Cultural Consumption and Consumer Well-Being: Implications from the Self-Determination Theory

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Abstract— academics, artists and policymakers have recently been exploring the relationship between cultural participation and well-being and have suggested that promoting the consumption of cultural activities might be a route to improving consumers’ perceptions of well-being. However, there is a paucity of studies that have attempted to examine the underlying mechanisms in the cultural consumption–consumer well-being link. The current study employs the self-determination theory to understand the dominant innate needs of customers in the context of cultural consumption. The aim of the research is to examine the role of self-determination mechanisms in the relationship between cultural consumption, vitality and consumer well-being.

Keywords— Cultural consumption, consumer well-being, self-determination theory, vitality

I. INTRODUCTION

The self-determination theory (SDT; Dec and Ryan, 2000) suggests that fulfillment of individual’s three fundamental needs, including autonomy, competence and relatedness, plays a significant role in the physical, psychological, and social well-being and the overall quality of life. Prior literature has studied the social contextual antecedents in linking with the need satisfaction and personal well-being outcomes (e.g., Ilardi, et al., 1993; Deci et al., 2001). However, to our best knowledge, limited studies have examined the relation between customer cultural consumption and their need satisfaction and fulfillment, and hence the consequential influences on well-being. The primary objective of this research is to draw on the SDT to understand whether and how cultural consumption would promote consumer well-being.

Cultural consumption includes activities of various types, such as consumer experiences with artworks or performances which bear meanings on their production and consumption. Customers generate meanings of those activities and develop a sense of self which help foster their well-being. Cultural theorists argue that cultural consumption can be considered as a process of culture appropriation. Thus, while arts organizations confer meanings to specific arts events, consumers likely make sense of the products for their own ends—maintaining social relationships or gratifying a cultural fantasy for example (Chan and Goldthrope, 2007; DiMaggio and Mukhtar, 2004). The reciprocal relationship between cultural institutions and a wide range of consumers actively contributes to the production of culture (Lizardo and Skiles, 2008; Storey, 1999). By examining how consumers bring their experiences, feelings, social position and social memberships to their encounters with the arts, this research can draw on a wider perspective in theorizing about cultural consumption as a total experience— of leisure activity, social interaction, and cultural learning— that fosters customer well-being.

This study attempts to define the nature of the link between cultural consumption and consumer well-being and the role of self-determination mechanisms. Specifically, the aims are two-folds: to quantify the relationship between cultural consumption and consumer well-being in the Hong Kong context and to quantify the relative importance of different self-determination mechanisms in the relationship between cultural consumption, vitality and consumer well-being. The findings should advance our understanding to what extent managing and investing in cultural activities would be beneficial to well-being.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Self-determination Mechanisms

According to self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 1985 & 1991), satisfaction of psychological needs, including autonomy, competence, and relatedness are essential psychological processes of an individual. Researchers have posited that satisfaction of all these three basic needs both directly or indirectly contributes to one’s well-being (Wilson and Rodgers, 2007) and psychological growth (Ryan and Deci, 2000).

Among the psychological needs, the need for autonomy appears to be central to people’s well-being. Autonomy refers to the sense that one’s behavior emanates from and is endorsed by oneself (Kasser and Ryan, 1999). Actions are characterized by a feeling of freedom and choicefulness when one is autonomous. People who experience greater autonomy are likely to exhibit lower depression, higher self-esteem, life satisfaction, as well as higher general health (Vallerand and O’Connor, 1989). On the other hand, actions with controlled motivation cause people to have greater tension and weaken their self-esteem.

The need for relatedness is another prominent psychological need for a human being. Relatedness refers to the need to feel securely connected with and loved by other people (Baumeister and Leary, 1995). It is the need for feeling close and connected to others (Ryan, 1995).

Competence is another basic psychological need which refers to the sense of proficiency or effectiveness in the
activities in which one engages (Ryan and La Guardia, 2000). It concerns people’s feelings of challenge and efficacy (Deci, 1975; White, 1959). In the present study, competence is excluded as one of the dimensions. We argue that arts organizations assign their own meanings to specific art events, but consumers make sense of the products for their own ends such as maintaining social relationships or to gratify a cultural fantasy (Chan and Goldthrope, 2007; DiMaggio and Mukhtar, 2004). The reciprocal relationship between cultural institutions and consumers makes sense of meanings that actively contributes to the production of culture (Lizardo and Skiles, 2008; Storey, 1999). Therefore, the interaction is not about challenge and efficacy but centres on relational bonds and feeling of choicefullness.

B. The Mediating Role of SDT on Cultural Consumption and Vitality

Art and cultural consumption may be interpreted in the form of customer involvement in a cultural activity or event. According to Havitz and Dimanche (1999), involvement is defined as “an unobservable state of motivation, arousal or interest toward a recreational activity or associated product” (p. 122). It refers to an individual’s motivational state regarding an object or activity. The concept of involvement has been applied to different contexts in understanding and explaining a person’s recreation behavior, such as international leisure tourism (Gursoy and Gavcar, 2003) and service delivery at national parks (Hwang, Lee, and Chen, 2005). Customers who are more involved in an activity are likely to attach a stronger sense of importance to participate in such an activity, resulting in higher level of awareness toward that activity.

