Managing Experiential Marketing: Insight From a Prototypical Experience

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At the heart of experiential marketing is creating an exhilarating experience or performance around a brand that will result in positive emotional energy, which will then manifest itself in future consumption. Companies are investing big dollars in experiential marketing endeavors. Limited research has explored and explained what actually occurs in the experiential consumption context. The purpose of this paper is to provide some theoretical support for the phenomena using Randall Collins’ Interaction Ritual Theory as an orienting framework (1975, 1981, 1990, 2004). The paper will also present an ethnographic analysis of a prototypical interaction ritual—a live music performance. The specific purpose of this approach was to glean information from an ideal experiential context that can be applied to experiential marketing phenomena.

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Roese 2003), no study to date has examined the moderating influence of individual differences in time orientation on regulatory focus. Hypotheses were tested using a 2 (regulatory focus: promotion versus prevention) x 2 (temporal frame: proximal versus distal) x 2 (CFC: low versus high) between-subjects experiment. Temporal frame was manipulated by altering the time period in which consumers of high-fat fast food meals may suffer adverse health effects as a result of consuming the food. Regulatory focus was manipulated through evoking a promotion or prevention focus through framing of the message. After exposure to the mock public service ad, 119 participants responded to dependent measures and the CFC measure.

Findings show a significant univariate temporal framing effect on the probability estimate \( F(2,90, p<.05) \). Consistent with Study 1 findings, the more proximal temporal framing of the risk message resulted in higher probability estimates than the distal temporal framing. Also consistent with Study 1, CFC was found to moderate the temporal framing effects. Contrasts indicate that low-CFC individuals reported somewhat higher probability estimates \( (M=58.48 \text{ versus } 49.37; t=1.40, p<.10) \) when the risk was framed in proximal rather than distal terms. High-CFC individuals reported similar probability estimates for the proximal and distal frame conditions \( (p>.30) \). As in Study 1, similar results were found for the risk likelihood variable.

A regulatory focus by CFC interaction was found for perceived effectiveness of the message and attitude toward the message \( F(1,90, p<.05) \). Consistent with predictions, low-CFC individuals evaluated the promotion framed message more positively \( (M=5.26 \text{ versus } 4.71) \) and perceived it as more effective \( (M=4.87 \text{ versus } 4.35) \) than prevention-framed message. In contrast, high-CFC individuals evaluated the prevention framed message more favorably \( (M=5.54 \text{ versus } 4.75) \) and more effective \( (M=4.54 \text{ versus } 4.22) \) than promotion framed message.

Findings from Study 2 show consistent effects of temporal framing in this health-risk domain and demonstrate that CFC can moderate these effects for risk-related variables. Findings also show that CFC can moderate regulatory focus for attitude and perceived effectiveness variables. High-CFC individuals evaluated promotion-framed messages more positively and as more effective; low-CFCs evaluated promotion-framed messages more positively and as more effective.

**Brief Discussion**

Consideration of future consequences has not yet been directly studied in a marketing context, nor has the potential interaction of this variable with temporal framing on risk variables been addressed. Findings from our preliminary studies offer evidence that CFC may be an important moderator of both temporal frame and regulatory focus. While Chandran and Menon’s (2004) ground-breaking work addresses important moderators of temporal framing, our results extend their findings by demonstrating another important variable (CFC) can moderate temporal framing effects. This research also contributes to the small amount of literature examining the relationship between time and regulatory focus. The findings also have potential practical implications the important areas of public policy and health marketing (Aaker and Lee 2006).

**References**


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**Extended Abstract**

One of the greatest assets that a company or individual can have is a strong brand identity. The leading brands of the world all enjoy one thing—a strong emotional connection with consumers. Recently, experiential marketing has gained momentum among marketers as a means of communicating a brand’s personality and values (Live Brand Experience Association 2005). Conceptually, experiential marketing attempts to engage consumers in memorable ways by “staging experiences” around products and services, in hopes of invoking positive emotional energy around a brand.

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2This manipulation is consistent with past studies that manipulate regulatory focus by framing outcome contingencies in terms of gains or loses (e.g., Higgins 2002; Lee and Aaker 2004, Pennington, Aaker, and Mogilner).
Experiential marketing can encompass everything from “live” product sampling to product demos. In 2004, companies spent 17.6 billion on in-store advertising and this number is expected to continue to rise (Nelson and Ellison 2005).

Limited research has explored and explained what actually occurs when experiential marketing is successful. The purpose of this paper is to provide theoretical explanation for the phenomena using Randall Collins’ Interaction Ritual Theory (1975, 1981, 1990, 2004). The paper will also present an ethnographic analysis of a prototypical interaction ritual—a live music performance. The specific purpose of this approach is to glean information from an ideal experiential context that can be applied to the management of experiential marketing phenomena.

