The present study investigates the effects of experienced-based marketing communication tools such as theme stores and experience events (e.g., M&M’s world) on consumer responses. It is hypothesized and found that a visit to a theme store or co-creating a product online enhances brand attitudes and brand relations (compared to a control condition). Furthermore, the results revealed that these observed effects were stronger for consumers with dispositional high (versus low) affective orientation. This study shows promising results for the growing field of experience-based marketing communication.

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the consumers we investigate have undergone gastric bypass surgery which allows them to literally as well as figuratively transform themselves from an obese person into a much smaller.

For instance, Peter was, at one time, over three hundred pounds. For most of his life, he had tried, desperately at times, to lose weight using a variety of more traditional means such as dieting and exercise. Furthermore, he had often looked to the marketplace for help, engaging the services of Weight Watchers, doctor-regimented diet plans, and even so-called “diet camps.” As failure after failure mounted, Peter became more and more desperate to lose weight. Finally, after much deliberation, he decided to have gastric bypass surgery. Now, a little over a year after the surgery, Peter is over a hundred pounds lighter with more pounds expected to be shed in the coming months. For him, the experience of losing “a whole other person” has been a transformation along the lines of “becoming someone else.”

This transformation takes literal form in the shrinking body as well as in his relationships with the world around him. For instance, he has had to relearn how to navigate the world. In his previous life, he had to “squeeze into desk chairs at school or on airplanes in order to fit into a world made for skinny people.” Now, he can fit comfortably into desk chairs and no longer feels out of place when he sits them, but he still moves down the airplane aisle in a sideways fashion instead of walking with his body facing straight ahead even though he can do so without bumping passengers that are already seated. Furthermore, he has had to undergo a mental transformation as well, moving from a person who had difficulties with the self-discipline required to maintain various weight-loss programs, to an individual who absolutely needs to maintain self-discipline in order to live. “I slipped one time,” he says, “and had too much Gatorade with all that sugar and I was sick for almost a week. I simply can’t take in anything like I used to, and I have to be really careful.”

Through Peter’s story and the narratives of other individuals who have undergone gastric bypass surgery, we find that consumers who transform themselves do so in a pattern that appears to follow the hero’s journey as developed by Joseph Campbell (1968). The hero’s journey is a mythic structure inherent within the literature and mythologies of many, if not all, cultures where the hero “ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder” where “fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory won,” and then the hero returns to face a new status quo where he (or she) “bestow boons on his fellow man” (Campbell 1968, 30). The three stages of the journey that Campbell identifies are departure, initiation, and return.

Peter’s story follows this same series of stages. The separation stage begins with Peter’s navigation of the ordinary world of his obesity and ends with his entrance into “the belly of the whale” or the actual surgery itself. His Initiation stage involves the trials and victories that start upon waking up from the surgery and ends with the hero “seizing the sword” (Vogler 1992). In this moment, the hero essentially casts aside the remnants of the old self and takes firm possession of the new self. The return involves the reintegration of the hero into the ordinary world where, in Peter’s case, he not only learns to navigate a “new” world in a “new” body, but with a renewed sense of self. Furthermore, he then has the opportunity to provide guidance to others who are seeking to transform themselves.

Our research follows in the tradition of bringing mythological structure to the various activities that consumers engage in. Levy (1981) determined that consumer interviews can be read as mythological narratives much as one might read fairy tales, fables, and other tales. Stern (1995) used Frye’s taxonomy in an effort to better understand the various myths contained within both consumer narratives and advertisements dealing with Thanksgiving rituals. Holt and Thompson (2004) examine the various “heroic” myths related to masculinity within Western culture, finding that, in recent years, the “man-of-action” myth has risen as the celebrated cultural model of masculinity. Additional research from the psychology literature has used the hero’s journey as a framework for understanding in counseling situations (Lawson 2005) and even spiritual development (Feinstein 1997).

Our research intends to define a framework for understanding consumer transformations that take place in the market. We believe that such a framework will be useful for marketers seeking to understand such transformations as well as though attempting to support those transformations. Ultimately, we believe that the framework that we develop will also move beyond the case presented here and extend into such contexts as helping individuals escape various addictions; deal with the loss of health, property, or loved ones; or even to achieve new states of spirituality, consciousness, or awareness. As such, we believe that our research will contribute to the field of transformative consumer research in addition to our understanding of basic consumer research.

