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Fun Made Me Do It! Transforming Consumer Well-Being Through Serious Play

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This longitudinal field study adopts a TCR framework in exploring a new method by which consumers can be motivated to engage in exercise. Using serious play as a driving mechanism, we demonstrate that fun has the power to increase self-efficacy, group efficacy, intrinsic motivation, and, ultimately, consumer well-being.

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Fun Made Me Do It! Transforming Consumer Well-being Through Serious Play

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

The lifestyle of the average North American consumer is becoming increasingly inactive. In 2008, an estimated 80 percent of U.S. jobs were classified as either completely sedentary or as requiring only light levels of physical activity (Church et al. 2011), meaning the vast majority of the adult population is sitting for a minimum of 40 hours per week. In addition, studies have shown that spending more time seated can increase one's risk for obesity, type 2 diabetes (Hu 2003), cardiovascular disease (King et al. 1995), anxiety (Schoenfeld et al. 2013), and can even result in premature death (Danaei et al. 2009).

Consumers are not blind to these issues, and most people understand the multifarious benefits associated with regular exercise. They know that being more active on a daily basis can lead to weight loss, increased overall health, and can even bolster mood and self-esteem. But if so many consumers both acknowledge the problem and understand the solution, why aren't more of them doing something about it?

The answer may be, simply, that most exercise is just not very fun. In the current research we propose that a potential solution to this problem may be found in serious play. Serious play is defined as the use of fun and playful activities to achieve targeted goals (Beech et al. 2004; Statler, Roos, and Victor 2009). Herein we argue that serious play can be utilized as a mechanism to create feelings of fun in consumers while engaging in exercise. We suggest that these feelings of fun will in turn result in increased motivation for exercise, increased engagement in exercise, and heightened well-being.

We test our theory in a longitudinal field study of consumers engaging in a team-based workplace exercise promotion program. Using pre- and post-program surveys linked to daily physical activity, we tested two longitudinal path models: the first investigating the cognitive processes sparked by serious play and their effect on motivation for and subsequent engagement in exercise (Model 1), and the second examining the well-being outcomes engendered by these changes in cognition (Model 2). More specifically, Model 1 posits that experiences of fun will be associated with increases in self- and group efficacy (belief in the abilities of oneself or one's group; Bandura 1977), which will in turn promote intrinsic motivation and increased exercise behavior. Model 2 expands Model 1 by suggesting that increases in self-efficacy will also be associated with increases in consumer well-being. As our chief goal with this research is to demonstrate a mechanism by which consumers' quality of life may be increased, we position ourselves within the Transformative Consumer Research (TCR) realm (Ozanne and Saatcioglu 2008).

Participants were consumers engaging in a 112-day team-based workplace exercise promotion program. All potential participants were emailed a T1 and a T2 survey, as well as an additional optional survey assessing well-being at T1 and T2. In total, 2,505 consumers completed the T1 and T2 main surveys, while 889 of these consumers completed all four surveys.

The main T1 survey assessed consumers' intrinsic motivation (Ryan, Koestner and Deci 1991), self-efficacy, and group efficacy (Schwarzer and Jerusalem 1995) using three 2-item scales. This survey also included two control variables, autonomy in joining the program and fun expectancy. The T2 survey featured the same six items assessing intrinsic motivation, self-efficacy, and group efficacy, as well as three items meant to assess participants' levels of fun experi-

enced during the program (e.g. "I thought the program was fun"). In addition to this questionnaire data, we were granted access to the 112 daily step counts for each participant for the duration of the program, as recorded via accelerometer (digital pedometer).

Prior to testing our models, we submitted all latent variables to a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The model exhibited excellent fit ($X^2=363.931$, CFI=.991, NFI=.988, RMSEA=.033 with confidence interval = .029 to .037) (Hu and Bentler 1999), all factor loadings were significant, and the average variance extracted exceeded the average variance squared, indicating strong discriminant validity between all constructs (Fornell and Larcker 1981).

Both Model 1 and Model 2 were tested using a longitudinal auto-regression approach in which T1 values of each construct are regressed onto T2 values of that same construct, as outlined by McArdle (2009). This methodology allowed us to examine participants' T2 scores on each construct while controlling for their T1 values (i.e. change values). The fit indices for Model 1 (N=2,505) revealed excellent fit ($X^2=833.071$, CFI=.986, NFI=.983, RMSEA=.041 with confidence interval = .039 to .044). In addition, we found confirmation for our hypotheses: the experience of fun was found to be positively associated with increases in self-efficacy ($\beta=.16$, $p<.001$) and group efficacy ($\beta=.32$, $p<.001$). Increases in group efficacy were positively related to increases in self-efficacy ($\beta=.08$, $p<.001$), increases in self-efficacy were associated with increases in intrinsic motivation ($\beta=.50$, $p<.001$), and increases in intrinsic motivation were associated with increases in exercise behavior ($\beta=.18$, $p<.001$). Fit indices revealed excellent fit for Model 2 as well (N=889) ($X^2=913.236$, CFI=.967, NFI=.953, RMSEA=.050 with confidence interval = .046 to .053). All mechanistic pathways outlined in Model 1 were reconfirmed in Model 2, and, as hypothesized, increases in self-efficacy were associated with increases in well-being ($\beta=.32$, $p<.001$).

This longitudinal study demonstrates the power of serious play in inducing meaningful behavioral change. Specifically, these results outline a pathway that may be used to foster consumer well-being and promote consumer engagement in exercise. Model 1 demonstrated that fun created by engagement in serious play is associated with increases in self-efficacy, which in turn are related to increases in intrinsic motivation for and engagement in exercise. Additionally, this experience of fun was found to promote group efficacy, which in turn was associated with greater increases in self-efficacy. Model 2 reconfirmed this mechanistic model, while in addition demonstrating the positive impact of serious play on well-being via the self-efficacy that it promotes. This research contributes to the field of TCR by providing a mechanistic model by which unappealing yet beneficial behaviors (such as exercise, recycling, or smoking cessation) can be promoted.

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