

## MARKETING THEORY: EXPERIENCE MARKETING AND EXPERIENTIAL MARKETING

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**Abstract.** Despite the fact that experiences are regarded as key concepts in marketing today, there are different views and interpretations about the content of terms. The main objective of this article is to analyse the concepts of experience and experiential marketing. Based on the literature review the authors found that experience marketing is a strategic and a broader term than experiential marketing. We define experience marketing as a strategic and holistic marketing of relevant (and meaningful) experiences, and experiential marketing as a tactical tool that helps to do marketing experientially. At the end of the article a conceptual model of experience marketing is proposed.

**Keywords:** experience marketing, experience, experiential marketing, customer experience, value.

**Jel classification:** D11, M31

### 1. Introduction

Increasing amount of people are searching for meaning, happiness, sensations, new forms of fulfillment and core values, which they often find in market offerings (Fortezza, Pencarelli 2011). Experience marketing is a new approach to marketing and business. Compared to traditional marketing it is an innovative and creative approach, and is going to be a major growth area in next years.

Already in 1999 Schmitt declared that we are in the middle of a revolution that will replace traditional feature-and-benefit (F&B) marketing with experiential marketing (Schmitt 1999 a). In 1998 Pine and Gilmore (1998) introduced experience economy as the next economy following the service economy. Experience is the main component of experience marketing and according to LaSalle and Britton (2003) and Schmitt (1999 a) it is key marketing in future. Although experiences are regarded as key concepts in marketing today, there are mixed views and interpretations about the content of terms. Experiences are seen in different ways and varying approaches are available. Some terms are sometimes used as synonyms, for example confusion arises when defining experience marketing, experiential marketing, and customer experience management (CEM).

Tynan and McKechnie (2009) in the review article “Experience marketing: a review and reassessment”

refer to lack of clarity in marketing literature with regard to “what exactly constitutes an experience and the conflation of terms associated with experience marketing”. The seminal article and book “Experiential marketing” was written by Schmitt in 1999. In the articles written by Schmitt (2009, 2010) ten years later the keyword is surprisingly experience marketing.

This article seeks to contribute to the existing knowledge of experience marketing. The key research questions are: 1) what are experience, experience marketing, and experiential marketing?, 2) what is the difference and relationship between the terms?, 3) how to conceptualize experience marketing? The goal of this theoretical article is based on the analysis of key concepts and earlier research in the field to propose a conceptual model of experience marketing.

The structure of the article is as follows. First, we provide an overview of key concepts of experience and experiential marketing. Second, we examine some theoretical approaches and formation of experience marketing, and also relationships between the terms. Finally, we propose the conceptual model of experience marketing to understand the essence of experience marketing and pave the way for further analysis and research.

## 2. Definitions of experience

As a concept and empirical phenomenon, experience is not as established as other consumer and marketing concepts, such as choice, attitudes, consumer satisfaction, or brand equity (Schmitt 2010). Poulsson and Kale (2004) observe that no attempt has been made to systematically define an experience in marketing terms. The lack of clarity lies in different ways in which the term can be understood. Tynan and McKechnie (2009) explain that experience is both a noun and a verb and “it is used variously to convey the process itself, participating in the activity, the affect or way in which an object, thought or emotion is felt through the senses or the mind, and even the outcome by way of a skill or learning”. In addition, experiences are even more complicated because there is a difference between the simple pleasure of an ordinary or mundane experience and the enjoyment of an extraordinary or flow experience (Carù, Cova 2003). For example flow experiences describe a form of intrinsic motivation and are characterized as states of intense concentration, focus, and absolute absorption in challenging activity (Csikszentmihalyi 1990).

Carbone and Haeckel claim to have launched the “experience movement” in 1994 (cited in Tynan, McKechnie 2009), but Holbrook and Hirschman wrote already in 1982 an iconic article on the consumption experience. Thus, almost 30 years ago marketing researchers discovered the importance of experiential aspects of consumer behaviour. Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) developed a useful model contrasting the differences between the information-processing (rational) and the experiential view (irrational).

