A Motivational Framework For Self-Directed Hedonic Consumption

Monica C. LaBarge, University of Oregon
Peter A. Dacin, Queen's University

EXTENDED ABSTRACT - Marketing researchers view both play and adventure as forms of self-directed hedonic consumption (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982) and investigate the various motives for certain types of this consumption, especially when it is voluntary and high-risk (Celsi et al. 1993, Shoham et al. 2000, Ewert and Hollenhorst 1989, Arnould and Price 1993). In everyday play and adventure, however, most consumers do not assume this level of risk taking yet we know considerably less about the motives for less-risky and non-risky forms of hedonic consumption. To our knowledge, there is little research in the marketing literature that examines motivations for non-risky, habitually-practiced hedonic activities (i.e. hobbies), such as training for triathlons or marathons, yet these are among the fastest growing leisure activities in North America, increasing rapidly in participation year after year (Woodrow 2000).

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A Motivational Framework for Self-Directed Hedonic Consumption

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Marketing researchers view both play and adventure as forms of self-directed hedonic consumption (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982) and investigate the various motives for certain types of this consumption, especially when it is voluntary and high-risk (Celsi et al. 1993, Shoham et al. 2000, Ewert and Hollenhorst 1989, Arnould and Price 1993). In everyday play and adventure, however, most consumers do not assume this level of risk taking yet we know considerably less about the motives for less-risky and non-risky forms of hedonic consumption. To our knowledge, there is little research in the marketing literature that examines motivations for non-risky, habitually-practiced hedonic activities (i.e. hobbies), such as training for triathlons or marathons, yet these are among the fastest growing leisure activities in North America, increasing rapidly in participation year after year (Woodrow 2000).

The objective of this paper was to address this gap in our understanding of the motives driving participation in these non-risky, habitually-practiced hedonic activities by developing a framework for better insight into the complex hedonic consumption motivations behind participation. We developed this framework by integrating and extending existing research in marketing, sports psychology and leisure studies. We then discussed several expectations for this framework and provided an initial, exploratory application of it in the context of a low-risk activity. We concluded by discussing the results of this study, providing general recommendations and directions for future research.

Celsi et al.’s (1993) framework has served as a fundamental starting point for marketing researchers interested in consumers’ participation in risky hedonic consumption (Arnould and Price 1993, Dodson 1996, Shoham, Rose and Kahle 1998, 2000). A common element in this extended research is the repeated identification of the three general categories of motives: Self-Efficacy, Normative and Hedonic. The validity of these three categories finds support in Arnould and Price (1993), Shoham, Rose and Kahle (2000) and Hopkinson and Pujari (1999). More interestingly, several studies in the fields of sports psychology and leisure studies, while not specifically referring to these three categories of motives, present results that can be interpreted as supporting the existence of similar categories of motives in less risky hedonic consumption contexts (Brannigan and McDougall 1983, Ewert and Hollenhorst 1989, Gill et al 1996, Ogles, Masters and Richardson 1995). While research in the marketing, leisure studies and sports psychology fields appear to independently arrive at similar findings, there is no existing research that integrates the fields with respect to commonalities that exist between risky and non-risky activities.

To fill this gap, we proposed a general framework of motivations for participation in habitually-practiced, self-directed hedonic consumption. While largely based on Celsi et al.’s (1993) framework, we made several important adaptations, with the primary goal of bringing the model out of the specific context of risky activities into a more a general application which would be of interest to a broader group of marketers. We maintained the same structure proposed by Celsi et al., with three categories of motivation: Self-Efficacy, Normative, and Hedonic. The pattern of movement along the continua of motivations also remained the same as in the Celsi et al. model; people move between stages depending on the level of two moderating factors. However, two necessary changes in expanding the model beyond risky activities were: 1) to reconsider the dimension of “Acculturation of Risk” and replace it with “Desire for Challenge” and 2) to replace Celsi et al.’s label of “Survival” with that of “Completion.” We discussed the rationale for these suggested changes, the assumptions of the resulting framework, and developed some expectations based on its application in a non-risky context.

We investigated a preliminary application of the proposed framework through a convenience sample, where participation in an Internet-administered self-report survey was solicited from various local groups of adult runners, triathletes and swimmers. All respondents participated, to different degrees, in these habitually practiced activities and received no compensation (i.e., sponsorship, scholarships, etc.) for their participation. We constructed a survey measuring our theoretical constructs based on a combination of sources, including Ewert and Hollenhorst (1989), Shoham et al. (2000), Arnould and Price (1993), Masters et al. (1992), and Dodson (1996). Based on comments received in the pretest and our psychometric analysis of the scales, we made several revisions to arrive at our final survey. In the final survey, one set of questions gathered information about each respondent’s level of participation and their individual level of Desire for Challenge; another set of questions addressed each of the three categories of motivations (Self-Efficacy, Normative, and Hedonic); and a final set of questions collected various demographic data on the respondent.

The results of our analyses suggested, as expected, that there are changes in the characterization of motives as Desire for Challenge and Experience (the two dimensions of the model) change. Additionally, we found that it is important to measure experience both as a function of total experience (measured in years) and frequency of participation (measured in hours a week) in order to get at both the internal and external motives for participation. Finally, we determined that it is highly likely that the relationships between the constructs are not linear, which suggests a need for further investigation and more sophisticated modeling techniques in order to determine the exact pattern of changes.

In the final section, we discussed several limitations of our study and suggested directions for future research. We concluded with a discussion of managerial implications, including the potential to use the measures of Desire for Challenge and Experience to predict motivations of participants in non-risky activities, implying an enhanced ability to profile and target consumers of these activities.

Cited References


