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How in-store educational and entertaining events influence shopper satisfaction

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ABSTRACT

While recent years have seen an increased use of educational and entertaining events within the store environment, little seems known about how consumers value such events. This study investigates how the staging of education and entertainment-focused in-store events impacts on consumers' value perceptions, arousal levels and store satisfaction. It is hypothesized that such events have a positive effect on store satisfaction but that their effects are moderated by a shopper's motivational orientation. Findings from a scenario-based experiment among 786 shoppers from two retail categories (hardware and computer stores) provide support for this. The findings show that task-oriented consumers derive more value and satisfaction from an education-focused event than from an entertainment-focused event, while recreation-oriented consumers appreciate either type of event. The study findings imply that providing education themed events is a safer option for retailers than providing entertainment-focused events because education satisfies a wider range of shopper needs. Shoppers overall derive pleasure from entertainment but task-oriented shoppers tend to also see it as a hindrance to the convenience of shopping, with the result that for these shoppers the hosting of entertainment-focused events may result in reduced store satisfaction levels.

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Since Pine and Gilmore (1999) introduced the concept of the experience economy there has been an increased interest in the enhancement of consumers' in-store experiences as a way to engage consumers and differentiate the retail offer. Retailer strategies to enrich the consumer experience have often focused on the in-store design aspects (Turley and Milliman, 2000); however, another way in which retailers attempt to enhance the retail experience, and create consumer satisfaction, is by hosting special temporary in-store events (Hede and Kellest, 2011; Leischnig et al., 2011a). Such events can range from ordinary and mundane types at one end to extraordinary and spectacular events types at the other. An example of a spectacular in-store event is Niketown (Peñaloza, 1998), which stages temporary entertainment-focused events offering consumers the ability to meet sporting celebrities while the store setting is transformed by relevant imagery and sporting paraphernalia. An example from the more ordinary end of the spectrum is a local Do-It-Yourself (DIY) hardware store holding

education-focused events based around teaching particular DIY skills. The question arises how experiences offered by such temporary events add to the attraction of the retail environment and whether they add value to consumers' shopping trips and enhance consumers' store satisfaction levels?

The present paper therefore investigates how in-store events create value for shoppers in retail stores. Contrary to previous work (Borghini et al., 2009; Diamond et al., 2009; Kozinets et al., 2002), we do not study flagship branded or manufacturer-brand owned, but instead focus on conventional retail environments that exist in almost any high street or neighbourhood mall. To understand how events may provide value we adopt the theories of pleasure–arousal (Donovan and Rossiter, 1982) and perceived value (Sweeney and Soutar, 2001). Overlaying these two frameworks we distinguish arousal, pleasure (regarded here as synonymous with enjoyment), perceived convenience and perceived risk as four components that will determine the value and satisfaction a shopper derives from the presence of temporary in-store events. We specifically focus on education and entertainment event based experiences. While there is a wide range of possible in-store events, many experiential retail environments share a focus on entertainment and education (Firat and Venkatesh 1993; Kozinets et al., 2002; Peñaloza, 1998; Pine and Gilmore, 1999; Sands et al., 2009). We define education-focused

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events as events characterized by the opportunity they create for the consumer to acquire product knowledge, for instance by enabling consumers to utilize, trial or experience a product by getting the product “out of the box” (Baron et al., 2001). In contrast, entertainment-focused events offer action and fun within the store, and create excitement, but they do not necessarily offer specific product related information—some typical examples of entertainment include fashion shows, exhibitions or celebrity appearances (Hede and Kellett, 2011; Leischnig et al., 2011a, 2011b; Parsons, 2003; Sit et al., 2003).

We posit that shopping motivation moderates consumers' perceived value of education and entertainment-focused events and store satisfaction. This expectation is in line with past research that has shown that whether a consumer's goal is recreationally (hedonically) or task (utilitarian) oriented moderates how a consumer responds to store environments (Kaltcheva and Weitz, 2006). Our study extends this notion by investigating whether the presence and nature of in-store events similarly depend on consumers' shopping motivational orientation. Specifically, we propose that consumers who are task-oriented will be better served by an education-focused event than by an entertainment-focused event. Education-focused events may directly assist with the achievement of task-related goals because they can provide relevant product information (Van Kenhove et al., 1999) while entertainment-focused events may be perceived as a hindrance to achieving these goals because they can distract the shopper from completing the purchase task. In contrast, consumers who are recreation-oriented will be able to equally appreciate entertainment and education-focused events. This is because these consumers derive value from the shopping experience itself (Bellenger and Korgaonkar, 1980). The product information provided by an education-focused event can satisfy these consumers' needs for stimulation just as well as the experiences offered by entertainment-focused events (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982).

