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行政院國家科學委員會專題研究計畫成果報告

消費體驗與體驗品質之研究
A Study On Service Experience

中文摘要

　　自 90 年代末，有愈來愈多的學者（Pine II and Gilmore，1998，1999；Schmitt，1999；O'sullivan and Spangler，1998）提出「體驗經濟」與「體驗行銷」的觀點，認為體驗是一種經濟商品，消費經驗是可以被企業塑造的，於是有別於傳統行銷強調產品特性與功能，體驗行銷重視顧客在消費過程中所獲得的體驗感，強調產品所帶來的快樂、情緒、感覺、形象與刺激。

　　然而，針對體驗概念本身的實證研究仍然有限，因此本研究以文獻探討與質化研究方法來探討體驗的本質，根據消費者深入訪談的結果，歸納整理構成體驗的要素與提出相關的概念架構和命題。

關鍵字：體驗，服務體驗，體驗行銷

Abstract

The notion of experience has caught scholars' attention since late 90's. Researchers regard ''experience'' as a distinct economic offering, and business can make and offer consumption experience for consumers (e.g. Pine II and Gilmore, 1998, 1999; Schmitt, 1999; O'sullivan and Spangler, 1998). Different from traditional marketing which emphasizes attributes and functions of products, experiential marketing stresses the consumers' experiences of consumption process and the accompanying happiness, emotion, feeling, image, and stimulation.

The concept of experience, however, remains indefinite for academic investigation and it lacks a comprehensive framework. With the focus of concerning about the emotional aspects of customers' experiences that occur when customers physically stay in and participate in an elaborately designed service setting, we conduct an exploratory study to investigate the essence of experience. Two main research questions are approached through in-depth interviews with customers. As for a customer, what has he/she perceived when putting him/herself in a service surroundings? Moreover, what elements does a customer mention when describing an impressed service experience? Several insights are obtained through in-depth interview. We thereby propose a framework and propositions. Relevant discussion is presented lastly.

Key Words: experience, service experience, experiential marketing

1. Introduction

Experience is generally referred as any feeling or knowledge that a person obtains while undergoing any events or activities in daily life.　People get experiences all the time, no matter what they do.　Several examples of experiences are provided, including eating, driving a car, seeing a movie, and etc.　Recently, marketing researchers and practitioners have paid a great deal of attention to the notion of experience and suggested the new focus of economy has been transferred into experience (e.g. Pine II and Gilmore, 1998; O'Sullivan and Spangler, 1998; Schmitt, 1999).　Numbers of relevant concepts are thereby proposed, such as experience economy (Pine II and Gilmore, 1998), experiential marketing (O'Sullivan and Spangler, 1998; Schmitt, 1999), entertainment economy (Wolf, 1999), a dream society (Jensen, 1999), emotion economy (Gobé and Zyman, 2001), attention economy (Davenport and Beck, 2002), and etc.

Although experience is not a new concept, it draws marketers' attention due to providing more intrinsic or personal benefits for customers.　As for marketing practice, experience is regarded as an offering that companies can create or even customize to fulfill customers' individual needs.　Managing and designing experience is hence considered as a base for companies to differentiate themselves from competitors and to achieve competitive advantage. Apparent examples can be referred to rapid expansion of theme restaurants such as Starbucks and Hard Rock Café.　Not simply selling cups of coffee to customers, they focus on examining whether the consumption situation can provide meaningful or valuable experiences to customers.　That is to say, products and services might not be main offerings anymore; experiences, that represent customers' personal sensation of feeling and fulfill customers' inner needs, is becoming a focal point for newly economic stage (cf. Pine II and Gilmore, 1998; O'Sullivan and Spangler, 1998; Schmitt, 1999).

