Creating Greater Entertainment Experiences at Shopping Centres: An Exploratory Study

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Abstract

Entertainment is an integral part of the shopping centre environment. There are numerous studies on consumer satisfaction, but few studies have examined shopper satisfaction derived from entertainment consumption in shopping centres. Through a qualitative pilot study, this paper examined the joint impact of consumption motives and emotions on overall satisfaction of entertainment-seeking shoppers. In this study, entertainment shoppers are deemed to have dual consumption motives, namely social and escape motives. Consistent with the congruency theory, this study found that shoppers who reported ordinary overall satisfaction were those whose emotive experiences matched their consumption motives. Moreover, in order to create extraordinary overall satisfaction, shopping centre management may consider designing entertainment that evokes stronger positive emotions to exceed shoppers' consumptions motives.

Introduction

By the 1970s, besides a proper mix of merchandising, shopping centre management realised that they needed to create an environment of bustle and excitement to entice consumers (Kingston, 1994). Since then, many shopping centres have emphasised their roles of being a communal venue for various experiential activities other than the acquisition of goods or service (Bloch, Ridgway and Dawson, 1994). That is, shopping centre management has sought to alter consumers' perceptions of shopping to be a recreational activity, for seeing and being seen, for meeting and passively enjoying the environment (Bloch, Ridgway and Nelson, 1991; Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982). One of the strategic approaches is the integration of entertainment into shopping centres' properties (Hazel, 1998; Kenyon, 1998; Thorne, 1998). In Australia, several shopping centres have been or are being constructed with substantial spaces allocated to entertainment, such as Pacific Fair Shopping Centre (Gold Coast) and Knox Towerpoint (Melbourne) (Anonymous, 2002). Despite the increasing significance of entertainment, few studies have explored shoppers' experiences of entertainment consumption in shopping centres (Babin, Darden and Griffin, 1994; Jones, 1999). Hence, this study aims to explore overall satisfaction of entertainment-seeking shoppers via the influence of consumption motives and emotions.

Shopping Centre Entertainment

Entertainment can be classified into three categories, namely special event entertainment, specialty entertainment, and food (Haynes and Talpade, 1996). The key distinction between these entertainment categories is the length of duration or span of operation. (Haynes and Talpade, 1996) *Special event entertainment* is offered on an occasional basis for a shorter period of time, including fashion shows, bridal fairs, taking pictures with Santa Claus. Unlike the special event entertainment, *specialty entertainment* and *food* are part of the tenant mix of a shopping centre and thus are incorporated into the centre's property for a longer duration. In particular, specialty entertainment refers to movie theatres and video arcades, whereas food

concerns the range of eateries, including food courts, cafés, and restaurants (Haynes and Talpade, 1996).

Consumer Satisfaction

This paper focuses on shoppers' overall experiences of an entertainment trip to a shopping centre, and thus overall satisfaction of entertainment-seeking shoppers was measured. The concept of consumer satisfaction has its origins in discrepancy theory (Porter, 1961). The two most widely discussed and used models for measuring consumer satisfaction are the expectations-disconfirmation model and the desires congruency model (Oliver, 1981; Sivadas and Baker-Prewitt, 2000; Spreng, MacKenzie and Olshavsky, 1996). The expectationsdisconfirmation model, also known as expectations congruency, holds that consumer satisfaction is the assessment of the discrepancy between consumers' perceptions of product experiences and their pre-purchase expectations of experiences (Spreng, MacKenzie and Olshavsky, 1996). In this model, pre-purchase expectations act as a frame of reference for post-consumption evaluation (Oliver, 1980). The discrepancy ranges from negative (expectations exceed realised outcomes) through zero (expectations just equal realised outcomes) to positive (realised outcomes exceed expectations) (Parker and Mathews, 2001). Unlike the expectancy-disconfirmation model, the desires congruency model focuses on the attainment of desires that consumers seek, and thus perceived performance of a product or institution is simply tested against the extent to which it meet consumers' desires (Spreng, MacKenzie and Olshavsky, 1996; Westbrook and Reilly, 1983). In particular, this desires congruency model holds that the higher the congruency between consumers' perceptions of a brand's performance and his or her desires, the more favourable the evaluation, and thus the greater the satisfaction, and vice versa.

