

THE WEIRD SIDE OF EXPERIENCE MARKETING

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Abstract

Experience marketing is considered the marketing of the future. Unlike traditional marketing which is based on consumers' rational decision making, experiential marketing uses the senses, feelings, intellect and curiosity of consumers. Experiential marketing aims to build and deepen relationships with customers by offering them meaningful, memorable, interactive, exciting experiences with companies' products and services. Here, it is not a question of demonstrating the technical characteristics of a product but highlighting the emotions and sensations associated with this purchase. Companies differentiate themselves in the market by providing an appealing brand experience. They make consumers heroes of their stories. On the other hand, consumers want to be active participants in the life of the brand. They want to be involved. As Seth Godin points out, "people do not buy products and services. They buy relations, stories and magic". The new concept of experiential marketing makes it possible for consumers, offering them fun, excitement, involvement, novelties. However, apart from positive examples of experiential marketing, in reality, companies driven by the need to attract the consumers' attention, sometimes provoke very bizarre, strange feelings and experiences for consumers. This paper aims to investigate the experiences and reactions of consumers to such a practice of offering them weird experiential marketing activities.

Keywords: *experience; experience marketing; consumer involvement; fun; excitement; weird marketing practices*

JEL Codes: *M30, M31, M37*

Introduction

Marketing evolves and changes due to new technologies and new ways of communication between companies and consumers. Today's marketing practices are very different from those of a few years ago. The Industrial age has brought **traditional marketing** on stage that mainly focuses on the functional features and core benefits of

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products and services. This marketing sees consumers as strictly rational who make decisions based on comparisons of performances, prices, technical characteristics of products. Their decisions are seen as the result of purely logical steps: understanding they have a need, searching for more information, comparing various alternative options, and then making the buying decision. (Johnston, 2013). Companies achieve comparative advantages by offering better product performances or additional benefits to consumers.

With the beginning of the new Information age, in the first decade of the 21st century, marketing experts are increasingly discussing the new marketing concept - **Experience marketing**. Although some experts argue that there are differences between experience and experiential marketing, in this paper they will be treated as the same term. Namely, there are also other names used as synonyms for experiential marketing, such as “participation marketing”, “event marketing”, “on-ground marketing”, “live marketing”, “expressive marketing”, etc. (Bizzabo team, 2021), but they have the same meaning and objective, directly to involve consumers into the life of the brands. Now, features and benefits of goods are replaced with emotions, intellect, senses of consumers that are used and manipulated in order to attract more consumers. Experience marketing adds a large emotional dimension to consumer behavior, seeing them as driven by spontaneity, by fun, by fantasies, by deep feelings and imagination. Experience marketing plays on the emotions of consumers and impacts their senses through touch, sound, smell, taste and sight. (Johnston, 2013). Experience marketing offers engaging, interactive, and entertaining brand experiences. Experiential marketing sees consumers as both rational and emotional. Companies are attracting consumers offering them unforgettable experience, fun, excitement, extraordinary feelings. At the end of the day, consumers are people with social needs and they want to communicate and interact.

Nowadays, when there is a great availability of different products on the market and consumers have tried almost everything, they become more sophisticated in their requirements and look for new challenges when buying products and services. Their attention can be attracted by their involvement in the life of brands. With the Internet, and especially the more intensive use of social networks, consumers are demanding even greater involvement. Companies differentiate themselves based on the offer of new experiences, novelties, excitement among consumers. “The benefits are not in the products. They are in the consumer experience!” (Janiszewski, 2009). Companies are willing to offer bizarre, taboo, weird stories and experiences just to get consumers' attention.

However, there are a lot of **benefits of experiential marketing**, such as: (Pro Motion Blog,2021)

- Brand awareness and bringing consumers closer to the company's products,
- Brand affinity and loyalty that will encourage repeat purchases,

- Driving word of mouth and spreading messages fast to customers' friends and families,
- Collecting customer feedback, their reviews and impressions,
- Creating unforgettable and lasting memories,
- Expressing authenticity,
- Efficiency and profitability of a company.