Marketing researchers have long recognized the significance of experiential consumption. Hirschman and Holbrook (1982) classified the experiential aspects as fantasies (dreams, imagination, unconscious desires), feelings (emotions such as love, hate, anger, fear, joy, sorrow), and fun (hedonic pleasure derived from playful activities or aesthetic enjoyment). This view suggests that subjective experience, product meaning, and consumer emotional responses are intrinsic to service consumption. Cultural consumption is typical of experiential consumption. First, the core product of both the visual arts and performing arts is an experience. Then, one necessary element is customer interaction and engagement. Only through a customer’s active participation (either mentally or physically), can they perceive value, fun and enjoyment from their experience. Third, customers evaluate cultural consumption from a more experiential/affective standpoint, rather than using traditional service quality criteria (Parasuraman et al., 1988).

Vitality is a central indicator of well-being, reflecting the energy available to the self of an individual (Ryan and Frederick, 1997). According to Ryan and Frederick (1997), subjective vitality is defined as the positive feeling of aliveness and energy which derives from feelings of freedom, autonomy support, and intrinsic motivation. Within SDT, the energy for action arises either directly or indirectly from the fulfillment of basic psychological needs. Vitality of an individual can be maintained or enhanced when the needs for autonomy and relatedness are satisfied. Previous studies have demonstrated the positive relations between vitality and attainment of basic psychological needs. Ryan and Frederick (1997) support that people exhibit higher vitality as they engage in actions or behaviors that feel more autonomous or self-driven (Muraven et al., 2008). The study of Sheldon and Kasser (1995) shows that less self-determined personal striving is associated with lower subjective vitality. Sheldon, Ryan, and Reis (1996) also support a positive association between self-determination and vitality.

Self-determination theory (SDT) (Deci and Ryan, 2000) is adopted to explain why and how cultural consumption adds value for consumers and promotes consumer vitality. Cultural consumption enhances consumers’ knowledge of a certain aspect of culture while at the same time giving them a new experience and helping them to develop relationships with cultural organizations and/or other consumers. These help fulfill the innate autonomy and relatedness needs, which results in satisfaction and leads to personal growth and vitality.

The need for autonomy involves the perception of one’s activities that are endorsed by or congruent with the self (Reis et al., 2000). The well-being of a person can be enhanced by daily activities contributing to their need attainments (Reis et al., 2000). In consistent with prior study, consumer vitality is likely to be promoted when daily events are congruent with one’s presumed basic needs and long-term goals (Sheldon & Kasser, 1995; Csikszentmihalyi, 1992).

Moreover, cultural consumption helps to build up the emotional ties between customers on one side and providers as well as relevant community on the other side. Previous literature reveals that when individuals experience support from others with love and affection, they are likely to function better, be more stress resilient, and report fewer psychological difficulties (Cohen, Sherrod, and Clark, 1986; Lepore, 1992; Ryan et al., 1995; Sarason et al., 1991). Greater satisfaction of the need for relatedness, in turn, can be expected to enhance one’s vitality. In light of the literature, it is hypothesized that:

H1: Autonomy mediates the relationship between cultural consumption and vitality.

H2: Relatedness mediates the relationship between cultural consumption and vitality.

C. Vitality and Well-being

In the past two decades, the study of psychological well-being has been guided by two primary conceptions of positive functioning. One conception defines happiness as a balance between positive and negative affect. An alternative conception, emphasized among sociologists, relates well-being to life satisfaction (Ryff and Keyes, 1995). The study of consumer well-being received little attention in the marketing field until recent years (e.g., Burroughs and Rindfleisch, 2002; Lee et al. 2002; Moisio and Beruchashvili, 2009). The World Health Organization, however, has attempted to measure well-being in nations around the world. The brief version of their well-being indicator (WHOQOL-BRIEF) was designed and it indicates well-being in four domains: physical, psychological, social and environmental. Grossi and his colleagues have asserted that the impact of cultural consumption on physical,
psychological and social well-being is substantial (Grossi et al., 2010). In this study we propose to employ the first three domains of the WHOQOL-BRIEF indicator as our measure of long term well-being.

Literature suggests that vitality emerges as one component under the well-being construct. The notion of vitality focuses on the present state of individuals. It is the psychological sense of aliveness, enthusiasm, or energy of one self. A person's experience of possessing aliveness and energy varies with both physical (e.g., state of illness) and psychological factors (e.g., being in love). Due to its phenomenological centrality and highly association with physical and psychological influences, experience of vitality can serve as a reflection of personal well-being (Ryan and Frederick, 1997). The study of Ryan and Frederick provides evidence supporting the association between subjective vitality and personal well-being. It shows that vitality ratings are related to indexes of psychical and psychological well-being. Vitality is rated higher for people with better body functioning and physical self-efficacy and fewer physical symptoms as well as for those who have higher self-esteem. Consistent with Stewart, Hays, and Ware (1992), positive relations between feelings of energy and personal mental health is found. It is therefore hypothesized that:

H3: Vitality is positively related to well-being.

III. Conclusion

In this research, relations between cultural consumption and consumer well-being and the role of self-determinant mechanisms will be investigated. This research will enrich and contribute to existing well-being literature by exploring how consumer well-being can be promoted in the context of cultural consumption. It is expected that consumer experience of cultural activities motivates the fulfillment of consumer psychological needs (i.e., autonomy and relatedness), in turn, enhances their vitality and long term well-being. It provides valuable insights to practitioners and governments on the importance of managing and investing in cultural activities, which ultimately fosters consumer and citizen well-being. The goal of societal sustainability can be achieved.

References


