

The Consumption of a 'Self-development' Product or Service: Take the Dance Club at Copenhagen Business School as an Example

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Abstract: This research takes the Dance Club at Copenhagen Business School as an example to attempt to explain consumption behaviors of a 'self-development' product, using qualitative methods. With 3 different qualitative methods, the researcher analyzes the consumption behavior in culture perspective, consumer rituals, identity and consumption/selves in transition. The dancing classes have many virtues to contribute to the identity construction of female college students and the research gives the a clear understanding of female college students' consumer behaviors in dancing classes. Upon understanding, marketers will have a clearer insight into the current market and trend.

Keywords: Self-development product; Consumer Behavior; Qualitative Methods

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1 Introduction

Qualitative market research is a method to understand through meanings, concepts, characteristics and or symbols rather than statistical measures^[1]. Instead of providing a large amount of data to support findings, qualitative research helps to gain understandings from the data which in terms of consumer behavior, it will help marketers to gain insight into market trends. In other words, marketers derive value from qualitative methods through a more in-depth understanding of the target market, thus, allowing them to better tailor

and develop products to consumer needs. Dancing lessons as a self-development product attract a lot of female customers, and since the researcher started to take dancing lessons last year, she felt dance is not just a simple product to consume but also the context in consumers' self-development. Therefore, the researcher decided to explore more about how dances contribute to the identity construction of female college students. (CBS Dance)



Figure 1. CBS Dance Facebook Page

The objective of the research is to use the theoretical and methodological framework to analyze what does the dance lesson as a self-development product means to female college students, how dancers consume the experience of dancing, and finally, explore how the dance lesson as a product contributes to their identity construction. Ultimately, to come up with an understanding of the consumption of dancing lessons among consumer culture.

This paper mainly consists of 5 sections. With the research question: 'how dance contributes to

the identity construction of college female dancers' mentioned above, the researcher will explain the methodological approach to data collection., and based on the qualitative data, she will further analyze it and conclude to my research question. Ultimately, I will use qualitative methods to reflect myself from contribution to the class to my learning outcome.

2 Methodology

2.1 Observation

A qualitative researcher's observations are documented systematically and thoroughly to find patterns across the data set. There are four levels of observation: Complete Observer, Observer as Participant, Participant as Observer and Full Participation. When the researcher first started to research, she started from an outsider perspective with observation level one which is she went to dancing classes at CBS common room and sat down aside to observe dancers' reactions and behaviors through the class. The researcher found that all the dancers first changed clothes and did warmup when they came to the class. And most of them are very confident while dancing even though some are not professional in dancing. Then the researcher joined the class as a participant to observe. After the class, she felt her muscles more comfortable though she sweated a lot. At time in the research process, an outside perspective is not enough as it may not reveal the whole picture or the depth of the research. Therefore, the researcher started from an insider perspective: after the class, she hung out with my fellow dancers to build trust and observe their actions.

2.2 Netnography

Netnography studies the interaction between people as a cultural phenomenon and it can help gain rich insights about customers in online communities to in-depth understand consumer behavior. To collect data, the researcher found a Facebook group that has over 1500 followers. She mainly collected archive data here so she has researched previous comments and posts from participants and saved all the relevant data for further analysis.

2.3 Interview

In the field of marketing and consumer research, interviews tend to be the method most often associate with qualitative research. Qualitative interviews can

give us useful insights into a number of issues, such as how consumers make sense of and attach meaning to activities, brands, self, or society, consumers' emotional connection to a brand, the symbolic meaning related to product use etc.. In order to gain more in-depth resources of the topic, the researcher developed an interview guide. At the first time, she interviewed a Danish girl called Anna (Alias) who has attended the dancing classes for almost one year. After gaining the permission of recording the interview from Anna, she started with questions like please recall your first dancing class, describe your favorite experience here etc.

Anna told me her story: "I have never learnt to dance before I entered university. So, at first, I wasn't confident enough to dance with other dancers... one day I saw my friend posted a short video of the dancing class, I felt that I should try...umm... I actually wanted to learn to dance in my college life...but always afraid of start. So... with the encouragement from my friends, I went to my first dancing class. My first dancing class was like a 'tester' for me...you know... I felt very nervous at first... Oh I still remember that the instructor asked us to walk in the way that we wanted...like...like confidently show our beautiful body shape. And... it somehow worked for me. Nobody cared about you, you just walked the way you wanted. I...I felt a good start. Then... up to now I've taken the classes for almost one year... 'consume the product' for a long time and... and I'm not afraid of dancing in the front anymore even though I still don't have solid foundation of dancing skills...Since joined the class, I met a lot of good friends and I become more extroverted now and I also feel that I don't feel exhausted that often as before... become more energetic... and my body shape looks better as well, I can clearly feel my muscles [haha].