Carù and Cova (2003) confirm that the concept of experience is still ill-defined and in the field of marketing we must use a “typology of consumption experiences which goes beyond an ideological view” where every experience is extraordinary. Their analysis showed that in the social sciences and philosophy experience is defined as a “subjective episode in the construction/transformation of the individual with, however, an emphasis on the *emotions* and *senses*”. By experience Carbone and Haeckel (1994) mean the “takeaway” impression formed by people's encounters with products, services, and businesses – a perception produced when humans consolidate *sensory* information.

Tarssanen and Kylänen (2007) define experience as “*emotional* experience that can lead to personal change”, Pine and Gilmore (1999) as memorable events, and Pitkänen and Tuohino (2006) as

*affective* events that have a strong impact on the perceiver.

Veijola (2002) describes two dimensions of experience: 1) experience (in German *Erfahrung*), as already perceived or experienced, and 2) experience (in German *Erlebnis*), not previously experienced. Snel (2011) assures that *Erlebnis* is isolated and immediate, but *Erfahrung* is a continuous process of doing and undergoing, giving and taking, causes and consequences, action and reflection, etc. German, Dutch, Estonian, Swedish, Norwegian, Finnish, and Japanese languages make a distinction between these two words, but English has only one word ‘experience’.

Despite the frequent use by scholars of the term ‘experience’, its definitions in the literature tend to focus on different elements (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Lexicon of experience

Authors	Year	Experience
Maslow	1964	Peak experience
Holbrook, Hirschman	1982	Experiential aspects
Csikszentmihalyi	1990	Flow experience
Arnould, Price	1993	Extraordinary experience
Carbone, Haeckel	1994	Customer experience engineering
Pine, Gilmore	1998	Distinct economic offering, memorable, experience economy
Schmitt	1999	Experiential marketing
Poulsson, Kale	2004	Commercial experience
Boswijk, Thijssen, Peelen	2005	Meaning experience
Tarssanen, Kylänen	2007	Experience pyramid, personal change

In summary, experience is a complex and layered construct. There are even more dimensions – Carbone and Haeckel (1994) explain that experience “may be good or bad, lasting or fleeting, a random phenomenon or an engineered perception”.

An experience as a noun is something that affects the way you feel or knowledge or skill from doing, seeing or feeling things. An adjective ‘experiential’ means *based on experience*. That stresses the importance of experience as a basis of the area.

## 3. Experiential marketing

According to Schmitt, the initiator of experiential marketing, the framework of experiential marketing has two aspects: 1) five types of experiences,

called strategic experiential modules (SEMs), which form the strategic underpinning of experiential marketing, and 2) experience providers (Ex-Pros), the tactical tools (Schmitt 1999b). Holbrook (2000) criticizes Schmitt for positioning this rather modest conceptual framework as “a key strategic planning tool” of experiential marketing. We stress that marketing planning tool is tactical, not strategic. Experience marketing concept is based on experiences, not only on specific activities that are experiential in nature.

Carù and Cova (2003) are critical towards American romanticism (Schmitt, Holbrook, Pine, Gilmore, etc.) and confirm that this allowed Holbrook to propose the "logical sequence: ‘romanticism → experiential consumption → *emotional* responses → pleasure’, and to insist on the fact that in this experiential approach, *sensations are more important than the consumers’ rational thoughts*”.

Smilansky (2009) defines experiential marketing as a “process of identifying and satisfying customer needs and aspirations profitably, engaging them through two-way communications that bring brand personalities to life and add value to the target audience”. Experiential marketing helps to create experiences and *emotions* to the customers. International Experiential Marketing Association (2011) states that experiential marketing “allows customers to engage and interact with brands, products, and services in *sensory* ways”. According to You-Ming (2010), experiential marketing is a “communication method, which mainly raises customers’ physical and emotional *feelings*”. Hauser (2007) describes experiential marketing as a *holistic* approach to the customer/brand relationship.

