

The Extended Self in a Business-To-Business Context: An Inquiry Into Trucks and Truck Drivers

COMPETITIVE

Daniela Andreini - daniela.andreini@unibg.it – Italy- Università degli Studi di Bergamo

Giuseppe Pedeliento - giuseppe.pedeliento@unibg.it - Italy- Università degli Studi di Bergamo

ABSTRACT

If B2B and B2C marketing should be considered distinct domains, is an ongoing debate that is affecting marketing research and practice. Recent contributions in the IMP school of thought have tried to solve this century old dichotomy. Scholars adopting some theories and methods mostly developed in consumer culture theory (CCT) have demonstrated the existence of some thick commonalities between the two fields as well as common consumption patterns in B2B and B2C contexts. With this paper we contribute to this cultural debate showing the importance that product attachment plays in the context of truck and truck drivers. Through an exploratory survey on a sample of 514 Italian truck drivers we demonstrate the existence of a diffused feeling of product attachment. In a second study, we have deepened the understanding of the product attachment using the experiential phenomenological research methods. Findings of this second study suggest that the extended self is a suitable framework to describe truck possession and usage.

Keywords: B2B, Product Attachment, Extended Self, Truck, Individualism, Postmodernism

INTRODUCTION

Business-to-business (B2B) and business-to-consumer (B2C) domains seem to be ever more intertwined in marketing research, theory and practice (Vargo and Lush, 2011; Cova and Salle, 2006). Recent developments toward the so called service dominant logic - SDL have strongly contributed to this cultural switch (see e.g. Vargo and Lush, 2004; Lush and Vargo, 2008). In addition, CCT's researchers have recently affected the development of new paths in the IMP mainstream, sparking off a lively debate in search of some commonalities (e.g. Cova, 1994; Easton, 1995; Tikkanen, 1995; Borghini et al., 2010; Dubois and Gadde, 2002; Dubois and Gibbert, 2010; Easton, 2010; Visconti, 2010; Cova and Salle, 2006). Notable examples of this cultural debate can be found especially concerning the postmodern/post-structuralist critique of epistemology and respective research methods (e.g. Gummesson, 2003; Cova and Salle, 2007; Hietanen et al., 2011).

In fact it is not a chance that several contributions were recently published in the *Industrial Marketing Management* (IMM) in the attempt to underline how CCT's theories and methods can contribute to renew the European business marketing approach (notable examples can be found in the 2010 IMM's special issue).

And again is not a chance that some scholars have identified in CCT's approaches interesting cues and stimuli to rejuvenate the industrial marketing tradition (Cova and Salle, 2003).

Although a humanistic renaissance of the marketing discipline seems coming to the fore on the wave of a generalized cultural turn (Moisander and Valtonen, 2006), just few contributions have empirically shown common consumption patterns in the B2B and in the B2C realms (see for example Cova and Salle, 2000; Rinallo and Golfetto, 2006; Rinallo et al. 2010).

According to the current marketing literature it seems that one of the most studied avenues to make the two branches converge, is to focus on the relationship as a unit of analysis and apply common theories in different domains (i.e. B2B and B2C). SDL theorists for example go in this direction (Vargo, 2009).

Another possible avenue – we argue - that can offer some stimuli to favor the mentioned convergence is to focus on the product.

If in B2B traditionally little emphasis has been posed on the relationship between client(s) and products or product categories, in B2C instead, relevant contributions have demonstrated the existence of a tight link between consumers and products/brands and how this link influences consumers' behaviors.

In particular, in CCT's tradition several authors have analyzed product possession in ontological terms. Among the constructs, concepts and theories developed in this research stream, the extended self (Belk, 1988), focusing on product possession as a way to build individuals' identities, has opened the door to a reconceptualization of the dyadic relationship between customer and brands that pass through the possession, usage and experience of products (Mittal, 2006).

In contrast in B2B literature the product has been traditionally investigated in its mediating role, that is, in terms of how it influences content, type and intensity of commercial

exchanges. As noted by Metcalf et al. (1992) the characteristics of the product exchanged have a significant impact on the interaction between the parties. Nonetheless product importance has received little attention relative to other aspects of product exchange (Bloch and Richins, 1983).

These premises done, if the focus on the relationship offers a non repeatable field to bridge the gap between B2B and B2C, what about the relationship between product(s) and customers in the business context? Is there any common consumption pattern in consuming industrial and/or mass market products?

In this article we address these issues focusing on a particular industrial product: the truck. The choice of this product category is due to the fact that although the truck must be considered among the industrial products (as we are going to show below), it shows several features typical of the consumer sphere such as the existence of product and brand communities, the high experience-content of the product, and a practiced product's personalization among the owners. In this context hence, although the domain is undeniably B2B, it seems there are some anthropological evidences of the link between possession and self (Beaglehole, 1932).

The article is structured as follows: first, we review the literature to date in order to understand if the current "mainstreams" in marketing research (IMP, CCT and SDL) offer significant rooms to allow a convergence between B2B and B2C; second, we identify the product-customer relationship as a fruitful field where thick cross-fertilization between industrial and mass market consumption patterns can be found. Third, drawing on well established constructs in consumer research - product attachment and the extended self - we empirically investigate the existence of some psychological and emotional feelings in the consumption of the product truck. Finally, research and managerial implications are provided and discussed.

IMP,CCT, SDL: IN SEARCH FOR CONVERGENCES

"The prevailing view of the literature supporting the dichotomy (between B2B and B2C) rests on the conceptual argument that B2B market characteristics and influences, buyer decision processes, and buyer-seller relationships differ from those found in consumer markets" (Coviello and Brodie, 2001: 383). Nonetheless, the contrasting conclusions to which the few empirical works that have tried to test the existence or not of the dichotomy (see Coviello and Brodie for a review of studies published on this topic until 2001), corroborate what Fern and Brown stated about 30 years ago: "this distinction (between business and consumer marketing) is unjustified because it is neither based in theory nor empirically supported" (Fern and Brown, 1984: 68).

Attempts to solve the "century old" dichotomy have been brought in IMP school of thought both by SDL and CCT theories and theorists. The former, supporting the idea that commercial exchanges assume the form of service for service and thus – implicitly – there is no difference between B2B and B2C; the latter, offering research methods and epistemological foundations that seems to be more appropriate in the increasingly complex business world.

In particular, SDL theorists (Vargo and Lush, 2004) in the attempt "to nudge marketing thought away from fragmentation and toward a more unified theoretical conceptualization and framework" (Vargo and Lush, 2011: 181), have claimed that "it's all B2B" (Vargo and Lush, 2011). Authors suggest to dissolve the dichotomy adopting the term "actor" instead of both "business" and "consumer", giving birth to the so called actor-to-actor (A2A) marketing. Hence, the adoption of the A2A orientation conceptually allows that what has traditionally

been thought of as consumers' world can be equally applied to the producers and vice versa (Vargo and Lush, 2011). Differences existing between individuals and companies are blurred and the exchange between them is conceived as value co-creation.

