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Professor Isabelle Szmigin – Understanding the Science of Shopping transcript

Understanding the science of shopping,Professor Isabelle Szmigin, University of Birmingham

Title: **Professor Isabelle Szmigin (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RNcp8I3XXM4) – Understanding the Science of Shopping (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RNcp8I3XXM4)**
Duration: 4.25 mins
Speaker Names (if given):S1 Professor Isabelle Szmigin

S1 Well my current research is really about conceptualising how consumers actually behave; so I'm particularly interested in the interface between what consumers do and how businesses and other organisations interpret what they do. So recently I've looked with other colleagues at young people's drinking – that's people over the age of 18 – and it's obviously a major concern to Government at the moment. I've also looked at how older people are represented in the media; again, it's of major current interest with older people becoming a much larger proportion of UK and indeed world society. I've also recently looked at how consumers understand credit and debt, and with other colleagues and other universities, I've looked at the current situation for students with student loans, and so on. And then I've also been looking at how different ethnic communities consume in some cases differently to mainstream, if you like, communities. We're also interested in how consumers operate online, how that online behaviour might be different to how they operate offline when they go to the shops. Well, I think that the important thing here is to actually understand what's happening from the consumer's perspective. One of the things that businesses and indeed Government organisations and public bodies often, I think, fail to do is to really see what is happening from the consumer's perspective. Sometimes I think that businesses have an idea of how consumers ought to behave and it actually isn't the way that they do want to behave. So, for example; if I take the situation with young people's drinking, one of the things that we've identified is that drinking for people say between the ages of 18 and 24 is all about the social activity. A lot of the Government advertising has been about individual responsibility and while I'm not saying that there's anything wrong with that, actually understanding that drinking is very much about the social activity and finding ways to help young people get home safely and not end up in A&E is one of the things that we've tried to present there. With the older people I think one of the problems has been in the way that they're presented; both in the media and very often by public bodies in leaflets and so on, is I would sort of say in a slightly condescending way and I think that still continues. And while older people like to see young people in ads and so on, they also want to see themselves, you know, in a way that they see themselves in the mirror, you know, and that isn't as, if you like, something different to mainstream consumers.

The key thing about consumer behaviour is that it's very much about how consumers change and so it's about the dynamism of consumers. One of the things that Kotler said is that markets always change faster than marketing; so we have to look at what consumers are doing and how they change with markets. There's a whole range of things that I think consumers are going to be much more concerned about in the future. Of course, one of the things is about aging consumers. The whole world is going to be a much older population and we will be concerned about how organisations deal with older people. Currently I teach consumer behaviour to under-graduates in their second year and we look at all kinds of things in consumer behaviour and particularly how consumers are presented in advertising, and so on. So they get involved by looking at advertising and really critically assessing the consumer behaviour aspects of it and getting involved sometimes doing primary research. For example; last year my students took a week of their own purchasing and analysed it in detail from shopping in the Bullring Centre to the relationship that they have with their retail banks and their mobile phone providers. I think they found it very useful and it also helped them identify just what kind of budgets they had too. The fact of the matter is that there's a whole range of interesting research out there and I think as the years go on, there's going to be much more for us to consider and certainly much more for students to become involved in.

End of recording

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