**Interaction Ritual Theory**

An interaction ritual, according to Collins, is an emotional transformer, taking some emotions as ingredients, and turning them into other emotions as outcomes. There are four elements or ingredients that go into producing an Interaction Ritual: (1) co-presence of individuals (2) ecological barriers (3) common focus of attention (4) and common emotional mood among present individuals.

The outcomes of the Interaction Ritual are (1) symbols marking the social relationship, which can include objects, persons, gestures, words, and ideas (2) a sense of moral righteousness about symbols marking group membership (3) group solidarity (4) and enhanced emotional energy. Interaction Ritual Theory is a useful tool in explaining a live music performance since all the ingredients of an Interaction Ritual are present.

**Enhancing the Experiential Marketing Experience**

Ethnographic fieldwork was conducted in a local dueling piano bar, called Charley’s, in a medium-sized city in the southern part of the United States during the course of two months. Participatory observation and ethnographic interviews were conducted. Findings from field notes are discussed in terms of four major themes extrapolated from Collins’ Interaction Ritual Theory: (1) ecological barriers (2) emotional transformers (3) symbols and (4) emotional energy.

**Ecological Barriers**

According to Collins, a primary component of an Interaction Ritual is the creation of physical barriers to outsiders. The more effective boundaries are in separating people from external stimuli, the greater the likelihood that an emotionally rousing, successful interaction will occur. Charley’s was a quaint, charming venue. Every element of the club set its patrons up for an experience. Its décor, including the abstract paintings and the pencil sketching of musicians all helped to create and welcome an atmosphere for music and fun. Companies are aware that creating an environment that appeals to the senses is paramount in creating an experience for the consumer. Examples of retailers that successfully stimulate the senses by creating effective ecological barriers include Apple computers, Victoria Secrets Auntie Anne’s, and Bath and Body Works.

**Transforming the Emotions: Focusing Attention and Creating Shared Mood**

Interaction Rituals have the ability to transform negative emotions into positive emotions (Collins 2004). When individuals are gathered together and separated from the surrounding environment, a mutual focus of attention and common awareness can set the stage for a shared mood among the group. Moods are transitory and may ebb and flow, but creating shared mood can be facilitated by rhythmically synchronizing the group. The musicians at Charley’s were able to skillfully manage the emotions of the audience by allowing interaction among individuals at tables, but then periodically calling their attention back to the stage by getting the group to engage in an activity, whether it be clapping in unison or singing along.

Based on the values and interests of the target group for an experiential marketing endeavor, activities can be planned which stimulate interaction among consumers and get them to share in carrying out the same activities. This can include involving them in a recreational activity, enjoying a live music performance or eating and drinking.

**Symbols**

In Collins’ Interaction Ritual Theory, symbols become the focus of attention of emotionally entrained crowds. These symbols can be objects, ideas and theme, or people and are imbued with emotional overtones. Audience members at Charley’s engaged in a chant that had become the Charley’s rallying cry and theme. Even though there were expletives and offensive language in the chant, both men and women, young and oldheartily participated in shouting out the chant at their top of their lungs along with the musicians on stage.

Collins’ symbols are not unlike brands. The most popular brands of the world have a strong emotional connection with consumers. Experiential marketing endeavors should be designed in such a way that the brand’s image (ie. logo) is always visible or present. At Charley’s an important artifact that became a symbol were the red mugs that patrons brought to the club on Thursday nights. Although very utilitarian, these mugs were imbued with meaning.

Placing the brand on other objects (in the form of promotional giveaways) that may be of both utilitarian and hedonic benefit for the consumer might help to create additional symbolic representations of the brand. Having the brand on these objects (although not necessary the actually product itself) can help to keep the brand at the “top of the mind” of consumers.

**Emotional Energy: Becoming a Link in the Consumption Chain**

Transient emotions such as joy help to fuel Interaction Rituals. In interaction Ritual Theory, these emotions intensify into shared excitement and culminate into a collective effervescence. The high, positive emotional energy generated from each encounter at Charley’s helped to facilitate and fuel subsequent visits. Patrons became “regulars” and Charley’s became part of their consumption chain.

Applying Collins’ theory in an experiential marketing context, if a marketing event is successful, the identity of the brand has been enhanced in the minds of consumers. This positive affect toward the brand, product, or even company should help to spawn future consumption of the brand or product.

As future consumption begins to take place and consumers develop strong emotional ties to a brand or product, they may start to feel a sense of belonging to the community of consumers that also share strong loyalty for the product. Consumers may become so enamored with the product that they are encouraged to participate in brand communities. Subsequently, by focusing on the ingredients that go into an interaction ritual, marketers can create successful experiential marketing experiences.
Extended Abstract

Many consumer decisions involve comparing the emotional intensity of alternatives that occur at different points in time. Is a currently sampled movie preview more or less enjoyable than the last movie previewed? Is the present culinary sample more or less delicious that the last sample? Is the song just sampled in iTunes more or less enjoyable than the last song sampled? Such judgments of emotions over time have the potential to influence consumer attitudes, involvement, and choices.