Although the logic behind SDL is gaining increasing attention in academic circles (Ballantyne and Varey, 2008), it cannot be considered fully exhaustive: first, because the notion that both firms and customers are under every circumstances value co-creators is misleading (Grönroos, 2011); second, because SDL seems to be implicitly oriented toward the B2C domain (Ford, 2011).

CCTs instead - differently from SDLs - rather than to propose an all embracing logic able to integrate and synthesize all the branches of marketing and management (Peñaloza and Venkatesh, 2006) suggested to adopt some interpretivist, post-modern, ethnomethodological research methods and paradigms also in business contexts (Gómez and Acébron, 2001). In particular they claim that in the post-modern era, modern research methodologies cannot grasp the complexity and the beneath evolutionary trends of today industrial markets (Gummesson, 2003).

As a result, the interpretive post-modern epistemology(ies) and research methods are gradually finding rooms in the IMP group (see e.g. Lowe, 2001; Borghini et al., 2004; Lowe et al., 2008; Visconti, 2010; Borghini et al., 2010; Easton, 2010; Geiger and Turley, 2003; Wagner et al., 2010) as well as forerunners attempts aimed to underline the existence of similarities even as far as theoretical foundations are concerned (Cova and Salle, 2006).

Nonetheless, despite of the rising legitimization of CCT's research methods and philosophical standpoints in the IMP circle, the two streams are still far (Too far!).

Hence, a brief review of the literature to date does not provide a satisfactory solution to solve the dichotomy between B2B and B2C marketing. The three mainstream "academic brands" in marketing (Cova et al., 2009 – namely IMP, CCT and SDL) – sound similar concerning how far they are from the traditional (kotlerian) perspective of marketing and marketing management (in particular CCT and IMP), cross-fertilize each other in terms of concepts and research methods but, altogether, do not provide a unique lens that can be used in analyzing B2B and B2C contexts. One way to solve the dichotomy – we argue – does not necessarily pass through a thorough unification of the theories and of the epistemological foundations behind them.

Rather, can be found in common research foci and perspectives and in the introduction of concepts and constructs developed in consumer into business research and vice versa.

To this aim CCT seems to be a fertile source since focusing on the micro level of consumption (Holt, 2002), does not attempt to provide a universal marketing theory but provides a family of theoretical perspectives aimed to unveil the dynamic relationships between consumer actions, the marketplace and cultural meaning of consumption (Arnould and Thompson, 2005).

This last aspect represents the thickest *trait d'union* between CCT and IMP since scholars are more inclined to fieldwork than to laboratory and quantitative tests in both schools of thought (Ford, 1990; Arnould and Thompson, 2005).

Although the boundaries are less definite than they were in the past, the adoption of constructs developed or introduced in the marketing literature by CCT's in industrial marketing contributions is still rare. To date just few papers can be found: Cova and Salle (2000) have used the construct of rite/ritual often applied in consumer research (e.g. Belk et al., 1989; Schouten and McAlexander, 1995) to understand the nature of social interactions in extra-business relationships. Rinallo and Golfetto (2006) developed a framework aimed to shed light on the shaping process of the fashion market drawing upon the post modern constructs of hyper-reality (Eco, 1986) and representation (Baudrillard, 1994) borrowed by

consumer researchers (e.g. Firat et al., 1995, Brown, 1995). Rinallo et al., (2010), studying trade shows, suggest that tools and conceptual models developed by the experiential perspective in consumer marketing can also be applied in B2B contexts.

These first attempts to “import” not only CCT’s foundations and methods in industrial marketing, but also constructs, concepts and frameworks forged or borrowed in consumer research, signal a growing cross-fertilization of the fields in sight of a possible convergence (at least in pioneer investigations of *naïve* industrial contexts). This paper goes in this direction.

In restoring the centrality of the product in industrial marketing, we look at the product not limiting the focus to its utilitarian basic features, but extending its significance to those features that allow to consider the product as a cultural artifact through which – to certain extents - people express themselves.

THE PRODUCT IN BUSINESS AND IN CONSUMER RESEARCH

In B2B literature since the focus is on the relationship (Håkansson, 1982; Håkansson and Snehota, 1995), the product has been traditionally investigated in its mediating role, i.e. in terms of how it influences content, type and intensity of commercial exchanges.

In the first work of the IMP group (Håkansson, 1982) the product is considered the core of the exchange between the parties and is supposed to have a significant effect on the client-supplier relationship along dimensions of i) standardization/complexity, ii) purchase’s importance, iii) transaction’s novelty/frequency and iv) product’s importance. Consistent with Metcalfe et al. (1992) if the first three dimensions received extensive importance in the B2B literature, the fourth did not receive the same emphasis. In particular, there is an aspect of product importance that appears to be under-researched and deals with product importance as perceived by the buyer (Bloch and Richins, 1983).

If in B2B product importance is generally weighted according to the nature of the problem it is aimed to solve (namely routine order, procedural, performance and political problems - Lehmann and O’Shaughnessy, 1974), little emphasis has been posed to product importance in terms of personal attachment, non-utilitarian benefits and self-expression contents.

In consumer research instead, these aspects constitute the lenses through which the product is currently mostly investigated. Products are considered cultural artifacts and consumption patterns are analyzed beyond utilitarian motives (McCracken, 1986).

In particular, a field that has been object of in depth investigations in consumer research, deals with customers’ product attachment; a topic that used to be almost neglected in modern consumer research (Wallendorf and Arnould, 1988).

Product attachment can be defined as “the emotional bond a consumer experiences with a product” (Schifferstein and Zwartkruis-Pelgrim, 2008) that exceeds product’s utilitarian benefits. Product attachment is a manifestation of product possession that is tightly linked with self-expression (Belk, 1988) i.e. products are associated to some symbolic and cultural meanings through which individuals display their selves-concept to others.

As far as product attachment is concerned, Belk (1988), drawing on Sirgy (1982), defined and developed the extended self construct. Briefly, the basic assumption behind the extended self is that human beings, display evidences of the existence of a relationship between possession and sense of self that pervades the three existential basic states: having, doing and being” (Belk, 1988). The link between possession and sense of self for Belk is bidirectional. Hence, is not regarded only as a part of the self, but also as an instrument for the development of the self.

According to McCracken (1986) not only consumer goods are the locus of self-expression and of symbolic/cultural meanings. Every product serves as media for the expression of the

cultural meanings that constitute our world. This is coherent with Belk's idea of things that can be considered as extension of the self that is not limited to material and consumer goods but encompasses ideas, experiences, places, tools, etc.

Assuming this standpoint, we can so infer that also (some) B2B products can be considered as media through which actors express themselves, their culture and the culture of the collectives to which they belong, can display feeling of attachment, person-object congruity and personality (e.g. Belk 1988; Malhotra 1988; Sirgy 1982; Aaker, 1999; Govers and Schoormans, 2005).

Thus, in this frame, we investigate a B2B product to which buyers/users seem to show significant symbolic meanings and a profound attachment: the truck.

