Social involvement and consumption motivation: Co-creation of magic in the servicescape

Lisa McNeill *, Damien Mather

Department of Marketing, University of Otago, PO Box 56 Dunedin 9013, New Zealand

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

In service experiences, customers often look to create their own magic in the service environment, through interaction with other customers, not the producer of the experience (the provider) at all. The current study examines the bar environment, where hedonically-driven service encounter experiences are constructed, not by the provider, but by the social interactions of the consumers of the environment. The study surveys 130 consumers, measuring experiential, situational and social involvement levels in relation to consumption motivation and overall experience evaluation. The research finds that, while bar consumers are likely to be highly socially involved, they still need the company of close friends to become fully involved in the bar service experience. In addition, where atmospheric theory discusses the value of extraordinary or surprising service environments, consumers in the already hedonic bar environment may indeed prefer environments which are simply comfortable and consistent with their expectations (in regard to motivations to consume and overall positive evaluations).

© 2016 Australian and New Zealand Marketing Academy. Published by Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

CHINESE ABSTRACT

在服务体验中，客户通常通过与其他客户（而非体验的提供方（提供方））的互动，在服务环境中创造属于自己的奇迹。目前的研究探讨了酒吧的环境。在这里，敬业驱动的服务接触体验不是由提供方构建，而是由环境消费者的社会交互而构建。这项研究调查了 130 名消费者，衡量与消费动机和总体体验评估相关的经验、情境和社会参与水平。研究发现，尽管酒吧消费者很可能会充分参与社交活动，但他们仍然需要亲密朋友的陪伴来充分感受酒吧服务体验。此外，在氛围理论讨论非凡或绝佳服务环境的价值的情况下，已经享受酒吧环境的消费者可能确实喜欢简单舒适且符合其预期（关于消费动机和整体正面评价）的环境。

© 2016 Australian and New Zealand Marketing Academy. Published by Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Much of the 'magic' of marketing in the current century is in the producer accepting that customers are no longer "prepared to accept experiences fabricated by companies" (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2000, p. 86). Within a market place, or servicescape, exchanges are mixed; consumers are filling not only their basic utilitarian needs from the environment, but also psychological and social needs (Bagozzi, 1975). The presence of other customers adds a social dimension to the service encounter where consumers are looking to fulfil a social need separate to their utilitarian needs (Rosenbaum and Massiah, 2011; Rosenbaum and Montoya, 2007). In a setting where utilitarian needs are limited or not existent at all, such as the bar environment, where few consumers would claim to 'need' to drink the alcohol products on offer, the desire for positive and enhanced social interaction becomes primary, with motivation towards consumption an ancillary impact of this drive (Grayson and McNeill, 2009). In these environments, customers increasingly want to shape experiences themselves, both individually and with other customers (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2000) – effectively making their own magic in the experience by accepting or rejecting provider offerings as tools in the co-creation process.

2. Literature review

One of the primary products of a service is the environment and atmosphere which exists within (Bitner, 1992; Tombs and McColl-Kennedy, 2003). The atmosphere is made up of many aspects, not limited to the physical environment choices of the service producer, but also the expectations of the service and environment as proposed by branding and marketing prior to the experience. However, without engaged input of consumers, the key 'actors' in the consumption experience, atmospheric value potential is severely limited. In this way, the 'magic' of any service experience lies with the engagement of the customer as a part of the creation process. In a

---

* Corresponding author. Fax: +644798162.
  E-mail address: lisa.mcneill@otago.ac.nz (L. McNeill).

hedonically driven service environment, where the atmosphere is heavily affected by the influence of the uncontrollable (customer) element within it (Grayson and McNeill, 2009; Grove and Fisk, 1997), the industry relies on those who partake in a service to create the 'magic' in it, not only for themselves, but for all those within the environment (including the service provider, in a bidirectional fashion). For many customers in a bar environment the social aspect is the primary driver for their participation; be it with close friends or to meet new people. The co-creation and co-production of the value involved in this social interaction thus comes primarily from the interaction which takes place consumer to consumer, with the ability of the producer-driven marketing elements of an environment to facilitate this social interaction often secondary in the phenomenon of the experience.

Co-creation is a term often used interchangeably with co-production, with the consumer viewed as a partner in the act of service delivery (Baumer et al., 2011; Cairns, 2013). Vargo and Lusch (2004) however, make a distinct link between the term co-creation and the concept of value, indicating the precise nature of co-creation as intrinsically bound to the consumer perception of value in the service environment. Traditional co-creation of value literature stems from the service dominant schools of thought and one of the key principles which service dominant logic proposes is that the customer is always a co-creator of value, there is no value until an offering is used, that experience and perception are essential in the determination of value (Vargo and Lusch, 2004). In services literature, the study of co-production is often limited to the study of processes rather than outcomes (Voorberg et al., 2015). The study of co-creation thus offers the opportunity to understand the ways in which customers actually extract value from their offerings – which may not be the way they had anticipated in the design of these offers in the first place (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2000). This realisation, that "the product is subordinate to the experience" and that it is, indeed, the customer who often creates the magic in the service experience, will force organisations to take a second look at the role of the consumer in the service industry (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2000, p. 90).