Cantone and Risitano (2011) confirm that many firms are adopting CEM strategies, in which „the role of emotions, feelings, sentiments, passions and experiences” are emphasized in consumer-brand relationships. According to Yuan and Wu (2008), experiential marketing can be seen as a marketing *tactic* designed by a business to stage the entire physical environment and the operational processes for its customers to experience. We highlight that all these definitions indicate that experiential marketing is mainly related to *emotions, feelings, and senses*; and has less to do with cognition and human intentions.

When Schmitt (1999a) explains the idea of Pine and Gilmore’s (1998, 1999) experience economy he uses the phrase *experiential* economy. It shows how those terms and words are used interchangeably.

#### 4. Experience marketing

According to Leeflang (2011) one of the specific topics that have not yet received enough attention is experience marketing.

Experience marketing is generally based on experience economy theory. Pine and Gilmore (1998) claim experiences to be the fourth economic offering. They explain the progression of value from commodities to experiences by showing how experiences differ from goods and services (Table 2). Pine and Gilmore (1999, p. 12) declare that “while commodities are fungible, goods tangible, and services intangible, experiences are *memorable*”.

**Table 2.** Economic distinctions (Source: adaptation of Pine and Gilmore (1998))

Economic offering	Goods	Services	Experiences
Economy	Industrial	Service	Experience
Nature of offering	Tangible	Intangible	Memorable
Key attribute	Standardized	Customized	Personal
Seller	Manufacturer	Provider	Stager
Buyer	User	Client	Guest
Factors of demand	Features	Benefits	Sensations

Experience economy (Exponomy) is of increasing focus. Although the concept was born in the business field in 1998, it has gone beyond its boundaries to tourism (Leighton 2007), retailing (Grewal *et al.* 2009; Verhoef *et al.* 2009), architecture, sports, branding (Brakus *et al.* 2009; Gentile *et al.* 2007), entertainment and arts (Petkus 2004), urban planning, hospitality and other fields.

Experience economy is also considered as a main underpinning for customer experience management (CEM). According to Schmitt (2003), the term ‘customer experience management’ represents the “discipline, methodology and/or process” used to comprehensively manage a customer’s cross-channel exposure, interaction and transaction with a company, product, brand or service. CEM is more like a program (Cantone, Risitano 2011) or schedule, based on five steps. The CEM strategies impel the customer’s involvement at different levels (Gentile *et al.* 2007): rational, emotional, sensorial, physical, and spiritual.

Walls *et al.* (2011) define ‘consumer experience’ as “multidimensional takeaway impression or outcome, based on the consumer’s willingness and capacity to be affected and influenced by physical and/or human *interaction* dimensions”.

Experience marketing offers engaging, interactive, and entertaining brand experiences. Brakus *et al.* (2009) define brand experience as “subjective, internal consumer responses (sensations, feelings, and cognitions) and behavioural responses evoked by brand-related *stimuli*” that are part of a brand’s design and identity, communications, and environments in which the brand is marketed or sold.

Experience marketing is also related to consumer behaviour theory. Consumer behaviour as a field has expanded to three dominant specializations (subfields): consumer information processing, consumer culture theory, and behavioural decision theory (MacInnis, Folkes 2010). These subfields have all provided consumer insights on experiences. However, Schmitt (2010) regards that also two other main marketing disciplines (marketing strategy and marketing models) have also contributed to experience marketing in addition to consumer behaviour.

According to Schmitt (2010) the key concepts of experience marketing are: 1) experiential value, 2) different types of experiences, 3) the distinction between ordinary and extraordinary experiences, and 4) experience touchpoints. Consumer behaviour and experience marketing fields are open to adjoining disciplines, e.g. psychology, economics, communications, sociology, anthropology, and culture. These fields may be useful to better understand consumer behaviour and experience marketing.

**4.1. Definition**

To simplify, as the wording suggests, the focus in experience marketing is on experience. The other important components are the customer and experience co-creation. “Experience marketing can create emotions by making entertainment for customers, by allowing them to escape from the reality, by educating them and giving them aesthetic objects or places to see” (Pine, Gilmore 1999).