RESEARCH SETTING

The characteristics of the product truck along the dimensions commonly held to differentiate B2B and B2C marketing - market, product, organization of operational set-up, technical complexity, purchase frequency, service requirement, amount of information search, riskiness, etc. (Fern and Brown, 1984) – make its industrial nature indisputable. Nonetheless, along other dimensions - such as the number of actors who are involved in the purchasing process, generally considered higher in industrial than in consumer contexts - its industrial nature is less crystalline.

The traditional buying center focused approach to the purchasing process of industrial products [see Johnston and Bonoma (1981) for a robust review on the topic] does not fit thoroughly the trucks' trade that shows some peculiarities difficult to find elsewhere.

Some actual data can help to validate this statement.

In Italy, according to the last census of trucking companies (2004), of the 196.086 firms regularly registered to the Ministry of Transportations, the mono-vehicular ones (those in which the owner of the company and the driver of the truck are the same person) represent 43.8% of the total. This means that almost a half of the market is represented by customers that play with different intensity all the buying roles in the purchasing process - initiator, influencer, decider, purchaser and user – that are generally considered held by different actors in the purchasing process of industrial products (Lehmann and Winer, 2002).

The Italian truck market thus shows a significant fragmentation of the customer base and a prevalence of micro-small companies.

The mentioned fragmentation of the Italian demand is motivated by the fact that being Italy a long boot shaped peninsula, road freight movements are quicker and cheaper than other forms of transportation (trains and/or ships at first) stimulating micro entrepreneurial initiatives. As a result according to Eurostat (2006) the Italian road freight transport market is the second most developed in Europe (after Spain).

<<If manufacturers have to develop consumers' or customers' marketing orientations, is an ongoing debate in this market and represents the main challenge for marketing and sales managers working for truck producers. Difficult even for me that I work in this industry since more than 20 years>> said M.L. the local CEO of a primary truck manufacturer in a meeting we had recently.

Given these peculiarities it seems that the product truck encompasses most of the contradictions and unclear boundaries that contribute to de-emphasize the strength of the dichotomy between B2B and B2C (products and marketing).

RESEARCH METHOD

In order to find a common consumption pattern in B2B and B2C products, we have adopted a mixed research method.

Through a quantitative exploratory survey we have measured if truck drivers are affected to their truck, how diffuse and felt this attachment is and how the truck is associated in some ways to the expression of truck-drivers' identities.

A qualitative enquiry instead allowed us to deeply explore the consumption dynamics through the self-extension theoretical approach in the light of the results reached with the first study.

Quantitative research

The main purpose of the exploratory survey is to provide evidences that the attachment to the truck is a common phenomenon among truck-drivers and not only a characterization of circumscribed segments like truck owners, heavy users, or product enthusiasts.

In order to create a questionnaire able to identify and gauge truck-drivers' attachment with their trucks, the authors interviewed a small sample of truck-drivers (users) with different characteristics in order to retain the biggest variance of responses. Initially, we interviewed six truck-drivers: three owners and three employees (differentiated for national and international transports and level of personalization).

Consistent with findings drawn in the preliminary setting, we set up a questionnaire divided in three sections: in the first part we collected demographical information (age, gender, education and region of residence). In the second part, we investigated the role (owner or employee), the prevailing type of transportation (national or international), the number of nights spent on the truck and, last, we asked the reasons behind the professional choice.

Finally, in the third section, we measured product attachment on a Likert scale from 1 to 5.

Since the main objective of this exploratory survey was to verify the existence of a generic feeling of product attachment among truck-drivers, we used only some items composing the measurement scale suggested by Kleine and Baker (2004), commonly adopted in B2C. In fact, according to the results of the preliminary interviews we concluded that the emotional and psychological bonds that truck-drivers establish with their trucks, can be grasped only through a qualitative inquire, since the multi-faceted aspects of these tensions are difficult to unveil by means of a questionnaire. Nonetheless, the dimensions selected as a proxy of product attachment provided thick evidences of the actual existence of non-utilitarian meanings involved in truck consumption.

Accordingly, we chose passion (as a proxy of self-extension), care (as a proxy of costs of attachment), instrumental attachment (as reverse item for the emotional dimension of product attachment) and personalization (as a proxy of the investment self in the object), also measured with a multinomial variable according to the levels of expenditure. Finally, the questionnaire was pre-tested on 15 truck-drivers (Churchill, 1979) and after this pre-test some statements have been made more understandable and clear.

Some results

In order to gather as many responses as possible, the questionnaire was posted on the two most visited web portals by Italian truck-drivers (www.camionsfera.it and www.trasporieuropa.it) and was also administered "on the road" by the authors. In total we collected 544 questionnaires: 170 from personally administrated questionnaires and 374 from the web. After a preliminary analysis to check the quality of the questionnaires collected, 514

of them were retained and analysed.

As far as demographic and work-related information of the sample is concerned (the first two sections of the questionnaire) 56% held a junior level of education, 39% a diploma, 2.4% an elementary level and 2.6% a degree. Employees represent the most significant category (64%), followed by owners (36%). Truck-drivers engaged in international transportations represent 18% of respondents and on average informants spend eight nights in a month on the truck, showing a high standard deviation (SD=7.78).

Unfortunately, a precise comparison between the distribution of the self-selected sample and that of the target population was not possible; in fact, no record or register exists for this profession in Italy. Because we are working with a self-selected sample, we encounter the risk of collecting biased data; in this case, individuals in some categories could be more likely to participate in the survey. However, the distribution of respondents by role indicates that we obtained a well-balanced presence from all of the considered categories. In fact, according to the Italian Ministry of Transportations 46% of the truck-drivers are also owners of their trucks. Moreover, according to Eurostat (2006) 80% of freight transportation in Italy is national. Finally, all the Italian regions are well represented if compared with the regional distribution of GDP: 57% of the respondents come from Northern Italy, 27% from Central and 16% from Southern.

In conclusion we can assert that the sample obtained can be considered as representative of the population from which it is drawn.

Table 1. Constructs and items

Statement	Descriptive Statistics		T-test Owners Vs. Employees			T-test Spenders in personalization Vs. Non spenders		
	Mean	S.D.	T	Df	p	T	Df	P
Product attachment (n=514)								
Taking care of my truck is important for me	4.28	1.05	2.511	458	0.012	4.707	409	0.000
My truck is my biggest passion	3.25	1.48	2.912	409	0.004	7.866	472	0.000
I spend my spare time taking care of my truck	3.05	1.39	7.341	423	0.000	7.341	423	0.000
My truck is only a professional tool (reverse score)	2.68	1.58	0.287	499	0.775	-7.765	481	0.000
Product personalization (n=514)								
Personalising my truck is a way to express my personality	2.73	1.56	1.742	489	0.082	10.332	492	0.000
Personalising my truck is important	2.37	1.42	2.744	351	0.006	14.790	493	0.000
I have (would) personalize(d) my truck because I want it to represent me	2.30	1.45	4.149	342	0.000	16.377	454	0.000

According to the product attachment measurement session of the questionnaire, we used the passion for the truck as a descriptive item (Belk et al., 2003). The mean value is quite high, and a statistically significant difference between owners and employees exists. Owners, in particular, are those that choose this profession for the passion they have for trucks

suggesting that emotional motives behind the professional choice prevail on utilitarian ones. This finding is in line with the results about the reasons behind the professional choice: 67% of respondents said they have chosen their job because of their passion for trucks, with no difference between roles.