**Selected References**


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**The Effects of Experience-Based Marketing Communication on Brand Relations and Hedonic Brand Attitudes: The Moderating Role of Affective Orientation**

Marieke Fransen, University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands

Paulien Lodder, University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands

**Introduction**

Events such as the “Nike run London”, and theme stores such as “M&M’s World” and the “New World of Coca Cola” (i.e., experience-based marketing communications) are a growing phenomenon in the area of marketing communication. The emergence of this...
new form of marketing communication appears to be due to several reasons. First, the overuse of traditional media seems to call for a different strategy to be able to stand out from competitors (e.g., Smit and Neijens 1999). Second, as a result of today’s global marketplace where many companies are competing for the same often limited market share, it has become difficult to compete and differentiate on mere product or brand characteristics. Third, consumers are more and more looking for marketing communications that are relevant for them as an individual and recognizes their need for novelty and excitement (Schmitt 1999). Fourth, consumers’ growing need for the experiential aspects of consumption (Holbrook 2000; Holbrook and Hirschman 1981) resulting in less rational decision making strategies, calls for a different marketing communication approach.

Despite the continuous attention of marketers to experience-based marketing communication, surprisingly little empirical attention has been paid to this phenomenon. One reason for this could be that there is not one clear term or definition available in the literature. Terms that are proposed include “experiential marketing” (Schmitt 1999), “event marketing” (Wood and Masterman 2008), and “experience marketing” (Pine and Gilmore 1998). Unfortunately, these terms are used interchangeably but do not always apply the same definition. However, there seems to be consensus on several components. First, experience-based marketing communication is initialized by the company. Hence, the event, experience, or theme store is staged by a company distinguishing it from, for example, “event sponsoring” (e.g., Cornwell and Maignan 1998). Moreover, the experience of the consumer, rather than the marketing message (as in traditional forms of marketing communication), is of focal attention in experience-based marketing communication strategies. Finally, it is generally assumed, but not empirically tested, that experience-based marketing communication enhances brand attitudes and brand relations.

The aim of the present research is to empirically examine the effects of experience-based marketing communication tools on consumer responses. It is hypothesized that a visit to a theme store (i.e., “Heineken the City”) or an online co-creation task (designing a label for a Heineken beer bottle) can have a positive influence on brand attitude and brand relation (compared to a control condition). Furthermore, based on the assumption that experience-based marketing tools tap into consumers’ emotions (rather than cognitions), it is expected that the effects of experience-based marketing tools on consumer responses is stronger for people with dispositional high (versus low) affective orientation (Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield 1990).

**Method**

We used a 3 (experience: visit to Heineken the city vs. designing a label for Heineken beer bottle vs. control) x 2 (affective orientation: high vs. low) between subjects design to test our hypotheses. Consumers (N=101) were randomly assigned to one of the experience conditions. Based on a median split, participants were classified as high or low in affective orientation. One week after visiting the theme store “Heineken the city” or performing the online design task participants received a questionnaire measuring consumer brand attitudes (Voss, Spangenberg, and Grohmann 2003) and brand relation (e.g., Chang and Chieng 2006). Note that participants in the control condition only received this latter questionnaire and were not exposed to any form of marketing communication.

**Results and Discussion**

A full factorial ANOVA revealed a main effect of experience demonstrating that participants who visited the theme store or designed a label online had a more positive attitude towards the brand (Heineken) and had a stronger brand relation than participants in the control condition. No differences were observed between the two different experience conditions. Moreover, we observed the expected interaction effect between experience and affective orientation showing that particularly participants with high dispositional affective orientation (compared with participants low in affective orientation) are affected by experience-based forms of marketing communications. Again, no differences between the two different forms of experiences (i.e., visit and design condition) were observed.

The present study shows initial evidence for a positive relation between experience-based marketing communication and consumer responses. Moreover, it reveals a boundary condition for these effects to occur, namely, the extent to which people have a dispositional affective orientation. These results provide promising evidence to support the growing field of experience-based marketing communication.

**References**