The concept of experience, however, remains indefinite and lacks a theoretical framework. To our limit knowledge, existing articles are mostly conceptual ideas or guidelines for experience management (e.g. Carbone and Haeckel, 1994; Pine II and Gilmore, 1998, 1999; O'Sullivan and Spangler, 1998; Schmitt, 1999; Berry et al., 2002).　Few academic researchers have attempted to carefully define and model the notion of experience except Grove and his colleagues' service experience metaphor (e.g. Grove and Fisk, 1992; Grove, Fisk and Bitner, 1992; Grove, Fisk and John, 2000; Grove, Fisk and Dorsch, 1998) and Gupta and Vajic (2000). We hence attempt to define and frame the concept of experience through exploratory investigation.　Two main questions are addressed.　The first question is concerned with customers' recognition of experiences.　As for customer, what has been perceived or sensed when he/she steps into a consumption surrounding?　Answering this question helps to understand the intrinsic meaning of experience from customers' perspectives.　The next questions are related to customers' descriptions of experiences.　How does a customer describe a consuming experience?　What elements make a customer be impressed while he/she describes a consuming experience?　We aim to find out the elements that contribute to an experience.

To approach these questions, we start with reviewing the literature of experience and

relevant concepts.　Next, we conduct an exploratory research design to collect empirical data. On the base of data analysis, we propose an integrated framework and propositions.　We then discuss the research and managerial implications of the framework and propositions.　We additionally offer suggestions for future research.

2. Literature Review

In this section, the concept of experience and service experience is going to be reviewed in order to conceptually understand the existing research.　The focuses of this study are meanwhile identified.

2.1 Defining Experience

With regard to the meaning of experience, we first look at the dictionaries.　In Webster Dictionary and Oxford Dictionary, an experience means that an individual directly participate in or undergo any events or activities, and the individual personally learns, obtains and accumulates conscious or unconscious feeling, knowledge, or skill.　It is hence to say that people get experiences all the time, as long as they partake in any daily activities.

The conceptualization of experience, however, is broad to some extent, especially for academic studies.　Reviewing relevant research, we generalize two premises that researchers rest on and attempt to expound and delimit the concept of experience.　First, experiences address the psychic needs of a society (Toffer, 1970; O'Sullivan and Spangler, 1998; Schmitt, 1999).　Once members in a society make most of their basic and physical needs be satisfied, they would turn their attention, time and money to meeting psychological needs.　Second, customers are emotional as well as rational (Schmitt, 1999; Holbrook, 2000), and customers prefer pleasure-oriented experiences (Solomon, 1980).　Customers are emotionally driven while experiences are directed toward pursuing fantasies, feelings and fun (Schmitt, 1999; Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982; Holbrook, 2000).

Generally, authors contend that customers obtain experiences as long as engaging in consumption events (cf. Abbott, 1955; Holbrook, 2000; Laverie et al., 1993; Carbone and Haeckel, 1994; Berry et al., 2002).　In addition, several authors view experience as an offering, and further discuss the distinction between experiences, products and services (cf. Pine II and Gilmore, 1998, 1999; O'Sullivan and Spangler, 1998; Gupta and Vajic, 2000).　Pine II and Gilmore (1998) point that an experience happens "when a company intentionally uses services as the stage, and goods as props, to engage individual customers in a way that created a memorable event" (Pine II and Gilmore, 1998, p. 98).　O'Sullivan and Spangler (1998) regard experience as the state that an individual physically, mentally, emotionally, socially, or spiritually involve in or participate in the consumption.　Then, conscious perception and a change in knowledge, skill, memory, or emotion result from such participation (O'Sullivan and Spangler, 1998).　Gupta and Vajic (2000) define experience as "a phenomenon that is socially produced and context specific" (p.40).　Although Schmitt (1999) does not directly point out the difference between experiences, products and services, he takes the similar viewpoint with most authors.　In his work, experience is implied as an individual's personal perception resulting

from participation in activities.

Resting on the above discussion, we conclude researchers' definition of experience. In general, experience is regarded as an outcome resulting from an individual's participation in a consumption activity or event. Such outcome is a complex structure, containing consumers' sensation, feeling, change of knowledge or skill, and etc. Experience is, for this reason, inferred as an output of consuming (a product and service)—coming along with a product and service. Either being concerned as an output of participating in a consumption event or as an offering, experience is different from a product and service owing to meeting with customers' inherent, internal, personal, emotional, or psychic needs.