The researcher was very impressed by Anna's answer as she started to dance without foundation. In order to gather data from a different perspective, the researcher also interviewed another girl, Shuyu (Alias). Since she started to learn to dance at a very young age, and has danced for more than 10 years. So, the researcher asked her to roughly tell me her dancing experience and why she as a consumer chose dancing classes this product. One of the most impressive things that she said was that she was ethnically from China but grew up in Denmark. So, she used to be very afraid of talking to people

here due to racial differences and she felt self-abasement even though people were very friendly to her. Therefore, she was sent to dancing classes by her mom. Actually, her first intention was just to learn a skill and have an interest, however, with the improvement of her dancing skills, she found out herself and became more open to get out of her own world. Therefore, she keeps attending different dancing classes to make friends who can share a common interest as well as encourage those college girls who are not confident enough especially, they're at a stage where they care about their body shape very much. Based on these data, the researcher will further analyze them later.

3 Analysis

3.1 Culture perspective

Cultural categories: Cultural categories are a system of distinctions that organizes our phenomenal world.

Time: In our case, female college students track their muscles and weight throughout time. Because there are various dancing classes, they choose different types and time based on their long-term goals, for instance, attending 3 hours a week will help gain muscles faster than 1 hour a week.

Space: The common dancing room is for dancers to socialize and make friends with people who have similar goals or interests, also sometimes they help each other with body movements and warmup.

Cultural principles: Cultural principles are ideas that determine how our phenomenal world is organized, evaluated, and construed.

Norms: There are several unspoken rules when one attend dancing classes. Dancers should clean the floor and leg pressing pole before and after class. Besides, do show respect to each other and do not keep staring at others while dancing. This is very important as some are not good at dancing at first or some may be overweight, so judging others is very rude in dancing classes. Usually, there is only one wall of mirror in the space, so changing positions regularly is also a norm, because most dancers want to see themselves in the mirror while dancing.

Ideals: They all want to improve their body shape and confidence and of course dancing skills.

3.2 Consumer rituals

Ritual is a kind of social action devoted to the

manipulation of cultural meaning for purposes of collective and individual communication and categorization^[2]. Based on the qualitative data that the researcher has collected; she researcher has found that college female students who attend dancing classes perform the following rituals.

3.2.1 Shoot videos of the dance instructor and themselves while they are dancing

Most of the dancers at the club shoot videos when the instructor is dancing, so that they can review the dances when they go back home. One of my interviewees, Nina said "...I always shoot a video of the instructor, because I'm a relatively slow learner in dancing and it was difficult for me to catch up with the instructor and remember all the movements. So, in this way, I could also practice at home and compare the instructor's dance with mine and improve my dancing skills."

3.2.2 Taking photos and shooting videos of all participants' dancing at the end of the class

With both observation and netnographic research, dancers usually post the dancing videos and photos by themselves after each class. In this way, dancers can see their improvements in dancing and most importantly share their experience with other potential consumers who may also interested in.

These rituals can be categorized as Exchange Rituals and Possession Rituals.

Exchange Rituals: According to McCracken, Exchange rituals are used to direct goods charged with certain meaningful properties to those individuals the gift-giver supposes are needful of these properties^[2]. Most people first come to know the information about dancing classes through advertisements, promotions by universities and people who are attending or have attended the classes before. The information spreads through these platforms. This is considered an exchange ritual. The researcher also noticed that people who attend the classes like to share their experience, videos, photos after each class and post them on the social media platform. Because the social circles of most college girls are college students, through the posts, the information is being transferred to those who are interested in.

