations. That is, fetishes are created for central purposes in one's life : health, spirituality, protection, self-enhancement, etc. These two facets of fetishes are useful to distinguish fetish from other magical artefacts such as sacred objects (which are not always instrumental, but rather have intrinsic value, like the holy relics of a saint) or lucky charms (which are not necessarily aspirational, but rely on superstitious beliefs, that is, related to the existence of good and bad luck ; Kramer and Block, 2008).

The proposed model. In this paragraph, a model is introduced, based on the previous discussion of the nature of fetishism. The idea that fetishes are necessarily instrumental implies that these objects are expected to have some kind of power in the first place, otherwise they would have no reason to exist. Fetishism stems from magical expectations towards an object. This paper focuses on the notion of transformation expectations as « magical beliefs/expectations » (p. 154 ; Richins, 2011) which are particularly relevant in the

context of modern consumption. Defined by Richins (2011, p.145) as « the belief that one's self or one's life will be changed in a significant and meaningful way by the acquisition and use of a product », transformation expectations are deeply rooted in human irrationality and fantasy. This paper contends that transformation expectations (self-transformation expectations more precisely) might be an important driver of fetishist relationships to products.

H1 : self-transformation expectations positively affect product fetishism.

As stated earlier in the paper, the aspirational nature of the fetish implies that fetishism only occurs in contexts which are important to the consumer (in traditional societies, that would be abundant crops or protection from illness for instance ; e.g. Malinowski, 1948). Therefore, product category involvement (understood as the importance of the product category in one's life) was hypothesized to play a moderating role in the relationship between transformation expectations vis-à-vis the product and product fetishism.

H2 : Product category involvement is a moderator of the relationship between self-transformation expectations and product fetishism. That is, for consumers who are high in product category involvement, self-transformation expectations will have higher positive association with product fetishism than for their counterparts.

Another important aspect of fetishism is that actual fetishes are deeply cherished (Ellen, 1988 ; Fernandez and Lastovicka, 2011). Fetishism, based on transformation expectations, leads to an attachment to the fetishized product. Hence, the following hypothesis :

H3 : Product fetishism mediates the relationship between transformation expectations and the attachment to the product.

The next section presents two studies aiming at developing a scale of product fetishism.

Studies 1 and 2 : Product Fetishism Scale Development and Validation

Study 1 : exploratory analysis and scale development. Relying on the literature and on 15 semi-structured interviews, a set of 50 items was generated, related to the four dimensions of fetishism highlighted by Ellen (i.e. concretization [the object embodies an abstraction], confusion [the object is conflated with the abstraction], animation [the object is given human characteristics] and ambiguity of control [the object has a hold on its owner] ; 1988). The item list was submitted to three psychology experts. Only 43 items were retained for further analysis and 10 of them were reformulated for enhanced clarity. These items were not related to any type of products in particular. That is, the items were designed to measure generic fetishism vis-à-vis an object autonomously chosen by the respondent, not product fetishism. In fact, respondents were asked to think about their most cherished object and to answer the questions (on 7-points Likert scales) while keeping this object in mind. The items were administered through an online questionnaire filled up by 347 voluntary respondents (56.19% male, 43.81% female, ages from 20 to 27 yo). A principal component analysis was conducted on the data, using an oblique rotation. Items were removed from the analysis step by step when their quality of representation or factorial loadings were low (respectively <0.5 and <0.7). A 11-items, four-dimensional solution was obtained after many iterations. This solution accounted for 73.015% of the total variance. Cronbach's alpha was satisfying, ranging from 0.724 for the ambiguity of control dimension to 0.844 for the concretization dimension. The dimensions were moderately correlated, ranging from -0.329 (concretization and animation) to 0.290 (concretization and confusion). The 11 items emerging from this first study were used for the confirmatory analysis conducted in the next study.

Study 2 : scale validation . In study 2, the 11-items questionnaire was administered online to a different sample of voluntary respondents (N= 239, 41.4% male, 58.6% female, $M_{age}= 21.01$). Preliminary analyses showed the same factorial structure as study 1 and satisfactory reliability of the four dimensions. Then, a structural equation modeling software (Amos) was used in order to achieve the confirmatory analysis of the scale's structure. Three structural equation models were tested to enhance the model fit. The structural equation modeling analysis showed that a 10-items four-dimensional model fits better to the data. For this model, besides the Chi-squared test (which is very sensitive to the multinormality of the data and to the sample size according to Fornell and Larcker [1981] ; the test was significant, $p=0.02$; $\chi^2/df = 1.622$), the absolute fit indices provided satisfying values (RMSEA = 0.051 ; GFI = 0.963 ; AGFI = 0.928 ; SRMR = 0.0364). The relative fit indices also supported the good adjustment of the 10-items model (NFI = 0.948 ; TLI = 0.967 ; CFI = 0.979).