Accordingly, we identify our research focuses. First, we specify the context where experiences occur. We investigate the experience, the outcome resulting from a customer's participation in a setting deliberately designed by the service provider. Next, drawing on the two premises presented in the research that experiences fulfill individuals' psychic needs and customers are experience-oriented, we mainly focus on the affective or emotional nature of a customer's experience. Zaltman's (2003) argument additionally conforms to our focus. The author indicates that the subconscious sensory and emotional elements derived from the total experience have far more influence on consumer preference than tangible attributes of a product or service. Moreover, Pine II and Gilmore (1998, 1999) argue that the best relationships with customers are affective or emotional in nature.

2.2 Service Experiences

Service experience is more specific due to service itself, service surroundings, service providers and related components of service delivery, compared to consumption experience that is generally be identified as outcomes that individuals' participation in "any" consumption event. With the characteristic of simultaneity and inseparability, services are produced and consumed at the same time and service providers and customers interact during the production/consumption process (e.g. Martin, 1999). Physically participating in such process or service setting is accordingly a necessary condition of customers' service experience. Within service setting, customers get experiences through consuming service and interacting with service providers, other customers, and physical environment. Service experience, in essence, is as complex as it involves the whole service offering, which contains processes, people and facilities (Grace and O'Gass, 2004).

Numbers of researchers have devoted to studying the composition of service experience (cf. Johns, 1999; Tseng et al., 1999; Grace and O'Gass, 2004; Otto and Ritchie, 1995). Some authors have examined service experience drawing on service processes or a service blueprint scheme (John, 1999; Grace and O'Gass, 2004, Tseng et al., 1999). Other researchers point that service experience is composed by elements or clues with respect to functional/emotional characteristics (Carbone and Haeckel, 1994; Berry et al., 2002; Otto and Ritchie, 1995). Another scholars have approached service experience underlying the proposition that human behavior is drama (the drama metaphor) (cf. Goffman, 1959, 1967, 1974). Grove and his colleagues argue many of the drama concepts and principles may be used to capture the service

experience (Grove and Fisk, 1992; Grove, Fisk and Bitner, 1992; Grove, Fisk and John, 2000; Grove, Fisk and Dorsch, 1998).   However, the view of service experiences presented in Grove and his colleagues' workings is conceptual review and guideline.   Further empirical investigation is still limit except one qualitative study in 1998 (Grove, Fisk and Dorsch, 1998).

In conclusion, since service experience is recognized as a customer's whole journey with the service offering, including process, people, and facilities, components made up service experience are undoubtedly related to such service offering.   What customers experience during the whole journey contains functional and emotional aspects.   Functional aspects concern what has been delivered to customers whereas emotional aspects concern how services offerings have been presented to customers to arouse emotional response.   Service experience is essentially multi-faceted.   In this study, we especially concern about the emotional aspect of service experience with respect to customers' interaction with the whole service offering.   The first is physical surroundings where service experiences occur.   The second is service providers whom customers interact with while experiencing the service.   The last is not offered by companies and is also an important component of service experience.   It is the interaction with other customers.   These three components contribute to service experience, and the emotional aspect is the focus of our study.

3. Method

We undertake an exploratory qualitative study to investigate the concept of experience, with the focus of service experience.   In-depth interviews with customers are conducted to study service experience from the customers' perspectives.

Two categories of service industry with moderate customer participation (Hubbert, 1995) are chosen for investigation.   One category belongs to consumption service, and it is a company like Victoria's Secret, selling women underwear.   The other category is non-profit service, and it is a national museum of marine biology and aquarium.   In-depth interviews were undertaken with twenty customers, ten for each service categories.   Each interview was conducted by the principle researcher and lasted between forty-five and sixty minutes.   The interviews were recorded and then transcribed verbatim by the researchers.   Data collection was last for one month, during November in 2004.   Questions of interview are asked base on research purpose.