Our past research finds that people tend to exhibit an “immediacy bias,” judging immediate emotions as more intense, all else equal, than temporally or socially distant emotions (Van Boven, White, and Huber 2006; Van Boven, White, Johnson-Graham, and Kruger 2006). For example, people perceive a recently viewed (i.e., more immediate) movie clip as creating more intense emotions than a movie clip that was viewed in the past (regardless of the order in which the two clips are shown). This immediacy bias appears to be quite robust and can emerge across various emotions such as fear, amusement, and sadness. In the current research, we suggest that the immediacy bias should have important implications for consumer attitudes, involvement, and choices when consumers sequentially sample different alternatives. In particular, we propose that a positive consumption experience that is immediately experienced is more likely to lead to positive attitudes, greater consumer involvement, and product choice than a consumption experience that is not immediately experienced.

In study 1 we provide a preliminary test of the predictions that consumers will experience more positive emotions, have more positive attitudes, and report greater involvement towards an immediately experienced alternative rather than an alternative that was experienced in the past. Fifty-nine participants were asked to watch and evaluate a short film by BMW (Ticker, 2002). One half of participants evaluated the film immediately after viewing it (immediate condition) and one half of participants evaluated the movie after a half hour delay (past condition). Participants were asked to report the intensity of their emotions, their attitudes towards the film, their involvement with the film, and whether they would be inclined to repeat the consumption experience. As predicted, participants rated their feelings while watching the film as more intense ($t(56)=2.05, p<.05$), indicated their attitudes were more positive ($t(56)=2.10, p<.05$), and reported a greater degree of involvement ($t(56)=3.48, p<.01$) when the consumption experience was immediate rather than in the past. Finally, those in the immediate condition reported being somewhat more interested in repeating the consumption experience again than did those in the past condition ($t(56)=1.93, p<.06$).

In study 2 we tested the same predictions as in study 1, but also wanted more explicitly to test our prediction regarding consumer choice—that consumers would be more likely to choose an immediate option as opposed to a past option. Sixty-nine participants viewed two video clips of stand up comedians (i.e., Tim Allen and Robin Williams), each approximately four minutes long. The order in which the two film clips were shown was counterbalanced and the viewing of the film clips was separated by a 50 minute time delay. Thus, half of the time the Tim Allen clip was the immediate option (and Robin Williams the past option), whereas half of the time Robin Williams was the immediate option (and Tim Allen the past option). After participants viewed the first film they were asked to report their attitudes towards the first film. Immediately after viewing the second film, participants were asked to report the intensity of emotions in response to each film, their attitudes towards each film, their involvement with each film, and which comedy routine they would like to view in its entirety (i.e., our measure of consumer choice). Repeated measures ANOVAs, including film 1 and film 2 ratings as the repeated measure and order as a factor, revealed that participants reported more intense emotional reactions ($F(1, 67)=4.85, p<.03$), more positive attitudes ($F(1, 67)=4.10, p<.05$), higher involvement ($F(1, 67)=4.08, p<.05$), and a greater inclination to actually watch the entire comedy routine ($F(1, 67)=7.73, p<.01$), when the film was immediate rather than distant. Participants also misremembered their emotional reactions to the first film as less intensely positive after viewing the second film. Finally, the immediacy bias meant that participants were more likely to “mischose”—that is, choosing to view the film they actually enjoyed less—when they chose the second rather than the first film.

The results of the current studies demonstrate that the immediacy bias does indeed have implications for consumer attitudes and choices. That is, compared to the distant option, the more immediate option led to greater perceptions of emotional intensity, more positive attitudes, higher involvement, and consumer choice. The results of our research have implications for both consumers and marketers. For consumers, it is valuable to be aware of this bias and to be cautious regarding choosing immediate options (i.e., Do I really want a cheeseburger more than chicken teriyaki, or is just because I can currently smell the cheeseburger?). In addition, because consumers show a preference for more immediate alternatives, marketers should invite consumers to make choices while they are currently experiencing or sampling the key product option.

The Second Wind Phenomenon: Recovery from Cognitive Fatigue with Sensory Arousal

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Extended Abstract

Historically, researchers studying cognitive overload have examined the effects of decision making such as suboptimal choice and choice deferral. However, research is just beginning to focus on how consumers recover from overload in order to try to maintain optimal decision making ability (Brice & Smith, 2001 and van Duinen, Lorist, & Zijdewind, 2005). Brice and Smith (2001) administered caffeine to participants in a one-hour simulated driving task and found that steering accuracy was improved. Van Duinen et al. (2005) explored...