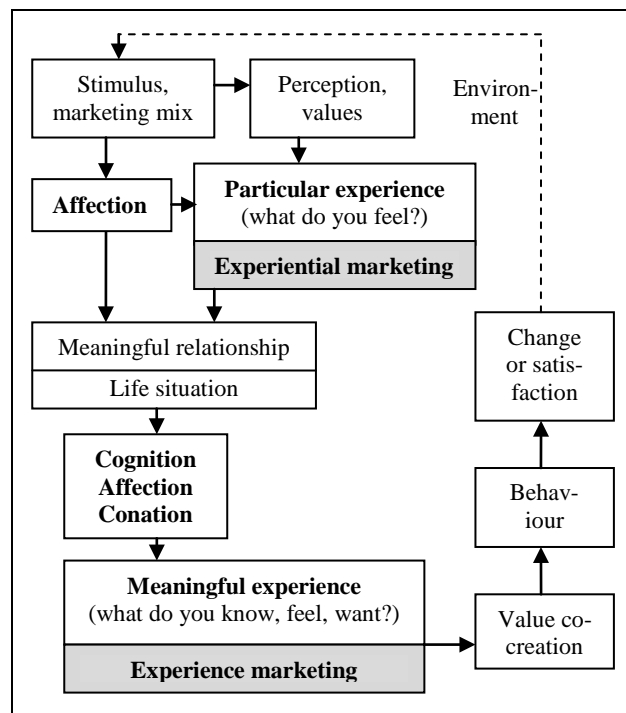
The diverse perspective and translations on experience has made it difficult to understand the concept and also define experience marketing. There is no consensus today on what the term ‘experience marketing’ refers to, and the context in which it is used. Lee *et al.* (2010) explain that experience marketing aims to request marketing staff to emphasize the overall experience quality for consumers passed by brands, including rational decision-making and sentimental consumption experience. Baron *et al.* (2009) define experience marketing as “the creation of a memorable episode based on a customer’s direct personal participation or observation”. But at

the same time they use exactly the same definition for experiential marketing.

**4.2. The difference between experience and experiential marketing**

The formation of experience marketing is a process from a stimulus up to a change in customer behaviour, learning or attitude. Experiences occur in response to some stimulation (Schmitt 1999a), e.g. marketing mix. The stimulus can be interpersonal (between people) or intrapersonal (within a person); it can be marketing stimulus (e.g. 4P) or environmental (e.g. economic, technological, cultural).

For its subjectivity experiences depend on the expectations and values of the customer (Tarsanen, Kylänen 2007). Experience can involve a perception on which one builds his/her own state of reality; a reality based on his/her interaction with the environment (Fig. 1).



**Fig.1.** The difference between experience and experiential marketing (Source: adaption of Leppiman, Same 2011)

A customer creates meaning to all he/she perceives. Experience represents a meaningful relationship between a person’s perceptual activity and a life situation, and is of particular significance to the person (Perttula 2007). When the customer experiences something to be important, this forms his/her life situations consisting of everything he/she is in meaningful relationship (Leppiman, Same 2011). Experiences are formed out of

these relationships and life situations. Fortezza and Pencarelli (2011) call it “packaging moments of life”.

Experiences may result in changes in attitude or behaviour. Customer attitude consists of three components: cognitive (mental images, understanding, interpretations), affective (feelings, emotions), and conative (intentions, actions, behaviour). “The most common sequence that takes place when an attitude forms is cognitive → affective → conative” (Clow, Baack 2007). This sequence can form a meaningful and relevant experience. *Meaningful* experience is composed of feelings, knowledge and beliefs (Leppiman, Same 2011). Thus, meaningful experience is broader than particular, which is mainly related to emotions and feelings, as seen on Fig. 1. A holistic experiential feeling may lead to changes in personal opinions and attitudes of a customer. Fig. 1 highlights that the platform of experience marketing is strategic and larger than experiential marketing.