Jöreskog's ρ was calculated to evaluate the scale's reliability, ranging from 0.702 (confusion dimension) to 0.828 (concretization dimension) and suggesting that the scale had a satisfying reliability. For the same purpose, the composite reliability of the four dimensions was calculated. It ranged from 0.701 (confusion dimension) to 0.829 (ambiguity of control dimension), suggesting the the reliability of the scale. Finally, to test the convergent and discriminant validities of the dimensions, average variance extracted (AVE), average shared variance (ASV), and maximum shared variance (MSV) were calculated. For all the dimensions, AVE was superior to the value of 0.5, suggesting that the dimensions show a satisfying convergent validity (Hair et al, 2010). Then, AVE was verified to be always superior to both MSV and ASV. This was the case for every dimension, suggesting that the dimensions of the scale display a satisfactory discriminant validity (Hair et al, 2010).

In conclusion, these results indicate that the 10-items scale of product fetishism is valid and reliable and might be fruitfully used in other studies.

Study 3 : Model Testing

This study focused on a specific product category : sports shoes. Respondents were recruited through the university's experimental laboratory. The respondents participated in exchange for course credits (N=152 ; $M_{age}=22.03$; 65.2% male, 34.8% female). After purification of the data from the extreme values (Hair et al, 2010), 141 responses were left for the final analysis. Respondents were asked to think about the last pair of sports shoes they purchased and to fill up the various scales of the questionnaire. Richins' (2013) 5-items self-transformation expectations scale was used ($\alpha=0.88$). In Richins' studies, respondents were asked to think about a product they really wanted to purchase. In this study, respondents had to think about a product they had already purchased (so product fetishism could be measured) and to project themselves at the moment of the purchase to describe their expectations at that time. So, the instructions preceding the scale (in order to get retrospective expectations) were a little bit different from Richins' studies. For product category involvement, defined as « an individual difference variable representing the arousal potential of a product or activity that causes personal relevance » (p.690 ; Higié and Feick, 1989), Higié and Feick's scale (1989) was adapted. The scale showed a two-dimensional structure (hedonic [$\alpha=0.9$] and self-expression [$\alpha=0.82$] dimensions) with only 6-items. For this study, the items of the scale of product fetishism was adapted to sports shoes consumption. In the previous studies, respondents were asked to think about one of the objects they cherish the most. Here, they had to think about the last pair of shoes they purchased. This context difference was expected to affect the scale's dimensionality. In fact, the dimensions appeared as less accurate in study 3. The concretization and confusion dimensions (which are conceptually close) merged into an

unique dimension (5 items, $\alpha=0.87$). The animation and ambiguity of control, which are both conceptually linked to the influence of the product on its possessor, merged into an unique dimension (4 items, $\alpha=0.87$). To measure product attachment, Ball and Tasaki's (1992) scale of attachment to possessions was adapted and reduced to 4 items ($\alpha=0.81$). A simple linear regression analysis was used to test the main effect of self-transformation expectations on product fetishism (after verifying the prerequisites for the test). Self-transformation expectations account for 19,5% of the total variance of product fetishism ($R^2 = 0.195$). The F test was significant ($F=33,761$, $p=0.000$). The correlations table suggested that self-transformation expectations have a moderate impact on product fetishism ($t=5.810$, $\beta=0.442$, $p=0.000$), supporting H1. To examine the moderating role of product category involvement on the relationship between self-transformation expectations and product fetishism, an analysis through the macro PROCESS (Preacher and Hayes, 2008) was conducted. The analysis showed that a significant interaction effect existed between expectations and hedonic involvement ($\beta = 0.0919$, $t = 2.6839$, $p = 0.0082$). A floodlight analysis was then conducted, showing that for values over 4.7, hedonic involvement influences positively the expectations-fetishism relationship. This finding supported the second hypothesis. Finally, Zhao, Lynch and Chen's (2010) procedure was followed to examine the mediating role of product fetishism in the relationship between self-transformation expectations and product attachment. The macro PROCESS (Preacher and Hayes, 2008) was used to generate regression results. The confidence interval excludes the 0 value at the 95% confidence level ([0.1511 ; 0.3741]). That is, the indirect effect of expectations on product attachment through fetishism is significant. The coefficient related to this indirect effect is positive (0.2517), just as the coefficient related to the direct effect of expectations on attachment (0.23). These coefficients, as much as regression coefficients related to product fetishism ($\beta_{\text{fetishism}} = 0.74$; $t = 9.04$; $p = 0.0000$) and self-transformation expectations ($\beta_{\text{expectations}} = 0.23$; $t = 3.6$; $p = 0.0004$), suggest that self-transformation expectations positively affect product fetishism, which in turn positively affects product attachment. This finding supports the third hypothesis. Moreover, by relating product fetishism and product attachment, study 3 provides support for nomological and predictive validities to the product fetishism scale.

Conclusion : Implications and Further Research

This paper proposed a conceptualization of product fetishism and a model relating this construct to self-transformation expectations, product category involvement and product attachment. The findings indicate that for highly involved consumers, the elicitation of transformation expectations may lead to product fetishism and attachment. According to Richins (2011), this kind of magical expectations may be created through advertising and media. This means that brands might reinforce their relationships to consumers by communicating about the extraordinary features of their products (that is, puffery and exaggerated claims). Much research is needed to understand if a transition from product fetishism to brand fetishism is possible. The consequences of product fetishism also have to be explored in terms of product failure sensitivity, price sensitivity, product disposition, consumer communities integration, etc. This concept opens many areas for new contributions.

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