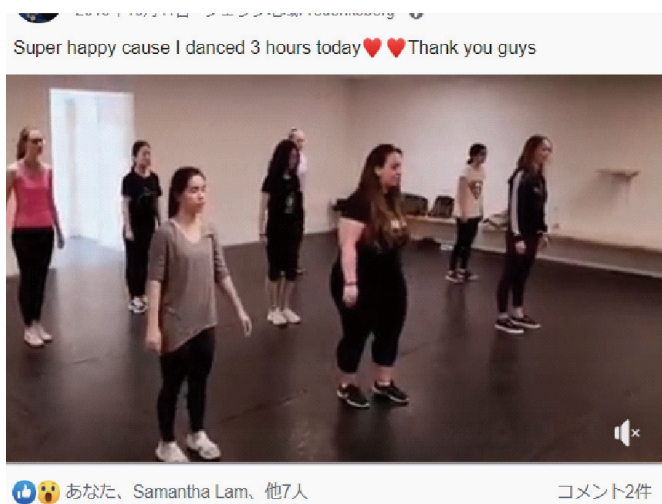


Figure 2. Dancer's Facebook Page

Possession Rituals: Through possession rituals, we make something “truly ours”. Dances can help people improve their coordination and flexibility. People who attend dancing classes regularly said that through dancing classes, they tend to become more and more confident. And most female college students learn to dance because of this. However, among female students, they may choose different types of dances. According to Patrick, if what a product stands for matches a consumer’s self-concept, it’s more likely to be consumed^[3]. For example, some attend hip-hop because they think they look more feminine while doing hip-hop. Others may choose ballet because they think these dances will improve their temperament. From the data that the researcher gathered through netnography below, you can see different types of dances have different meanings, people may choose different types of dances which cater for their self-concept and values, which the researcher thinks, this can be considered personalization in terms of possession rituals.

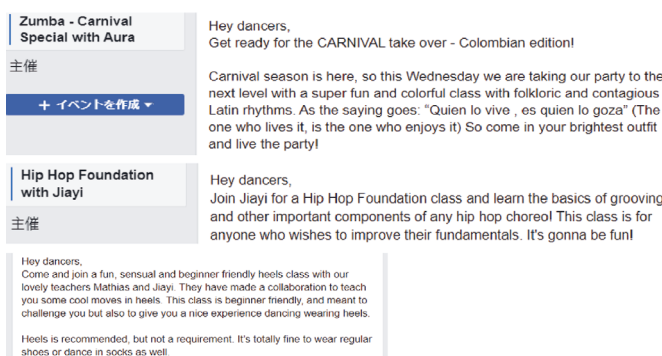


Figure 3. CBS Dance Facebook Page

3.3 Identity and consumption / Selves in transition

The Multiplicity of Self Theory states that wherein individuals view themselves through the different versions, others might perceive them, and in turn, the idea of “self” becomes a social construct, our research aligned with the theoretical constructs of the hoped for and feared selves^[3]. As the researcher mentioned earlier in the interview, one of my interviewees, Nina said “...I was a bit overweight compared with other dancers, and I didn’t have any past experience of dancing. But I since I’ m a college student now, and you know especially girls around 20 care about their body shape very much, so I started to attend the classes but it was hard to persist sometimes because it was very hard for me to catch up what the teacher taught and I sweated a lot, a lot more than others, so... I felt kinda embarrassed and just wanted to give it up.” From what she said, she did struggle a lot, and if she cannot resist the tiredness, embarrassment and lack of dancing skills at first, she will not be able to become the one that she wished to.

4 Conclusion

This research aims to find out how dances contribute to the identity construction of female college students. Since the self-development is an abstract concept which is not able to be analyzed by quantitative methods. This research is applied to qualitative methods. In terms of methodology, the researcher did observation in the dancing classes, used netnography to gather archive data on Facebook and interviewed two female college students who have attended dancing classes for more than one year. Based on the research, the researcher gained a deeper understanding of female college students’ consumer behavior in self-development products, which in our case is dancing classes. Upon understanding, the marketer will have an insight into the current market and trend. The dancing classes have many virtues to contribute to the identity construction of female college students and the research gives the investigator a clear understanding of female college students’ consumer behaviors in dancing classes. The common expectation for them is to be better themselves. However, due to personalization, upon common goals, their values are different. Therefore, they choose to attend different types of dancing classes that match their self-concepts. Overall,

dancing classes can be used as a tool for building female college students' self-confidence to further improve themselves to be better persons. Beyond simple contributions like increasing dancing skills, keeping a better body shape, etc., dances are also a part of the sociocultural context and ritual activity. People take part in dancing classes to socialize and gain a better understanding of different cultures and ultimately find themselves.

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