**4.3. Conceptual model of experience marketing**

An experience is important in business and technology because to the mind every economic offering is experienced (Van Doorn 2006). Experience is broadly speaking an interaction between a company (brand/product/service) and a customer. Experience is shaped by the characteristics of the customer and those of the product, company or brand. Desmet and Hekkert (2007) explain that “all *actions and processes* that are involved, such as physical actions and perceptual and cognitive processes (e.g. perceiving, exploring, using, remembering, comparing, and understanding), will contribute to the experience”.

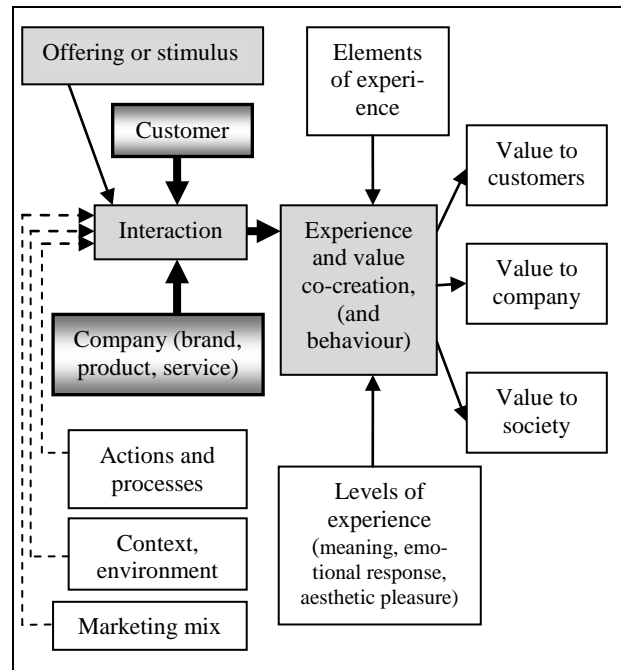
Consumer behaviour is influenced by internal influences, e.g. demographics, personality, motivation, knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and feelings. The behaviour is also influenced by external influences, e.g. culture, past experience, lifestyle, marketing mix. Psychological factors include individual’s motivation, perception, attitude and belief, while personal factors include income level, personality, age, occupation, lifestyle, etc. In addition, the experience is always influenced by the context – environment in which the interaction takes place.

The most important parts of the model (Fig. 2) are: 1) offering or stimulus, 2) interaction between the customer and company, 3) experience and value co-creation, 4) value. We believe these are the cornerstones of experience marketing.

Hekkert (2006) distinguishes three levels of experience: attribution of meaning (experience of

meaning), emotional response (emotional experience), and aesthetic pleasure (aesthetic experience). These experiences influence value co-creation, purchase decisions and behaviour.

At the level of meaning, cognition comes into play. Desmet and Hekkert (2007) confirm that contrary to popular belief, “an emotion is the result of a cognitive, though often automatic and unconscious, process”.



**Fig. 2.** Conceptual model of experience marketing

The ultimate outcome for the company is e.g. sales, value added, loyalty, etc. There is also outcome for the customer and ultimately to society. Tynan and McKechnie (2009) assert that experience marketing can deliver sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioural and relational value to customers, to which social and information based value can be added.

In 2007 the American Marketing Association adopted a new official definition of marketing (Keefe 2008): “Marketing is the activity, set of institutions, and *processes* for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging *offerings* that have *value* for *customers*, clients, partners, and *society* at large.” This definition also supports the model.