The complex interplay of ambient, physical, marketing and social elements in the bar environment means that each consumer may interpret or perceive not only these elements differently, but also the entire bar atmosphere, effecting whether their needs and desires (both conscious and subconscious) are met. However, unlike that of traditional retail or service settings, the bar environment's complex servicescape is one which is primarily driven by consumer-to-consumer social interaction. This unique setting has been given little academic attention, with the majority of attention in recent decades given to the study of effects of atmospheric conditions *on* consumers in retail environments, such as shopping malls or service environments such as restaurants and hospitals. There is a distinct paucity of research examining the impact of consumer social tendencies towards consumption in the bar environment, and overall evaluation of the experience.

2.1. Social involvement

The intricacies of the bar environment mean that the concept of purchase may be completely removed from the consumers motives for entering a bar (i.e. one could effectively participate in the environment, making no purchases at all). Bars could be said to service a social desire to feel connectivity with others, communality and social interaction; the bar is merely a support link to the primary goal of this interaction for consumers (Cova, 1997; Goodwin, 1994). Thus, due to the intangible nature of the actual 'product' offering of bars (social interaction) and the wide ranging motivations for patronage and consumption (or, indeed, non-consumption), examination of social involvement of the customer, linked to personality, may explain not only consumption motivations in non-utilitarian service encoun-

ters, as well as the likelihood of overall positive evaluations of the service environment (and thus ongoing custom or word-of-mouth benefits). Consumer socialisation literature supports the notion that peers are fundamental to the development of attitudes regarding products and services (Mukhopadhyay and Yeung, 2010; Wang et al., 2012). The level of peer-to-peer communication about a consumption behaviour (in an agent–learner fashion) influences the likelihood of positive associations towards that behaviour (De Gregorio and Sung, 2010), suggesting that, in socially mediated consumption environments, peer interactions are a necessary part of the creation of enjoyment of the experience. Wilkes (1992) found that self-confidence of the consumer has a strong, positive impact on social involvement, and evidences a scale measuring the degree to which a person reports enjoyment of community and proximity to others as indicative of social involvement, beyond lifestyle and demographic factors. If this is linked to consumption motivations, one can posit that individuals with higher social involvement scores are more likely to spend longer in a community or social environment, increasing exposure to consumption opportunities, thus:

H1. *Social involvement of the consumer can be positively correlated to consumption motivation in the service environment.*

2.2. Consumption motivation in the service environment

The service experience is generally defined as production, delivery and creation of value (Ostrom et al., 2010), but there is little agreement in the literature as to how customer motivations towards consumption are formed (Dong and Siu, 2013; Ostrom et al., 2010; Verhoef et al., 2009). It is suggested in recent literature, however, that the focal point should move from the construction of the service components, to the role of the service in the social life of the consumer, as an understanding of customer value formation is centred in an understanding of them as an actor in a dynamic social community (Heinonen et al., 2013). Aaker (1997) noted that the 'humanistic' personality of a brand served as symbolic or self-expressive in relation to an individual's consumption, removed from the utilitarian function of the consumption act. This assertion highlights again the importance of an individual's assessment of a service brand in relation to consumption motivation. In this sense, the overall positivity of the attitude of the individual towards the service brand personality, rather than their in-situ response to the environment, may be more important in understanding a hedonic experience, hence:

H2. *Customer assessment of service brand personality will impact consumption motivation in the service environment.*

2.3. Service environment evaluations

Service theory notes that, beyond the interactions between provider and patron, the service encounter is characterised by the merging of multiple actors (customers) within the experience (e.g. Grove and Fisk, 1997). The danger in the construction of a servicescape is thus in focusing too much on physical or ambient elements of the environment, without consideration of the predisposition of the customer towards the experience (Dong and Siu, 2013). Stayman and Batra (1991) measured the pleasure related aspects of a consumer's attitude towards a brand, and found that affective assessment was positively associated with higher overall hedonic attitudes. Further, Dawson, Bloch & Ridgway (19900 explored the connection between pleasure and consumption motives, finding that when an individual enters into an experience with existing positive emotion, this leads to higher overall positivity towards the experience outcome, hence:

H3. *Positive assessment of the service brand can be positively correlated to overall hedonic evaluation of the service environment.*