We subsequently analyze the data with the goal of making the data useful for answering research questions.   Thematic descriptions of customer service experiences were unfolded through an interpretive process (Thompson et al., 1989, 1990).   In order to have overall understanding of individual respondent's service experience from a first-person perspective, we carefully and repeatedly read thematic descriptions.   The verbatim interview transcripts were the data from thematic descriptions.   We then analyzed transcripts individually, and induced separate interviews to each other and common patterns.

4. Result

From customer's perspective, in-depth interviews illustrate that customers' service experiences are derived from interacting with physical surroundings and people in a service setting, and also from the customers themselves. People include service providers, other customers, and customers who are together with the customer. In general, respondents recognize not only functional but also emotional aspects of service experiences. Due to our research focus, we consequently discuss respondents' emotional aspects of service experiences with relation to physical surroundings, people and customers themselves.

Physical Surroundings

When a customer step into and stay in a service environment, he or she interacts with the physical surroundings (e.g. hearing music, seeing colors, smelling, touching, and etc.) and he or she senses and perceives experiences form physical surroundings at the same time. According to informants' description of service experiences, there are four emotional dimensions resulting from interacting with physical surroundings, atmosphere, concentration, imagination, and unexpectedness.

People

People contain interactions with service providers, other customers and companion-customers. As for the personal interaction between consumers and service providers, it has been viewed as the heart of most service experiences (Guiry, 1992), and has been termed the "service encounter" in the services marketing literature (Czepiel et al., 1985; Shostack, 1985; Solomon et al., 1985). During interviews with customers of the underwear specialty stores, informants mostly describe how service providers thoughtfully concern their needs and serve them. Next, customers' service experiences additionally result form interacting with other customers. It is well understood that other customers have impact on the benefits customers derive from service encounter (cf. Bitner et al., 1990). The compatibility between respondents and other customers are mentioned with relation to service experiences. Lastly, the interactions with customers who companion with respondents also contribute to service experiences. The companionships or interrelationships have effect on respondents' service experiences with relation to emotional aspects.

Customers Themselves

From customer's points of view, the findings of interviews illustrate that customers' service experiences not only come from interacting with physical surroundings and people in a service setting, but also from the customers themselves. By means of participating in the consumption activity in service settings, customers themselves meanwhile acquire cognitive learning and fun. Cognitive learning concerns the knowledge obtained from involving in the service process. Having fun is also revealed in the results of interviews, that respondents describe service experiences to be interesting and joyful. Either shopping in the underwear specialty stores or visiting the museum provides fun service-experiences to respondents. This finding conforms to the hedonic perspective of consumption (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982), which refers to facets of consumer behavior with relation to the multisensory, fantasy, and emotive aspects of product usage experience.

A Model of Customers' Service Experiences

Drawing on the findings of in-depth interviews and the previous discussion, we propose a model of customers' service experiences (figure 1), representing the essence of service experience from customers' viewpoints.

The first insight obtained from analyzing the informants' responses is that the emotional aspects of experiences can be decomposed into five dimensions, physical surroundings, service providers, other customers, companion-customers, and customers themselves.   That is, customers obtain service experiences through physically participating in a service setting, interacting with physical surroundings and people, and themselves acquiring cognitive learning and fun.   Through exploratory study, the findings of research empirically conform to Grove and his colleagues' argument of the composition of service experiences (e.g. Grove and Fisk, 1992; Grove, Fisk and Bitner, 1992; Grove, Fisk and John, 2000; Grove, Fisk and Dorsch, 1998).   More importantly, through exploring customers' viewpoints of experiences, the transcript data of in-depth interview demonstrate factors that are not integrated into the previous research.   The result shows that customer-related factors (other customers, customers' companions, and customers themselves) also contribute to customers' experiences.   This insight consequently leads to the following two propositions:

Proposition 1: Interacting with physical surroundings, service providers, other customers, and companion-customers constitute customers' experiences.