Literature review

Experiential marketing is a new concept of the new Information age and therefore there is a small number of written papers on it until now. Its characteristics, both positive and negative, as well as its impact on the efficiency and profitability of companies, are now being explored. Experiential marketing is used for the first time by Schmitt who sets his strategic framework. (Schmitt, 1999). There are some **definitions on Experience marketing**, but basically, all of them define it as a marketing strategy that creates unique experiences and lasting memories by physically engaging with consumers. "Experience marketing is usually broadly defined as any form of customer-focused marketing activity that creates a connection to customers. Experiential marketing emphasizes the creation of stimulating brand experiences for the customers" (Schmitt, 2010). Experiential marketing is a marketing strategy that directly engages consumers and encourages them to participate in the evolution of the brand. Experience marketing can create emotions to the consumer by making entertainment for customers, by allowing them to escape from the reality, by educating them and giving them aesthetic objects or places to see (Pine and Gilmore, 1999). The customer creates his/her own experiences with help of different tools provided by the company. (Same, 2013). Pine and Gilmore (1999) declare, that "while commodities are fungible, goods tangible, and services intangible, experiences are memorable".

Experiential marketing appeals directly to the senses through touch, sound, smell, taste and sight. Experiential marketing plays on the emotions of a consumer and is a more efficient way to touch consumers (Johnston, 2013). The consumption experience needs to capture consumers' minds in their entirety by making use of all five senses, and in doing so evoke positive emotions and truly captivate consumers (Mohasoa, 2014). Experiential marketing allows consumers to participate in an experience with the product or service (McCardle, 2012). All these definitions lead to the conclusion that Kotler made that "consumers view products as bundles of benefits and choose products that give them the best bundle for their money. What consumers really want is [offers] that dazzle their senses, touch their hearts, and stimulate their minds. They want [offers] that deliver an experience." (Kotler, 2005).

Schmitt (1999) distinguishes **five different types of experiences** that marketers can create for customers. These experiences, called strategic experiential modules (SEMs), are implemented through experience providers (ExPros), such as communications, visual and verbal identity, product presence, electronic media, etc. According to Schmitt believes that Experience marketing appeals to consumers’ senses (sight, sound, touch, taste and smell). Five different types of experiences, or strategic experiential modules (SEMs), that marketers can create for customers are distinguished: sensory experiences (SENSE); affective experiences (FEEL); creative cognitive experiences (THINK); physical experiences, behaviors and lifestyles (ACT); and social-identity experiences that result from relating to a reference group or culture (RELATE).

Dubé and LeBel (2003) distinguish four similar “pleasure dimensions”: emotional, intellectual, physical, and social pleasures.

Gentile et al. (2007) distinguish the following six experiential components:

- **Sensorial** (sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell experiences and how they arouse aesthetic pleasure, excitement, satisfaction and a sense of beauty),
- **Emotional** (moods, feelings, and emotional experiences that create an affective relation with the company, its brands and products),
- **Cognitive** (experiences related to thinking and conscious mental processes to get customers to use their creativity or problem solving so that they revise assumptions about a product),
- **Pragmatic** (experiences resulting from the practical act of doing something and usability),
- **Lifestyle** (experiences resulting from the affirmation of values and personal beliefs)
- **Relational** (experiences, emerging from social contexts and relationships, that occur during common consumption as part of a real or imagined community or to affirm social identity).

Methodology

For the purpose of this paper, two sources of data were used:

A) Secondary sources: data from relevant literature on experience marketing, like journals, statistical data, reviews, e-books, published presentations, blogs, FB statuses and YouTube vloggers. Secondary sources provide a lot of data from qualitative and quantitative research, historical reviews and comparisons.

B) Primary data: questionnaire that is divided into two sections: a) demographic data (gender and age) and b) psychographic data on person’s opinions, beliefs, attitudes, and

preferences collected through closed questions. The small questionnaire was randomly distributed to 50 individuals, in the period between 1st to 15th October, 2021. Results were collected by e-mail Facebook and personal contacts.