Moreover, the fact that just 27% of respondents declared to have chosen their job for money, and that even 44% of them affirmed to have dreamt this profession since the childhood reinforces what affirmed above and suggests that the choice to become a truck-driver is somehow related to an expression of the self.

As far as costs of attachment are concerned, product care has been traditionally considered an important expression of people's attachment to objects. As noted by Belk (1988) and Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) the degree of product attachment is related to the psychic energy invested in the product. The outcomes of the energy invested in a product are regarded as a part of self because they have grown or emerged from it. In our study we measured "costs of attachment" with two items: a first, regarding the perceived importance of taking care of the truck; a second, concerning the investment of spare time taking care of the truck.

As shown in table 1 the high value of the mean score for the first item, indicates a great attachment of truck-drivers to their trucks. The existence of a significant difference between owners and employees, is obviously influenced by a greater owners' willingness to control maintenance costs, extend the vehicle's duration and maintain its performances.

Nevertheless, the fact that a significant difference in mean values of the item "care" between truck-drivers who personalize their truck and those who does not exist, testifies the item's suitability to measure product attachment not just limiting to maintenance and/or other more functional manifestations of it.

The second item used as a proxy of costs of attachment, is the level of spare time spent taking care of the truck. Also in this case, the mean value is quite high with a significant difference between owners and employees, and between truck-drivers who personalize their truck and those who don't. The high score of the mean value for this item supports the idea that costs of attachment are generally supported by most of truck drivers with moderate differences in some categories.

In order to distinguish functional attachment from product attachment (Kleine and Baker, 2004), we used a reverse score item: "my truck is only a professional tool". In this case the mean value is the lowest among the items measuring product attachment and there are no differences between owners and employees. The only significant difference can be found between truck-drivers who personalize and truck-drivers who don't. The low scores for this item thus, confirms the emotional dimension of product attachment to the truck.

Finally, the last item measuring product attachment is product personalization. Product personalization is "a process that changes the functionality, interface, information content, or distinctiveness of a system to increase its personal relevance to an individual" (Blom 2000, p.313). Through personalization the product becomes self-expressive: it symbolically represents owner's identity and distinguish him/her from others. This activate a virtuous/vicious circle because product personalization displays higher degree of product attachment and, in turn, contribute to strengthen product attachment. This is the reason why truck-drivers show higher scores for all the items used to measure product attachment in this research. However, an evaluation of the respondents' level of personalization shows that 48% of them don't spend money to personalize their trucks, whereas 27% spend less than 1,000 euro and 25% more than 1,000 euro.

Although truck owners personalize more frequently than employees (70% vs 42.5%) and spend significantly more money, the fact that product personalization is also practised by

employees indicates that product personalization is more related to possession than to ownership.

The fact that items measuring product personalization show means score values significantly lower than those measuring product attachment is explained by the fact that personalization is not only related to monetary investments. Making a truck distinctive can also be done with personal objects and other artifacts without necessarily involve a monetary investment. Thus, since in the questionnaire the personalization is measured only through monetary investment, the authors will research more insights during the qualitative study.

Qualitative research: a phenomenological enquiry into truck possession

In the first part of this research we have shown the existence of a thick and diffused feeling of product attachment among truck drivers. In a second step we conducted several in depth interviews with truck drivers aimed to understand if this attachment can be declined as extended self (Belk, 1988). More precisely the aim of this second part of the research process was to identify what kind of symbolic and cultural meanings truck-drivers attach to the product, how the product possession pervades the three basic states of possession (having, doing and being – Belk, 1988) and the degree to which respondents invest themselves in the object. Moreover another purpose of this second part was aimed to understand if the “passion” motives behind the professional choice are driven for the passion for the job itself or are strongly influenced by the passion that drivers have for the truck.

The selection of the sample has been done through a snow-ball technique (Goodman, 1961) and the final sample was composed of 12 individuals.

The only criteria we follow for the selection was to ensure sufficient heterogeneity of the interviewees in terms of ownership and possession. We have included both truck owners and employees.

The interviews took place during 2011. The average length of each interview was about one hour and a half. Each interview has been recorded and transcribed by the interviewer. The work gave rise to about 100 pages of single spaced field notes and interview transcription. Structure, execution and analysis of the interviews were generated through the existential phenomenological interview method following Thompson et al. (1989). Thus, the course of the interview dialogue was set primarily by the informant, assumed the form of a conversation rather than of a questions-answer session and the descriptive questions employed by the interviewer flow from the course of the dialogue (Thompson et al. 1989).

The analysis of the data led to a set of predominant thematic categories that allowed us to deepen our understanding of the respondents’ attachment to their truck, to shed light on the nature and on the intensity of the subject-object relationship and to situate this relationship in the frame of the extended self (Belk, 1988). These predominant categories are reported below.

The humanization-personification of the truck

The prevailing metaphor that has been used by the interviewees in describing their truck and the relationship they have with it, assumed the form of a subjectification of the object. The affective emotional content of the truck and the symbolic meaningful relationship that truck drivers have with their truck is often conceptualized as friendship or marriage. The truck is a trustworthy partner whose trust must be conquered by the driver with the passing of time. It must be loved, respected and protected.

Consider the following statements.

A. P. My truck is my partner of adventures. We hang around together, me and him. I feel like of being Don Quixote and my truck is Rocinante. He is my horse, my company. If he feels good, I feel good as well. I'm jealous of my truck. I am the only one that can get into it. Even my boss is forbidden to get in.

C. C. He is my friend ... when I'm with my truck - let's say abroad - I never miss my place and my family. He is my best friend. I remember last year when I spent a lot of weekend with my truck in southern France. I have been traveling almost a year in France and it was amazing because during the summer weekends I was forbidden to travel and I was happily obliged to spend the weekend sleeping on the truck right near to the sea side looking at the sea, eating and drinking something ... can you ask something more to your life? If you are not a truck driver you cannot understand what I mean ...sleeping on your truck in front of the sea ... It's fantastic. Isn't it?

The investing self in the object

As shown in the previous exploratory study product care is the first item in describing product attachment. The phenomenological analysis of the interviews' transcripts, unveil particular patterns of the investing self in the object. Taking care of the truck is considered for truck drivers something that goes beyond the maintenance. It is more a sort of moral duty toward the object. A set of actions that the driver should exert in order to demonstrate reverence, gratitude and respect, undertaken not only during the work hours but also during the spare time.