**5. Discussion**

Experience marketing is more complex than the traditional marketing of the post-industrial era (Fortezza, Pencarelli 2011). We claim to have experience-driven organizations, experience-oriented

strategy and experience-based activities using the word ‘experience’, but still many authors use experiential marketing (for the whole approach) while knowing that everything is based on experiences. As for parts of speech, ‘experience’ is a noun and a verb, while ‘experiential’ is an adjective. The company’s marketing approach and activities can be experiential in nature, but everything is *based* on experience(s) or driven by experiences. The authors of this article recommend the wider use of the term ‘experience marketing’, because at the broadest level it is strategic marketing, a field of study, a broader concept referring to the “world of experiences”. In this article the term *strategic marketing* is used in reference to the field of study and *marketing strategy* in reference to the organizational strategy construct and the latter may be defined as organization’s integrated pattern of decisions (Varadarajan 2010).

Experiential marketing is part of experience marketing. Experiential marketing is a tactical, rather than a strategic approach that marketers should consider central to their integrated marketing communications plans, including techniques, which are part of the core experience marketing strategy. Experiential marketing shows us the ways how managers can create experiences (Schmitt 2003). Smilansky (2009) explains that experiential strategy is the campaign’s main concept. Through the best practices Smilansky (2009), Schmitt (2003), and other authors show how to involve and engage the audience.

We can conclude that experiential marketing is limited in scope, and more executive in nature, e.g. it may consist of a single campaign or involve only one media channel. The focus of experiential marketing is on specific business objectives, largely on creating or modifying the environments in which customers interact. Tactical decisions are marketing mix decisions (e.g. promotion, communication) and they define how the strategic decisions will be implemented (Varadarajan 2010).

Everything marketers do is experiential at some level – from the brand identity creation to the packaging, store design, media communication, or Web site. These are tactical decisions and activities. Experience marketing is strategic marketing of experiences (according to Pine and Gilmore (2002) the experience is the marketing). Experiential marketing helps to market experiences, answers the question how to do marketing experientially.

## 6. Conclusions

Drawing from the extant literature and considering all most relevant scientific contributions we define

the terms. *Experience* is an economic offering and an interaction between the company/brand/service, and customer, who perceive and meaningfully experience it. *Experience marketing* is strategic (customer-centric) and holistic marketing of relevant (and meaningful) experiences that takes into account the affective, cognitive and conative perspectives of consumption experience. *Experiential marketing* as a marketing planning tool is concerned on tactical and operational level actions where the main question is how to do marketing (campaign) experientially.

Experience marketing is strategic marketing management and is used to manage customer interaction, cross-channel exposure, and value co-creation. We found that experiential marketing focuses on tactical and operational level actions where the main question is how to do marketing experientially. To be successful, Poulsson and Kale (2004) argue that a marketing experience should have personal relevance for the customer, be novel, offer an element of surprise, engender learning and engage the customer.

Fig. 1 presents the formation of experience marketing and should assist marketing professionals to understand the difference between the terms. Here are two important dimensions: experiential marketing (connected to particular experience and affection) and experience marketing (connected to meaningful experience; cognition, affection, and conation). Our analysis of the literature leads us to conclude that experience marketing is more comprehensive in scope and strategic in nature than experiential marketing. Experience marketing is holistic and seeks to understand the value of customer experiences and besides affective perspectives regards cognitive and conative perspectives. This observation is important in order to understand the difference between the terms.

The conceptual model (Fig. 2) is a figurative representation of the domain and thus attempts to explain the essence of experience marketing. The model should assist marketing professionals to understand the essence of experience marketing.

The consensus on what does and does not constitute experience marketing and what distinguishes it from other fields is far from clear. Further empirical research is needed to analyse the specific dimensions of experience marketing and explore the relationships between the elements. More research is needed to fully understand the experience construct and its impact on customers. For example, according to Walls *et al.* (2011), additional exploration is needed to understand the relationship between experiences, emotions, cognition, and multisensory elements. Also openness

to adjoining disciplines can add insights to experience marketing.

Finally, we proposed a conceptual model of experience marketing that should be tested empirically. Marketers need to understand the conceptual framework and principles of experience marketing, because experience marketing is the only way to gain competitive advantage in tough competition. From the company's perspective it is useful as a differentiation strategy. Experience marketing can lead to greater impact for the customer, increased effectiveness, and even cost savings compared to traditional marketing.

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