Analysis and discussion

The reason why weird or unusual is popular in marketing, sales, blogs and social media is that it is different and it is the new norm. Being different is the key to marketing, and putting weird in front of the right people often boosts sales. (Suez, 2017). According to him, nowadays marketing has become unconventional, abnormal, and eye-catching. The phrase “Go Big or Go Home” is no longer applicable. In today’s society, it’s “Go Crazy or Go Home”.

Having in mind what is the new norm today, the simple and short questionnaire was distributed to different age groups that belong to different generations (Baby-boomers, generation X and Millennials) by e-mail, Facebook and personal contacts. The questionnaire was divided into two parts: geo-demographic data (age and sex) that is mostly important for the research and psychological data (the opinions of respondents regarding four pictures that represent some weird or unusual examples of experience marketing). The small questionnaire was randomly distributed to 50 individuals, in the period between 1st to 15th October, 2021.

The analysis of the primary data is presented below:

I part: Geo-demographic data

1) According to the gender: Out of a total of 50 respondents by gender, 38 are female respondents (76%) and 12 males (24%).

2) According to the age, respondents are grouped as follows:

Table no. 1 Geo-demographic data according to the gender

	Age group	No. of respondents	%	Generation Type
	15-35	15	39	Millennials
38 females	36-60	12	32	Generation X
	above 61	11	29	Baby-Boomers
	15-35	2	17	Millennials
12 males	36-60	5	42	Generation X
	above 61	5	42	Baby-Boomers

Source: Authors own research

Table no. 2 Geo-demographic data according to the age

	Age group	No. of respondents	%	Generation Type
	15-35	17	34	Millennials
ALL Respondents	36-60	17	34	Generation X
	above 61	16	32	Baby-Boomers

Source: Authors own research

II part: Psychological data

3) Photo 1: Poop bar, Taiwan



- a) Do you like the Poop bar, Taiwan presented on the photo above?
Yes / No
- b) Would you like to visit it?
Yes / No

According to the answers to both questions on photo 1, 50% of respondents like the Poop bar and are willing to visit it. Out of 50 respondents, 17 young persons (34%), 7 adults (14%) and 1 old person (2%) answered both questions with “yes”.

4) Photo 2: Clinic bar, Singapore



- a) Do you like the Clinic bar, Singapore presented on the photo above?
Yes / No
- b) Would you like to visit it?
Yes / No

According to the answers to both questions on photo 2, 36% of respondents like the Clinic bar and are willing to visit it. Out of 50 respondents, 17 young persons (34%), 1 adult (2%) and no old persons (0%) answered both questions with “yes”.

5) Photo 3: Coffin bar, Ukraine



- a) Do you like the Coffin bar, Ukraine presented on the photo above?
Yes / No
- b) Would you like to visit it?
Yes / No

According to the answers to both questions on photo 3, 32% of respondents like the Coffin bar and are willing to visit it. Out of 50 respondents, 16 young persons (32%), 0 adult (0%) and no old persons (0%) answered both questions with “yes”.

6) Photo 4: Café Ke'ilu that doesn't serve anything, Israel



- a) Do you like the bar in Tel Aviv, Israel presented on the photo above?
Yes / No
- b) Would you like to visit it?
Yes / No

According to the answers to both questions on photo 4, 58% of respondents like the Israeli bar and are willing to visit it. Out of 50 respondents, 17 young persons (34%), 10 adults (20%) and 2 old persons (4%) answered the both questions with “yes”.

Conclusion

Experience marketing, like a new concept is trendy, it's memorable, it's working. There are a lot of positive examples of companies that use this new marketing concept and find it out that it is efficient and profitable. However, the primary data shows that the new norms are more acceptable and refreshing for younger generations. They really are curious and want to experience everything, no matter how bizarre or weird the company's efforts are. Adults, or Generation X are not so much inclined to experience novelties that contain weird and unusual components. Definitely, experience marketing cannot target the older generation, baby-boomers who are old fashioned and like the way it was! So, regarding the usage of weird experience marketing, the companies need to be careful and to address their messages directly to the younger generation or Millennials.

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