C.C. If you mistreat a truck it mistreats you as well. I'm fully convinced of this. Trucks have soul. It happened to me to say "this shitty truck!" and after two hours the truck broke down. It can be a coincidence but I don't think so. I had just withdrawn a new truck from the dealer that costs like a studio apartment and it didn't perform as it might. I was always saying "shitty truck, damned truck" and after 20,000 kilometers the engine melt. We spent 60,000 € to repair the damages – obviously I was reimbursed by the producer since the problem was not my fault – and I keep on swearing at the truck. Once received it from the mechanic I keep on having a bad feeling with it. After two weeks the engine breaking broke down and I ended up on a 10 per cent downhill road, with a 40 tons load practically without breaks. It was awful. You know what I mean when I say that trucks have a soul? After this experience I have decided to give this new truck that at the time was top line to a driver of my company who immediately felt in love with it. As a result now the truck is in a perfect shape and it never shows up any problem.

An actual manifestation of the investment of the self in the object is product personalization. Sirgy and Danes (1982) defined product personalization as the extent to which a product has personality symbols and associations. Product personalization can be reached through a process that changes the functionality, interface, information content, or distinctiveness of the product in order to allow consumers to set up products that are unique and personal (Blom, 2000).

In the B2B literature, product personalization has been mostly declined as customization and built-to-order production and has been conceptualized as a way that companies can or should follow in order to fit customers' needs (e.g. Fredriksson and Gadde, 2005). This means that personalization has been conceived from the supplier perspective as a marketing strategy that companies can follow in order to improve their competitive positioning and enhance their competitiveness in markets. Product personalization instead is something that is decided and controlled by consumers: although the so called culturally constituted world (i.e. the "fashion system" – see McCracken, 1986) plays a great role in determining how meanings are located in goods (the truck in this case) personalization emerges spontaneously as an outcome of product attachment and reflects the identity and the self image of the possessor.

C. C. My truck is red mica colored with alloy chrome wheels, steel bars and several lights. When I go to truck drivers meeting (once in a while) and someone compliments me for my truck I feel realized. I spent 4,500 € to personalize my truck as it is. I bought six lights for the top, sixty new bulbs for the headlights, led circle shaped backlights (I spent 1,400 € only for the last item) and I have assembled an 800 watt hi-fi stereo. If I would never give my truck to someone else I would give it only to A. [A. is an employee of the company that C. C. runs] because he is a driver that can understand the love for a truck. He deserves a proper truck, a truck to be proud of. He always says that if he could win the lottery he would spend one million to make the most beautiful truck ever. If you saw my truck you could understand ... it's amazing. It doesn't have a drop of grease neither on the trailer, awesome! I use only the sleepers when I drive, shoes are forbidden. And because I smoke there's always a smoke odor exterminator candle in the truck.

My truck is my life. Do you know Capriccio? [Capriccio is the nickname of a truck driver who won several prizes in trucks beauty contests for the best truck in Italy. Capriccio drove a truck with about 165,000 € of accessorizes and technical elaborations. Capriccio has been killed for rivalry in May 2008 by a colleague after a quarrel they had during a contest]. If I would have a truck like Capriccio I would go even in disco with it. I would use it even of Saturday night. Anyway, I do not envy other truck drivers for their particularly beautiful and personalized trucks. You must love the truck you have, even if it is a wreck.

M.D.D. If you see my truck it seems to see me. I put some pictures of me on the truck. I have painted my eyes on the hoods and me posing on each door. You can find some pictures on my personal web site or on facebook. Inside I put red curtains even if my truck is yellow and several fans. I love fans and when I travel I often buy a fan for my truck. I haven't personalized it too much because I transport materials for construction and the truck is always full of dust. But I have plans for the future. Even if the truck is not mine my boss allows me to do whatever I want for my truck.

The tension between emotional and functional meanings

Despite the emotional meanings that truck drivers widely attach to their truck a tension between these meanings and the functional features of the truck emerges. The love, the attachment, the friendship bonds that the subject establishes with the object seem to be naturally limited by the acknowledgement that <<*it's only a machine, anyway*>> as F.G. said when describing how he meticulously maintain his truck. The description of personal meanings attached to the truck is often balanced by counter arguments aimed to de-emphasize the passionate view of the truck. Product attachment assumes the form of an intimate-secret relationship that informants dislike to talk about. In their descriptions there is almost always a veil of shame and the difficulty to admit they have feeling with their truck.

Consider the description of F. G. mentioned above:

My truck is untouchable. I am the only one that can get in. You cannot find a speck of dust. There's a driver in my company that has a maniacal relationship with his truck. I have difficulties even to convince him to leave it for a while when it needs maintenance. For me is not a piece of scrap cause it allows me to pay the bills at the end of the month. It's only a machine anyway, I care about it of course. Sometimes I talk to my truck, I know is crazy. I don't have an emotional bond with it but if you take care of it, it lasts for longer, fuel consumption decreases as well as maintenance costs.

Self and work self

As stated by Belk (1988) understanding the extended self helps to learn how consumer behavior contributes to broaden the existence of human beings. In this view, possession is regarded not only as a part of the self, but also as instrumental to the development of the self

and to the maintenance of the self-concept. In discussing product personalization we have shown how it is often practiced to make the product self-expressive.

Although the intimate relationship that truck drivers establish with their truck is to certain extent symbiotic, we cannot neglect the role that brands play in shaping the self and in representing the owner's identity.

C. C. Between "Volvers" and "Scaniers" there's the same division you can find between left and right wings, or between Porsche and Ferrari. Who buys Scania is a dude that loves to appear, that wants to let his rumor be heard. It has bright colors, particular headlights, etc. Volvo is a truck that if you make something wrong it suddenly becomes a scrap. If you fix even just a wrong bulb, it changes its performances. Volvo is a truck for elegant drivers that permits only sober personalizations. Is like to see Jennifer Lopez with a sexy dress, a provocative décolleté and a pair of sneakers. It ruins everything! Scania is a truck that can wear also sneakers because it allows more personalization than Volvo. Scania is for people that want to attract attention. Volvo is very elegant instead.

The consumption patterns of trucks are thus a way to express the owner's identity (eventually reinforced through personalization and other aesthetic ornaments) and at the same time to maintain the self.

It is interesting to note that the truck is the sole tool that truck drivers use at work and at the same time is their work place. The negotiation of the work self in this context thus offers unique cues. If Tian and Belk (2005) conceived the impetus for bringing possessions to work as a way to overcome feelings of alienation and transience and the home and work selves as competing entities, this seems to be less evident for truck drivers.

Bringing possessions in the truck seems not to be a way to overcome alienation and transience or to conceal the home and the work self. Traces and elements of the home self are brought in the truck only if necessary and having objects that can increase the sense of what Giddens (1984) has labeled as "ontological security" is not considered worthy by truck drivers because it reduces the adventure content of the job.

Consider what A. P. said when we asked him to describe what does it means to spend almost the entire week living on a truck.

In a truck you don't have your bed, your television, your family, nothing. You are always alone. If you end up in a place where you have never been before - maybe abroad where you have problems with the language - you are obliged to manage such a situation. You can rely only on your truck. It puts a strain on you. Of course the situations can be often hard but when you go back home and you were able to face all the difficulties you had, is a sort of personal victory. You feel alive. If I could add something more to my truck I will never add anything that is not related to the technical functionality of the truck otherwise the job would become easy and routinized.