1. Theoretical background

1.1. Consumption experience and the retail setting

Contemporary retail stores are designed to not only sell products, but also to entertain, educate, inspire, tell stories, and provide a form of escapism (Jansson, 2002; Kellner, 2003; Kozinets et al., 2002; Pine and Gilmore, 1999; Wolf, 1999). Accordingly, it has been suggested that retailers should consider themselves as hosts, and the retail environment as a theatre or stage for the consumer experience (Baron, Harris and Harris, 2001; Pine and Gilmore, 1999; Schmitt, 1999). Over the last decade this perspective has gained increasing prominence in the literature and in practice (Borghini et al., 2009; Diamond et al., 2009; Kozinets et al., 2002). However, much of the literature on retail experience has focused on the development of environments that are transformed (often permanently) to reflect a theme, such as the case at American Girl Place (Kozinets et al., 2002) or Toys “R” Us, where \$35 million was invested to make its Times Square New York store “the ultimate toy store that is the personification of every kid's dream” (Prior, 2001, p. 46). Less attention has been paid to how retailers can adopt theme-based events to temporarily enhance the in-store experience.

Pine and Gilmore (1999) provide a useful, albeit operational (Carù and Cova, 2003) starting point to consider how service providers may employ different event-types to convey different experiences (their typology offered at least four possible types: aesthetic, education, entertainment, and escapism). While the typology has been commended for its richness and its multifaceted view of the service experience-involving distinct but potentially complementary types of value (Holbrook, 2000) applicable across a range of service

settings—arguably education and entertainment are the most commonly provided experiences when considering event-types within service settings.

When comparing the role of education and entertainment in retail, arguably, education always has been an important element of retail service, as it is about the provision of product information to consumers. Instead, entertainment has become more prominent only since the early 1980s, which saw developments such as the West Edmonton Mall in Canada with its urban entertainment centre (Kooijman, 2002). The use of entertainment in malls and stores has since continued, in the belief that entertainment adds value to the shopping experience. Entertainment features have included amphitheatres, museums, and special attractions such as fashion shows (Parsons, 2003; Sit et al., 2003). This evolved into the emergence of flagship stores as brand museums (Hollenbeck et al., 2008) that combine entertainment with “an ostensibly education-related mission” (Borghini et al., 2009, p. 364). In the most extreme cases, consumers even pay admission to ‘stores’, purchasing the privilege of learning about the brand, or about product use itself (Hollenbeck et al., 2008). Borghini et al. (2009) describe the educational and entertaining aspects and components on display at American Girl Place, which includes a theatre and library.

Despite an increased interest in employing education and entertainment within the store environment, and indeed the view that success can result from such activities (Diamond et al., 2009), little seems to be known about how education and entertainment add to the service experience and how these different event-types influence post-visit satisfaction (Alexander and Muhlebach, 1992; Parsons, 2003).

1.2. A framework for investigating retail experience

A dominant paradigm in the study of retail atmospheric effects on consumers is the stimulus–organism–response (S–O–R) framework, which originates in environmental psychology. As summarised by Turley and Milliman (2000), the S–O–R framework assumes that environments present stimuli (S) that cause changes to a consumer's organismic (or internal) state (O), which in turn cause approach or avoidance responses (R) (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974). This framework explains and presents evidence regarding the effects of visual, aural, olfactory, and tactile cues on consumer responses of approach and avoidance. The framework specifies three basic dimensions: pleasure, arousal, and dominance; however, because studies showed limited support for the effects of dominance (Donovan and Rossiter, 1982; Donovan et al., 1994), most research that followed focused on pleasure and arousal. Pleasure relates to the degree to which a person feels happy, joyful, or satisfied with an environment, and reflects whether the environment is perceived as enjoyable (Yalch and Spangenberg, 2000). For example, playing popular songs should enhance consumers' pleasure, whereas unpopular music might diminish it. Arousal is the degree to which a person feels alert, excited, stimulated or active in a situation, ranging from sleep to frantic excitement (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974), and reflects how the environment stimulates the individual (Yalch and Spangenberg, 2000).

While research investigating the effect of environmental stimuli on consumers' behavioral responses has shown broad support for the positive effects of pleasure, the review of Kaltcheva and Weitz (2006) reveals the effects of arousal have been less consistent. Kaltcheva and Weitz propose that environments high in arousal are valued only by shoppers who have recreation-oriented shopping motivation. The authors show that recreation-oriented consumers are more likely than task-oriented consumers to enjoy an exciting (high in arousal) retail environment. Task-oriented consumers derive satisfaction from the outcome of the shopping activity (rather than from the activity itself), “their focus

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