Proposition 2: When acquiring experiences, customers themselves at the same time obtain cognitive learning and fun to some extent.
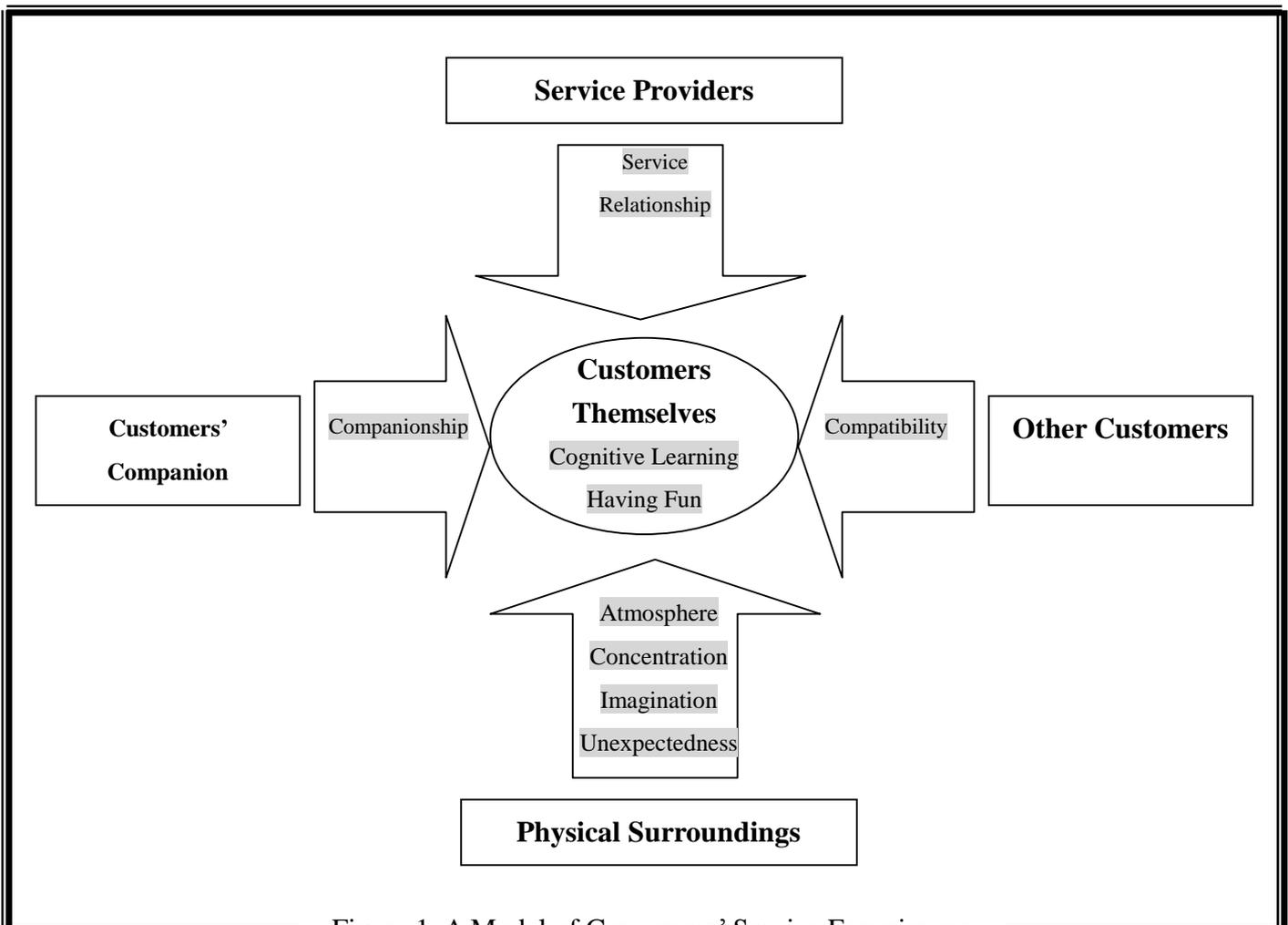