Truck drivers spend so much time on their truck that the differences between home and work life – and thus between the home and the work self – are blurred. Self and work self - as also confirmed in the first exploratory study - tend to merge.

If we accept the idea that the more we possess or are possessed by an object, the more a part of self it becomes (Belk, 1988) we can easily understand the nature of truck possession for truck drivers and the salience of the relationship they establish with their truck.

The truck is a product that strongly pervades the three stages of having, doing and being (Belk, 1988). Truck drivers spend at least ten hours per day on the truck¹ and according to the results of the exploratory survey on average they sleep two nights per week on the truck.

¹ According with the European law their daily schedule is four hours and a half driving, 45 minutes break and other four hours and a half driving. After having totalized a total amount of nine hours driving they are obliged to stop for eleven hours before starting to drive again.

Moreover, drivers choose this profession mostly for the passion they have for trucks. A passion that - has shown - often comes from the childhood. Accordingly, we can assert that in this context self and work self tend to overlap more than in other contexts and that the separation between product and place attachment are less evident. The truck is at the same time a product and a place around which meanings are constructed by experience (Tuan, 1980).

M.D.D. My truck is my second house. Or rather my first house since I'm always on the truck and never at home. With my first truck I had a relationship that I have no shame to say was sentimental. When my boss decided to sell it because it was old I cried. I have learnt to drive on that truck, I was in love with it. Now I have some resistances to attach to my new truck but I think that I will fall in love with it anyway when I get used to it.

From this last quote we can also appreciate the effect of the loss of possession that as suggested by Belk (1988) should be regarded as a loss or lessening of self and the sense of the past attached to possession that allows people to create, enhance and preserve the sense of identity.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The findings emerged in these two empirical studies, support the view that the B2B product category investigated, resembles several consumption patterns typically associated and explored in B2C contexts. In particular we found out that in the realm of B2B goods, there is at least an industrial product (the truck), to which users are strongly attached, with which they establish an intimate relationship and which takes part in the identity building process signifying some aspects of people's selves.

Accordingly – we argue – the product, that in B2B literature has been traditionally explored in its mediating role should be also investigated in regards to those aspects that are related to the product-customer relationship (and not only to the client-supplier relationship). Thus, less utilitarian and more ontological aspects of product's usage and possession should be considered in order to give a thicker representation of the meanings of the exchange in the B2B context and make marketing strategies, communication and selling processes more effective.

The context studied - truck and truck drivers - offered a stimulating field for the analysis of product attachment and meanings of possession, since the most part of truck drivers possess the truck but cannot claim a property right: thus possession's dimensions of doing and being, prevail on that of having (Belk, 1988).

As we have shown in both studies differences concerning product attachment and non utilitarian meanings associated to trucks are just slightly dependent on the role (owners and employees) suggesting that these feelings are more related to possession than to ownership.

The product truck offered interesting cues also concerning processes of negotiation between the self and the work self (Belk, 1998; Tian and Belk, 2005) that – as widely described above - in the trucking context seem to be more coexisting rather than competing entities (as Tian and Belk, 2005 suggest).

Being the truck the work place of truck drivers, the only tool they use at work, the place where they live and the object that in most cases they have dreamt since the childhood and that represents their greatest passion, it can be considered a unique context of investigation in which self and work self tend to merge.

As far as nature and intensity of the relationship between truck and truck drivers is concerned, if with the first exploratory study we have shown the existence of a diffuse and strong feeling of product attachment among truck drivers, in the phenomenological enquiry

we were able to explain how and why this product attachment can be considered as extended self.

Product attachment does not pass only through personalization and/or other manifestation of the “investing self in the object” but through a complex and long lasting experiences developed through daily usage that brings truck drivers to relate with the truck as an extended self in an emotional and relational way.

In fact, although truck drivers who personalize their truck i.e. that spend money in order to change some internal and/or external aspects of their truck are about a half of the sample, the impact of personalization on product attachment is not so strong.

Moreover, consistent with findings drawn both in the qualitative and in the quantitative study, the purpose of product personalization seems to be more aimed to the development of drivers’ personal and professional self-identities than to signify truck drivers’ social status. The same can be extended to product care that as noted by Belk (1988) is a principal manifestation of product attachment. In the context studied not only product care is the item with the highest mean score among those describing product attachment, but has a meaning that goes far beyond the area of maintenance. Truck drivers conceive product care as a sort of moral duty, a way to demonstrate gratitude and reverence to their generally humanized-subjectified object.

Once the existence of a diffuse feeling of product attachment has been demonstrated, the extended self has been used as suitable theoretical framework to deepen the understanding of product attachment and to provide wider explanations of truck possession in terms of individual, professional and collective representations.

Through phenomenological interviews we were able to identify a set of predominant thematic categories that allowed us to shed light on actual manifestations of product attachment signifying it in the frame of the extended self (Belk, 1988).

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

The importance of product attachment (as perceived by the users), the fact that this product attachment assumes the forms of extended self and the intimate relationship that truck drivers establish with their truck, have several marketing implications. In setting up their communication strategies for example, truck manufacturers should pay more attention to these particular facets of product importance trying to emphasize not only technical, economical and utilitarian attributes (such as fuel consumption, warranties, prices, etc.), but also leverage on less tangible attributes that strongly affect customers’ preferences, choices and – in the long term – loyalty. In particular – as noted above – in those highly fragmented markets, such as the Italian one, characterized by the prevalence of mono-vehicular companies, a deep understanding of this psychological and emotional content of truck consumption can result as a crucial facilitator of commercial exchanges and a source of differentiation and competitive advantage. Sales people, service centers and all the other actors that somehow participate to the selling and after selling process, should be able to take into account that although the product truck is – as argued above – undeniably B2B, the customers’ perception of product importance goes far beyond “neoclassical” motives.

Other managerial implications can be drawn on the demand side: according to the results obtained in this study - the more truck-drivers feel the ownership of the truck, the higher is the level of product care. Higher product care in turn, can be translated in lower maintenance costs and – in the long run – in a longer product life cycle. In big trucking companies, fleet managers can so leverage on drivers’ feelings of product attachment to reduce maintenance

costs that – according to the Italian Ministry of Transportations (2004) - represent on average 12.6% of trucking companies' total costs.

This article, like other rare contributions issued in the B2B stream of research (see for example Cova and Salle, 2000; Rinallo and Golfetto, 2006; Rinallo et al., 2010), offers an empirical example of how some consumption patterns that have been typically investigated in consumer research by CCT scholars, can also be observed in B2B contexts. It also contributes to the growing debate about a possible convergence of the two branches of marketing (Cova and Salle, 2006) that – we argue – can be reached not trying to establish all embracing marketing logics (as in the case of SDL), but through the adoption of philosophical/epistemological foundations, theories, research methods, constructs and concepts developed in consumer research in business marketing and vice versa. This article goes in this direction: adopting a research method mostly used in consumer research i.e. existential phenomenology (Thompson et al., 1989) and using constructs well established in consumer research such as product attachment (Kleine and Baker, 2004) and extended self (Belk, 1988) we have unveiled the existence of strong psychological and emotional features that costumers attach to B2B products focusing on the context of trucks and truck drivers. It thus can be considered an attempt to responds to the call for rejuvenation of the B2B research tradition (Cova and Salle, 2003) and, at the same time, to reinforce the idea that the distinction between B2B and B2C – at least in some naïve contexts - is unjustified (Fern and Brown, 1984).

