

Concepts of the seduced and repressed marketing essay



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This essay will introduce the concepts of the “ seduced” and “ repressed” and explain what they mean in Bauman’s theory of consumer society

The main body will consider how Bauman’s concepts:

help us better understand how consumption fits into and affects our modern UK consumer society.

fail to help us understand (what are their strengths and weaknesses ? what are their limitations as tools ?)

feedback from TMA01: make it shorter (~10%)

Main Body (approx 1000 words)

Introduce the concepts, explain what they mean

Summarise Bauman’s theory (consumption replaces class in post-industrial consumer society as a means of classifying members of society). Explain what Bauman means by “ Seduced” and “ Repressed” as concepts within his theory.

How the concepts help (try using Circuit of Knowledge)

Question: How do the concepts help us better understand consumption in our society ?

Claim: They enable us to create a clear, simplified description of a consumer society

Evidence: Examples of what Bauman describes from UK society:

Hetherington’s description of his street as an example of a typical UK street,

show how the concepts help us describe contemporary UK consumer society as exemplified by his street, how they simplify/clarify the description.

Claim: They offer an accurate (enough) explanation of why things are this way in a consumer society

Evidence: Show how the concepts offer an explanation of why people shop as they do, using the description of Hetherington's area. Jackson reached the same conclusion for retail park shoppers.

How the concepts fail

Question: How do the concepts FAIL TO help us better understand consumption in our society ?

Claim: Bauman's theory is a bit out-of-date, patterns of consumption and opportunities for consuming have changed. Distinguishing by ability to consume or not is less meaningful if everyone can consume satisfactorily. We might need a new set of concepts to partition the new " seduced", or a re-definition of Bauman's concepts to address this.

Evidence:

Money is more freely available on easy credit terms/store cards etc.

Online (ebay), high-street stores like Primark allow more people to consume successfully at different levels, not just a choice between consuming luxury or nothing at all.

Rising affluence (chapter 3 evidence, spend on essentials as a proportion of all expenditure has dropped since 1986),

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Greater access to a wider range of cheaper goods (e. g. cheap clothes in supermarkets - chapter 2).

Quote from V. Brown about how people in the UK have more stuff than ever before

Claim: They over-generalise/over-simplify - they don't explain lots of consumer types and how they behave.

Choose from these examples of consumers who don't fit the concepts depending on wordcount:

Evidence::

People who may not consume luxuries to fit in/portray a lifestyle normally, but who use occasional "retail therapy" as an escape mechanism from a stressful or boring lifestyle. They KNOW they're being seduced, and indeed choose to be for relief. People who consume to 'reward themselves' for working hard.

People in both categories simultaneously - e. g. may be heavily seduced whenever they spend on hobbies or interests, but begrudge every penny spent on other non-essentials;

People who consume goods and services aimed at the seduced, but who understand the manipulation and don't care

People who choose not to consume in order to make a point (Chapter 1 - Hetherington's "oppositional", and Audio CD1, Helen Rimmer (FoE) re. Tescopoly and other protesters)

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People who would be classified as repressed but are not, even though they have a good income (e. g. have high demands on their means) or they prioritise essentials over luxury

Conclusion (approx 150 words)

What has the essay discussed ?

What conclusions have been reached ? NO NEW MATERIAL !

It has examined the concepts from the perspectives of how they help us better understand how consumption fits into and affects our society and where they fail to help us in this understanding

It has concluded that the benefits outweigh the shortcomings, but that other concepts and theories are required to give a complete picture of the modern UK consumer society. So they leave a number of significant gaps, thus need to be augmented/extended to give a good understanding.

References

Add references at the end - don't forget the CD reference

David Byrne (PI: B0984954, DD131, TMA02 Task 2, Essay of not more than 1250 words)

Discuss the role of the concepts of the seduced and the repressed for understanding the place of consumption in contemporary consumer society.

Zygmunt Bauman has created an abstract model of the typical modern consumer society, as a way of describing this type of society and explaining

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why it might be so. He has invented a number of concepts to help with this explanation, and this essay will consider two of these that are closely related - what Bauman calls the "Seduced" and the "Repressed". This discussion will initially introduce these concepts and explain what they mean in Bauman's theory. It will then explore their usefulness by considering each from the contrasting perspectives of how they help us better understand where consumption fits into our modern UK consumer society, and conversely ways in which they might fail to help our understanding.

As noted by Kevin Hetherington (2009, p25), Bauman suggests that post-industrial capitalist societies are based on consumption, which he believes is a key characteristic of such societies. In a similar fashion to the class-based divisions in industrial society that group people by their positions in relation to the means of production, he proposes that societal divisions within consumer society are based on people's ability to consume material goods, services and experiences, and offers the concepts of the "Seduced" and the "Repressed" to describe those groupings. The "Seduced" in Bauman's model are those able to acquire the material goods that are valued as status symbols by their peers, and to live lifestyles aspired to by the group. As successful consumers, they are valued as members of society with a positive identity. In contrast, the constituents of the "Repressed" are those who are unable to access this way of life for some reason, for example because they do not have the disposable income to spend on non-essentials, or cannot access the sites of consumption such as retail parks and high streets due to factors such as physical disability, age or lack of transport. These are seen as

negatively-valued members of the consumer society, by the “ seduced” and by those with something to sell.