Figure 1: A Model of Consumers' Service Experiences

In addition to exploring the composition of experiences, this study specially focuses on investigating what emotional elements constitute customers experiences. With respect to the interaction between customers and physical environment, the result presents four emotional dimensions: atmosphere, concentration, imagination, and unexpectedness. Comparing the two investigated service organizations, however, this study finds that underwear specialty stores and museum of marine biology perform differently in these four emotional dimensions to some degree. As for atmosphere, there is no difference with each other due to successful management of atmospheric variables, such as layout, design, decoration, and etc. In regard to concentration and imagination, the two cases demonstrate different practices. The specialty stores make use of pink-orange color to create romantic shopping space and successfully catch female customers' attentions, while the museum of marine life and aquarium simulate the oceanic world by realistic tunnel, shipwreck, lighting, music, and etc. With relation to unexpectedness, nevertheless, the museum provides customers more unexpected services than the underwear specialty stores. When visiting the museum, customers totally involve in the elaborately physical environment, they stroll along the continuous aquariums, and they have no idea when the unfamiliar oceanic biology will show up before their eyes. This study therefore infers that service organizations with different focus and practices of physical surroundings design provide different service experiences to customers. The four emotional dimensions resulting from the interactions between customers and physical surroundings are weighted differently in diverse service organizations and thereby are experienced different by customers. We propose the propositions as follows:

Proposition 3: To some extent, customers emotionally experience atmosphere, concentration, imagine, and unexpectedness when they interacting with physical surroundings.

Proposition 4: Cross service organizations, customers emotionally experience various weights of atmosphere, concentration, imagine, and unexpectedness.

The last insight concerns interaction between customers and people in a service setting. People contain service providers, other customers, and companion-customers. In this study, findings of in-depth interview reveal that customers perceive different interaction with different subjects within different contexts. As for the underwear specialty stores, interaction with service providers and compatibility with other customers are critical aspects that contribute to customers' experiences. Interaction with companions is relatively not significant for the reason that respondents have diverse viewpoints with respect to shopping underwear with close friends or relatives. On the other hand, interaction between customers and their companions is a more influential aspect of customers' experiences than the other two kinds of interactions. Due to customers commonly visiting the museum with families or friends, the interaction with companions consequently plays an important role and determine whether having fun or not. This study accordingly proposes the following proposition:

Proposition 5: Interaction between service personnel, other customers and

companion-customers in service settings contribute differently to customers' service experiences across service organizations.

5. Discussion

This study conducts an exploratory qualitative study to investigate the concept of experience from customers' points of view. Two main questions are approached. The first one regards customers' recognition of experiences. The results of in-depth interviews demonstrate that customers recognize service experiences through interacting with physical surroundings and people in a service setting. Meanwhile, the recognized service experiences also come from customers themselves. Following the first question and findings, the second question is related to customers' descriptions of experience. When describing an impressed service experience, customers mention four emotional dimensions resulting from interacting with physical surroundings, atmosphere, concentration, imagination, and unexpectedness. In addition, interactions with service providers, other customers, and customers who are together with the customer are revealed in customers' descriptions. Moreover, cognitive learning and having fun, that customers themselves simultaneously obtain, are influential aspects of customers' experiences.

The conceptual model and the propositions emerging from this study remain to further investigate. First, there is a need to develop an instrument to measure customers' service experience resting on the findings of this research. Next, other categories of service industry can be conducted to explore and examine. With the limited numbers of respondents in interviews, more respondents are also required across service industry for future studies.

6. Self Evaluation of Research

This study conducts an exploratory research to investigate the concept of experience from customers' viewpoints. Although academic researches have paid much attention to the notion of experiences, a comprehensive framework for studying experiences is still limited. With attempt to exploring what elements customers themselves use to describe experiences, the findings of this study provide preliminary framework for future research on experiences. Therefore, the process and result of this research commonly conform to the original purpose of proposal. Additionally, the findings are valuable not only for further academic research but for managerial practices. As for marketers, the result helps to understand what customers recognize when interacting with the service process, and further help to design and manage the experiences for customers. As for academic investigations, further research can be proceeded to empirically test the dimensionality and relative importance of the elements of customers' experiences.

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