Further research is needed to evaluate if similar consumption patterns can be found in other B2B contexts. Surely the product truck offers some unique features that favor the dissolution of the B2B vs. B2C dichotomy such as the aforementioned overlapping between the self and the work self. This is an undeniable limitation of the study as well as the fact that we investigated only the Italian market that presents some characteristics typical of the Italian industrial context. Thus future studies could extend the analysis in different countries and in different contexts.

Nonetheless the cultural turn that is affecting the market place as a whole (see Moisander and Valtonen, 2006) and the rapid changes of marketers' and consumers' role in the production and commercialization of meanings (e.g. Peñaloza, 2000) can foster the emergence of more complex forms of consumption even in the B2B context.

REFERENCES

- Aaker, J 1999, *Brand Personality: a path to differentiation in brands face the future*, Rory Morgan, New York: Research International.
- Arias Gómez, TG & Acébron, LB 2001, 'Postmodern approaches in business-to- business marketing and marketing research', *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, vol. 16, no. 1, pp. 7-20.
- Arnould, EJ & Thompson, CJ 2005, 'Consumer culture theory (CCT): twenty years of research', *Journal of Consumer Research*, vol. 31, no. 4, pp. 237-249.
- Ballantyne, D & Varey, RJ 2008, 'The service dominant logic and the future of marketing', *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, vol. 36, no. 1, pp. 11-14.
- Baudrillard, J 1994, *Simulacra and simulation*, The University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor.
- Beaglehole, E 1932, *Property: A Study in social psychology*, Macmillan, New York.
- Belk, RW 1988, 'Possessions and the extended self', *Journal of Consumer Research*, vol. 15, no.2, pp. 139-168.
- Belk, RW, Wallendorf, M & Sherry, JF 1989 'The sacred and the profane in consumer behavior: theodicy on the odyssey', *Journal of Consumer Research*, vol. 16, no. 1, pp. 1-38.
- Belk, RW, Ger, G & Askegaard, S 2003, 'The fire of desire: a multisited inquiry into consumer passion', *Journal of Consumer Research*, vol. 30, no. 3, pp. 326-351.
- Bloch, PH & Richins, ML 1983 'A theoretical model for the study of product importance perceptions', *Journal of Marketing*, vol. 47, no. 3, pp.69-81.
- Blom, J 2000, *Personalization- A Taxonomy*, *Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, ACM, New York.
- Borghini, S, Golfetto, F & Rinallo, D 2004, 'Using anthropological methods to study industrial marketing and purchasing: an exploration of professional trade shows', *Proceedings of the 20th IMP Conference*.

- Borghini, S, Carù, A & Cova, B 2010, 'Representing btob reality in case study research: challenges and new opportunities', *Industrial Marketing Management*, vol. 39, no. 1, pp. 16-24.
- Brown, S 1995, 'Postmodern marketing research: no representation without taxation', *Journal of the Market Research Society*, vol. 37, no. 3, pp. 287-324.
- Churchill, G 1979 'A paradigm for developing better measures of marketing constructs', *Journal of Marketing Research*, vol. 16, no. 1, pp. 64-73.
- Cova, B 1994, 'Industrial marketing and purchasing in a postmodern era', *Proceedings of the 10th IMP Conference*.
- Cova, B & Salle, R 2000, 'Rituals in managing extra-business relationships in international project marketing: a conceptual framework', *International Business Review*, vol. 9, no. 6, pp. 669-685.
- Cova, B & Salle, R 2003 'When IMP- Don Quixote tilts his lance against the kotlerian windmills: btob marketing deeply changed during the last 25 years, btoc marketing too', *Proceedings of the 19th IMP Conference* .
- Cova, B. & Salle, R 2006, 'Questioning the btob/btoc dichotomy: the contribution of the consumer culture theory', *Proceedings of the 23rd IMP Conference*.
- Cova, B. & Salle, R 2007, 'The industrial/consumer marketing dichotomy revisited: a case of outdated justification?' *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, vol. 23, no. 1, pp. 3-11.
- Cova, B, Ford, D, & Salle, R 2009. 'Academic brands and their impact on scientific endeavor: the case of business market research and researchers', *Industrial Marketing Management*, vol. 38, no. 6, pp. 570 – 576.
- Coviello, NE, & Brodie, RJ 2001, 'Contemporary marketing practices of consumer and business-to-business firms: how different are they?', *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, vol. 16, no. 5, pp. 382 – 400.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M, & Rochberg-Halton, E 1981, *The meaning of things: domestic symbols and the self*, Cambridge University Press, UK.
- Dubois, A, Gadde, LE 2002, 'Systematic combining: an abductive approach to case study research', *Journal of Business Research*, vol. 55, no. 7, pp. 553-560.
- Dubois, A & Gibbert, M 2010, 'From complexity to transparency: managing the interplay between theory, method and empirical phenomena in IMM case studies', *Industrial Marketing Management*, vol. 39, no. 1, pp. 129-136.
- Eco, U 1986, *Travels in Hyperreality*, Harcourt Brace and Co, New York.

- Easton, G 1995, 'Case research as methodology for industrial networks; a realist apologia', *Proceedings of the 11th IMP Conference*.
- Easton, G 2010, 'Critical Realism in Case Study Research', *Industrial Marketing Management*, vol. 39, no. 1, pp. 118-128.
- Eurostat (2006), *Competitiveness in EU road freight transport*
- Fern, EF & Brown, JR 1984, 'The industrial/consumer marketing dichotomy: a case of insufficient justification', *Journal of Marketing*, vol. 48, no. 2, pp. 68-77.
- Firat, AF, Dholakia, N, & Venkatesh, A 1995, 'Marketing in a postmodern world', *European Journal of Marketing*, vol. 29, no. 1, pp. 40 – 56.
- Ford, D 1990, *Understanding Business Markets: Interactions, Relationships and Networks*, Academic Press, London.
- Ford, D 2011, 'IMP and service dominant logic: divergence, convergence and development', *Industrial Marketing Management*, vol. 40, no. 2, pp. 231-239.
- Fredriksson, P & Gadde, LE 2005, 'Flexibility and rigidity in customization and build-to-order production', *Industrial Marketing Management*, vol. 34, no. 7, pp. 695-705.
- Geiger, S, & Turley, D 2003, 'Grounded theory in sales research: an investigation of salespeople's client relationships', *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, vol. 18 no. 6/7, pp. 580 – 594.
- Giddens, A 1984, *The Constitution of Society. Outline of the Structuration Theory*, Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Goodman, L 1961, 'Snowball Sampling', *Annals of Mathematical Statistics*, vol. 32, pp. 245-268.
- Govers, PCM & Schoormans, JPL 2005, 'Product personality and its influence on consumer preference', *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, vol. 22, no. 4, pp. 189 – 197.
- Grönroos, C 2011, 'Value co-creation in service logic: a critical analysis', *Marketing Theory*, vol. 11, no. 3, pp. 279-301.
- Gummesson, E 2003, 'All research is interpretive!', *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, vol. 18, no. 6-7, pp. 482-492.
- Håkansson, H 1982, *International Marketing and Purchasing of Industrial Goods: An Interaction Approach*, John Wiley & Sons
- Håkansson, H & Snehota, I 1995, *Developing Relationships in Business Networks*, Thompson, London.