Bauman’s concepts can be used to describe and explain the different patterns of consumer activity in contemporary UK society. They distil all the subtly different attitudes to consumption held by the individuals in society down to just two consumer types, giving a simplified model that is much easier to understand than one incorporating all the individuals’ means and circumstances. Consider Hetherington’s account (2009, p13) of the businesses in his local area, a typical example of today’s UK urban landscape that includes small local shops, bars and restaurants, and out-of-town supermarkets and retail parks. This society can easily be described using Bauman’s concepts, where the “ Seduced” are likely to be those people Hetherington identifies as the night-time clientele of the bars and restaurants, and those who drive to the large supermarkets and retail park to shop, while the “ Repressed” could include those such as the ‘ latest group of migrants to arrive’ that Hetherington mentions. Bauman’s concepts also offer a simple theoretical way to explain why those who shop in each of the different outlets in the area do so. They suggest that the shoppers in the local retail park are the “ Seduced”, who shop there because they are buying into a lifestyle that emphasises acquisition of goods available in that environment, who have access to it by virtue of being car owners, and who can afford to shop there because they have sufficient disposable income. Those with sufficient disposable income to enjoy the bars and restaurants in the vicinity would also fit this category. In contrast, those local residents forced to settle for the limited range of goods on offer in the somewhat ‘ run-

down' local convenience stores because they can't afford to shop in the large out-of-town stores, or who do not have the appropriate means of transport to shop there, fit into the category of the "Repressed". This explanation of current UK society offered by Bauman's concepts is supported by practical studies such as Peter Jackson's survey of retail park shoppers (1990, cited in Hetherington, 2009, p45).

However since Bauman first presented his concepts in 1988, new opportunities for consuming that they do not accommodate have emerged in the UK. Vivienne Brown (2009, p111) presents evidence from the ONS of rising affluence here over the last fifty years, with the most significant rises in disposable income and in real earnings occurring in the mid-eighties and early nineties, trends accompanied by increased access to credit facilities through loan companies, store cards etc. Giant multinational retailers such as Tesco and Primark, with their global supply chains and huge buying power have brought an ever-increasing range of cheaper goods to the UK market, and online stores and auction sites facilitate high volumes of trade in cheaper goods. This combination of increased access to money and wider range of options means that a growing proportion of people are able to access a level of consumption that satisfies them instead of just being able to either consume or not. As Brown observes:

People in the UK have more clothing and shoes than ever before, eat a wider range of food than ever before, and increasingly their homes are fitted with appliances and facilities that would have been undreamed of or classed in the luxury bracket in the past (2009, p108).

Bauman's concepts distinguish people by whether they can consume or not, and are most effective when these distinctions are clear. When a majority of people are consuming satisfactorily, albeit at different levels, the differences between them as consumers narrow and the concepts may really only be useful for distinguishing between extremes. Additionally, without a baseline for comparison the concepts are hard to apply consistently: those considered "Seduced" from one perspective might equally be considered "Repressed" by those even better off. These gaps suggest that alternative concepts are needed to partition the contemporary "Seduced" in order to satisfactorily explain our society.

While Bauman's concepts simplify and clarify, they over-generalise and over-simplify. Many people in the UK today either don't fit neatly into the categories of the "Seduced" and "Repressed", or move easily between these groups. Examples include those who do not normally follow a consumption-centred lifestyle but who use occasional shopping ("retail therapy") to escape from stress or boredom, or as a personal treat or reward. They know they are being seduced, and indeed choose to be for their temporary specific purposes. Similarly, the concepts do not explain those that choose to not consume in order to make a point, who Hetherington (2009, p47) suggests might be termed the "oppositional", such as those who select what they buy on the basis of environmental friendliness, trade fairness or other ethical grounds. Helen Rimmer (DD131, CD1) describes communities in a number of UK locations who have rejected new opportunities to consume by actively opposing the introduction of big supermarkets in their area because they object to the local economy being

disrupted. The people in these examples are not “ seduced”, but neither are they “ repressed”: their conscious choices of where and how much they consume compared to others do not impact on their status in society or on how others value them. This again suggests that Bauman’s concepts may need re-definition to have more meaning in the context of our modern society.

Having evaluated the strengths and the limitations of Bauman’s “ Seduced” and “ Repressed” concepts as tools in advancing our understanding of the role of consumption in contemporary post-industrial UK society, it seems that they offer a useful way of classifying many of the members of that society, and often help to explain their patterns of consumption. However this essay has presented a number of examples where the concepts fail to offer a satisfactory explanation because they are too generalised and/or simplified. The evidence that Bauman’s concepts leave important gaps in our understanding therefore suggests that while they are most useful in giving a “ big picture” view of the role that consumption plays in modern UK consumer society, additional concepts and theories are required if we wish to understand the detail.

(1331 words)