

THE CO-CREATION AND CO-DESTRUCTION OF VALUE THROUGH LANGUAGE: AN ANALYSIS OF UNIVERSITY SERVICE PROVISION TO INDUSTRY WITHIN SHIFTING PARADIGMS

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ABSTRACT

'In a service-centered model, humans both are at the center and are active participants in the change process' (Vargo and Lusch 2004:12). Central to human activity is language. This paper takes empirical material from a three and a half-year ethnographic study to explore the co-creation and co-destruction of value through language. The language of the service provider / customer relationship is explored through an innovative application of systemic functional linguistics and Lacanian psychoanalytical theory. The paper illustrates the destruction of value in the service provider / customer relationship which has broader theoretical and practitioner implications for managing service marketing relationships. Academics and practitioners have no hesitation in paying attention to the most minute of statistical analysis in the pursuit of increasing value yet fail miserably when comes to understanding what customers and service providers may in fact be saying. The paper addresses a gap in marketing theory and practice and draws attention to the implications of language functioning in the production/consumption process of value creation/destruction at the moment of articulation.

INTRODUCTION

This paper explores how language shapes value 'In a service-centered model, [were] humans both are at the center and are active participants in the change process' (Vargo and Lusch 2004:12). The argument for a paradigm shift in marketing (Sheth and Parvatiyar 2000) is one that is gathering momentum. This is particularly the case with the new service paradigm which revises the logic on intangible resources as a major contributor to value (Vargo and Lusch 2004). Yet one of the most significant intangible contributors of value is little understood or researched. The purpose of this paper is to illustrate the central function of language in the co-creation and co-destruction of value that is overlooked in both the new service paradigm and Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) literatures. Ostensibly, these are two sets of marketing theory and practice which deal with the intangible, the cultural and the symbolic aspects of value creation but both underestimate the contribution of the functionality of language at the moment of articulation to the production/destruction of value as it is consumed at that point. This paper addresses this gap in theory and practice.

ANALYSIS AND LANGUAGE

The aim of this section is to outline the methodological approach with regard to key theoretical and analytical concepts drawn from two broad areas of theoretical work, the psychoanalytical writings of Lacan and systemic functional linguistics (Halliday 1994; Fairclough 2003) in order to investigate value creation / destruction at the point of articulation.

Desire for the Other

As it is impossible to desire what is possessed, desire is always 'the desire for something else' (Lacan 2006:431). So the object of desire is continually deferred. No consumer good will totally satisfy. Neither ownership nor consumption will satisfy. Desire is continual deferral and there is only one Lacanian Real object of desire. The *objet petit a* is ultimately the desire of the Other's desire. Other is the symbolic order as it is particularised by each individual. While the Other is also the other person 'the Other most of all must be considered a locus, the locus in which language is constituted' (Lacan 1997:274). The real object of desire is the *objet petit a* and this is not merely a relation to a conscious, homogenised object of the imaginary, but the desire of the Other's desire. Language is beyond conscious control and 'the unconscious is the Other's discourse' (Lacan 2006:10). Desire is the desire of the Other and 'desire of the Other's desire' and so desire is to be the object of another's desire and a desire for recognition. What makes an object valuable is not any intrinsic quality in the object but that the object is desired by another. Value is desire for the Other's desire. To destroy desire is to destroy value. The denigration of the Other's desire is the destruction of value.

The social production of the naming desire

In the unconscious realm of continual deferral, the retroactive effect of naming the signifier, the performative dimension of naming, transfers value onto an object from the unconscious desire named into the *objet petit a*. For example, the allusion to America as a land of hard, honest people of the Marlboro brand is not that Marlboro expresses an American value but that American value is retroactively constructed into the naming of America as Marlboro country.

References Available on Request.