- Hietanen, J, Sihvonen, A, Pedeliento, G, Tikkanen, H, Parvinen, P, Salo, J & Mattila, P 2011, 'Managerial storytelling: how we write up managerial and academic stories in b2b case study research', *Proceedings of the 27th IMP Conference*.
- Holt, DB 2002, 'Why do brands cause trouble? a dialectical theory of consumer culture and branding', *Journal of Consumer Research*, vol. 29, no. 1, pp. 70-90.
- Johnston, WJ & Bonoma, TV 1981, 'The Buying Centre: Structure and Interaction Patterns', *Journal of Marketing*, vol. 45, pp. 143-156.
- Kleine, SS, & Baker, SM 2004, 'An integrative review of material possession attachment', *Academy of Marketing Science Review*, accessed March 5, 2012, <http://www.amsreview.org/articles.htm>.
- Lehmann, DR & O'Shaughnessy, J 1974, 'Difference in attribute importance for different industrial products', *Journal of Marketing*, vol. 38, no. 2, pp. 36-42.
- Lehmann, DR & Winer, R 2002, *Product Management*, McGraw Hill, New York.
- Lowe, S 2001, 'The ideational dynamics of cultural interaction and actor bonds', *Proceeding 17th IMP-conference*
- Lowe, S, Ellis, N, & Purchase, S 2008, 'Rethinking language in IMP research: networking processes in other words', *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, vol. 24, no. 4, pp. 295-307.
- Lusch, RF & Vargo, SL 2006, 'Service-dominant logic: reactions, reflections and refinements', *Marketing Theory*, vol. 6, no. 3, pp. 281-288.
- Malhotra, NK 1988, 'Self concept and product choice: an integrated perspective', *Journal of Economic Psychology*, vol. 9, no. 1, pp. 1-28.
- McCracken, G 1986, 'Culture and consumption: a theoretical account of the structure and movement of the cultural meaning of consumer goods', *Journal of Consumer Research*, vol. 13, no. 1, pp. 71-84.
- Metcalf, LE, Frear, CR & Krishnan, R 1992, 'Buyer-seller relationships: an application of the imp interaction model', *European Journal of Marketing*, vol. 26, no. 2, pp. 27-46.
- Ministry of Transportations (2004) - Indagine conoscitiva su 2.000 imprese che esercitano l'autotrasporto di cose per conto di terzi, Edited by Ipsos-Explorer on behalf of the Italian Ministry of Transportation, Rome.
- Mittal, B 2006, 'I, me, and mine: how products become consumers' extended selves', *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, vol. 5, no. 6, pp. 550-562.
- Moisander, J & Valtonen, A 2006, *Qualitative marketing research: a cultural approach*, Sage Publications: London.

- Peñaloza L. 2000, 'The commodification of the american west: marketers' production of cultural meanings at the trade show', *Journal of Marketing*, vol. 64, no. 4, pp. 82-109.
- Peñaloza, L & Venkatesh, A 2006, 'Further evolving the new dominant logic of marketing: from services to the social construction of markets', *Marketing Theory*, vol. 6, no. 3, pp. 299-316.
- Rinallo, D & Golfetto, F 2006, 'Representing markets: the shaping of fashion trends by french and italian fabric companies', *Industrial Marketing Management*, vol. 35, no. 7, pp. 856-869.
- Rinallo, D, Borghini, S & Golfetto, F 2010, 'Exploring visitor experiences at trade shows', *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, vol. 25, no. 4, pp. 249-258.
- Schifferstein, HN & Zwartkruis-Pelgrim, EP 2008, 'Consumer-product attachment: measurement and design implications', *International Journal of Design*, vol. 2, no. 3, pp. 1-14.
- Schouten, JW & McAlexander, JH 1995, 'Subcultures of consumption: an ethnography of the new bikers', *Journal of Consumer Research*, vol. 22, no. 1, pp. 43-61.
- Sirgy, JM 1982, 'Self-concept in consumer behavior: a critical review', *Journal of Consumer Research*, vol. 9, no. 3, pp. 287-300.
- Sirgy, JM & Danes, JE 1982, Self-image/product-image congruence models: testing selected models, in Mitchell A. (ed.) *Advances in Consumer Research*, vol. 9, Association for Consumer Research, pp. 556-561, Ann Arbor.
- Thompson, CJ, Locander, WB & Pollio, HR 1989, Putting consumer experience back into consumer research: the philosophy and method of existential-phenomenology, *Journal of Consumer Research*, vol. 16, no. 2, pp. 133-146.
- Tian, K & Belk, RW 2005, Extended self and possessions in the workplace, *Journal of Consumer Research*, vol. 32, no. 2, pp. 297-310.
- Tikkanen, H 1995, 'The social construction of industrial networks', *13th IMP Conference*.
- Tuan, YF 1980, The significance of the artifact, *Geographical Review*, vol. 70, no. 4, pp. 462-472.
- Vargo, SL & Lusch, RF 2004, Evolving to a new dominant logic for marketing, *Journal of Marketing*, vol. 68, no. 1, pp. 1-17.
- Vargo, SL & Lusch, RF 2008, 'From goods to service(s): divergences and convergences of logics', *Industrial Marketing Management*, vol. 37, no. 3, pp. 254-259.
- Vargo, SL 2009, 'Toward a transcending conceptualization of relationship: a service-dominant logic perspective', *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, vol. 24, no. 5-6, pp. 373 - 379.

- Vargo, SL & Lusch, RF 2011, 'It's all B2B...and beyond: toward a systems perspective of the market', *Industrial Marketing Management*, vol. 40, no. 2, pp. 181-187.
- Visconti, LM 2010, Ethnographic Case Study (ECS): Abductive modeling of ethnography and improving the relevance in business research, *Industrial Marketing Management*, vol. 39, no. 1, pp. 25-39.
- Wagner, SM, Lukassen P & Mahlendorf M 2010, 'Misused and missed use — grounded theory and objective hermeneutics as methods for research in industrial marketing', *Industrial Marketing Management*, vol. 39, no. 1, pp. 5-15.
- Wallendorf, M & Arnould, EJ 1988, 'My favorite things: a cross-cultural inquiry into object attachment, possessiveness, and social linkage', *Journal of Consumer Research*, vol. 14, no. 4, pp. 531-547.