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Experiential Marketing and Vacation Experience : The Sample of Turkish Airlines*

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Abstract

Customer demands that change with competitive circumstances of modern day, force firms improve themselves for new strategies to differentiate them from their competitors and to acquire competitive advantage. Therefore, in the experience economy we live through; marketing theorists and implementers are in search of unique and entertaining experiences to create customer dependence. In this context, strategies of marketing world has changed and developed to provide consumer experience rather than selling product and service. Experience is the main component of experiential marketing and it aims to make consumers respond, act actively to purchase and gain different feelings, different perceptions in consequence of their experiences. For that purpose, experience creates varied revivers such as special areas, atmospheres, new settlements. In terms of airline sector; fast changing life styles, intense work periods and desire of award oneself after those hard periods, increasing expectations of people about using their spare time valuable and amusing; support travel and experience activities. With reference to this assumption; experiential brand qualification of Turkish Airlines, experiential qualification of services Turkish Airlines offer and how these services affect travel experience and position of Turkish Airlines about following experiential marketing activities will be determined and after the literature review about experiential marketing and experiential marketing implementations. Travel experience perceptions of consumers will be specified as well. It will also be examined if there is any difference about travel experience perceptions according to consumers who have different socio-demographic characteristics. A sample survey will be fulfilled for the study.

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1. Introduction

Changing customer demands along with today's competitive conditions force enterprises to differ from their rivals and develop new strategies to gain competitive advantage over its competitors. When there was an active process of agricultural economy, the products were not different and they were considered commodity. With industrialization, the products and the product centeredness have commenced and the enterprises have tried to make a

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difference between the concrete product and its quality. In the next step, abstract product concept has emerged by service delivery and support of products with services. By enterprises making difference, they are revealing a notion which is unforgettable and constantly kept in mind has become possible with transition into experience economy (Günay, 2008 : 65). Therefore, marketing theorists and practitioners embark on quest to create customer loyalty with the help of unique and entertaining experiences in experience economy. In this context, the strategies of marketing world has changed and improved so as to enhance customer experience rather than selling product and service. While Pine and Gilmore (1999) call this transition period as “experience economy”, O’Sullivan (1999) use the term “experience industry” and Jensen (1999) call it “dream society” (Akyıldız, 2010:26). Experience economy concept was at first used in Alvin Toffler’s book “Future shock” in 1970 (Weihua, 2008 : 1232). Experience economy is a notion which has emerged as a result of people’s identity and commitment seek in society increasingly getting wealth (Lorentzen, 2009 : 830). According to Weihua (2008: 1233), the characteristics of experience economy are referred as entertainment, interaction, nihilism (nihility), spirituality.

Experiential marketing conception contains the applications oriented for increasing marketing share within customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. For this reason, it is possible for companies to continue their existence by showing an over value contact. Besides these developments, economic value obtained from products and services has given way to economic value obtained from experiences due to the rapid change in technology, branding attempts and communication channels of marketing variation.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Experiential Marketing

Experiential marketing conception considers consumers not only as the buyers who want to meet their needs and benefit from them but also as humans being rational and sensible who want to try different things and experience pleasure (Schmitt, 1999:53)

Experience is the core element of experiential marketing. It aimed to create different stimulus such as special areas, atmosphere and new settings. By this way the consumers are expected to respond to these stimuli, show active buying behavior and gain experience and get different feelings like pleasure, entertainment (Akyıldız, 2010:22). At this point, experiencing environment is also important for product/service itself, company that presents product/service, benefit provided by product/service and brand name of product/service in experiential marketing (Altunışık, Özdemir and Torlak, 2006:167). Experiential marketing causes consumers to be get involved into process beginning from product development because modern consumers are aiming to brand while making purchases. For example, Adidas lets his customers to design their products themselves on web site and Levi’s also lets his costumers to choose specifications of jeans that they want to buy (Yeygel, 2010:7).

Experiential marketing has some different characteristics that differ it from other marketing thoughts. Experiential marketing is separated from traditional marketing not only with product categories and rivalry, it is also separated by consumers characteristics and investigation methods (Yuan and Wu, 2008:390)

According to these instructions, experiential marketing isn’t against to traditional marketing, contrary it has been thought in an integrated thought with traditional marketing (Holdbrook and Hirschman, 1982; Schmitt, 1999). Experiential marketing is also focused on consumption as a holistic experience. There has been an opinion that consumer experience will gain social interaction and this interaction will gain socialising, entertainment and value to the consumers. Virgin Airlines try to make an interaction to make flights more entertaining by serving music, food, fun and vacation together (Akyıldız, 2010:23). Herein, the enterprises shouldn’t let consumers evaluate that they are only inserting fun to existing facts, they actually do that to take attractions of consumers (Pine and Gilmore, 1999:41).

Experiential marketers are trying to find out which product is suitable for which consumption situation while considering about contentment and order. And also, not with only product, their target is to maximize experience before consumption with the help of packaging and advirtesement (Schmitt, 1999:58). Knowledge about socio-cultural structure will help marketer to create and use a thema in advirtesements while designing of a wholistic experience. For example, Nescafé ads are generally in a scene that represents friends drinking coffee together, here the aim is urging the consumption (Argan, 2007:79).

Experiential marketing offers necessary and sufficient information to consumers for purchasing decision and also offers deep tangible experiences (Williams, 2006:485). But, consumers are also emotional as much as they are

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