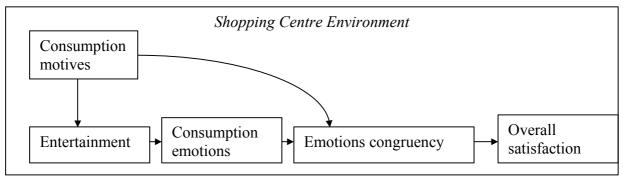
Both the expectancy-disconfirmation and the desires congruency models share at least two commonalities. Firstly, both models focus on the evaluation of two stimuli: an outcome; and a comparison referent (expectations or desires). Secondly, previous studies of the disconfirmation and congruency models have primarily focused on the perceived performance of a product as an outcome such as the versatility of camcorders (Spreng, MacKenzie and Olshavsky, 1996; Westbrook and Reilly, 1983). Few studies have explored emotive experiences as an outcome of entertainment consumption in shopping centres. As noted by (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1980), hedonic consumption is a phenomenon directed toward the pursuit of positive experiences such as fantasies and fun. Moreover, the joint impact of consumption motives and emotions on shoppers' overall satisfactions has not been examined.

Exploratory Research

Previous studies of consumer satisfaction have primary focused on deductive reasoning approach such as structural equation modelling (Goode, Moutinho and Chien, 1996; Sivadas and Baker-Prewitt, 2000; Yu and Dean, 2001). Given the literature gap on shoppers' satisfactions of entertainment consumption, an inductive reasoning approach was adopted to gain a depth understanding of the determinant effects of consumption motives and emotions (Hyde, 2000). This exploratory study conducted in-depth interviews with a convenience sample, involving administration staff and students of a university in a regional city, Australia. A total of 53 interviews were conducted, using a semi-structure protocol. A set of five questions was asked, specifically relating to overall satisfactions of entertainment consumption in shopping centres. Interviewees were asked to describe their overall

entertainment experiences at shopping centres, and were prompted to explain why the overall experience was extraordinary, ordinary or bad. Interviewees were also asked to recall their shopping motives, and then identify attributes or factors that most appealed to them in choosing a particular shopping centre for entertainment consumption. Subsequently, interviewees were asked to describe their feelings about their overall experience. The data was content analysed to uncover common themes. A majority of the interviewees were single females, aged between 20 to 24 years.

Figure 1: A Conceptual Model of the Consumption Experience of Entertainment-Seeking Shoppers



(Source: developed for this paper)

Discussion of Results

The findings from the exploratory research were integrated with the literature to develop a theoretical model that conceptualises the consumption experience of entertainment-seeking shoppers, and is illustrated in Figure 1. The inter-relationships between consumption motives, entertainment, emotions and overall satisfaction are discussed in turn. Note that the findings of this paper are indicative due to the small convenience sample.

Consumption motives. During questioning, interviewees were asked to recall one primary shopping motive and one secondary motive. Across primary and secondary motives, socialisation and escape were reported to be the two common consumption motives of interviewees. That is, interviewees, who mentioned 'socialisation' as a primary motive, would likely report 'escape' as a secondary motive and vice versa. In terms of socialisation, most interviewees emphasised that they would not have gone for entertainments without the companionship of partners, friends or family members. This may indicate that interviewees treated entertainment consumption as an opportunity of sharing and strengthening social bond with their partners, friends or family. Moreover, entertainment seems to offer great opportunities to socialise due to the variety of eateries, movie theatres and video arcades, as well as the presence of open spaces and benches in shopping centres (Feinberg, Sheffler, Meoli and Rummel, 1989). In terms of escape, interviewees reported entertainment as a relief of boredom and an escape from usual demands of life such as study, work or family. That is, entertainment in shopping centres seems to offer high level of sensory stimulation and an opportunity to forget problems. Supplementary to entertainment, many interviewees considered shopping centres as an easily accessible and low cost venue for affiliation and escape (Bloch, Ridgway and Dawson, 1994).

Entertainment. Interviewees sought to fulfil socialisation and escape motives through going movie (specialty entertainment), dining out (food) and having a snack (food), in which going

movie was mentioned most frequently. This finding also highlights that specialty entertainment and food are in the evoked set of interviewees. On other hand, special event entertainment such as fashion shows were not mentioned, which indicates a lacking of interviewee awareness of this entertainment. Unlike specialty entertainment and food that compose the tenant mix of a shopping centre, special event entertainment is generally offered on an occasional and irregular basis, and thus shoppers' exposures to special event entertainment can be limited, resulting in minimal or no referral to such entertainment.

Consumption emotions. Consumption emotions are the affective responses to one's consumption of an experience (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1980). In this study, the emotive experiences that were commonly mentioned by interviewees included pleasure, happy, relaxed, content, free, hopeful, interested, uncrowded, stimulated, unimportant and excited. The result seems to indicate that interviewees had clear recollection of episodes of specific emotions and the events that triggered those emotions.

Emotions congruency and overall satisfaction. The aim of this study is to explore the congruency effect between consumption motives and emotions in influencing overall satisfaction of entertainment-seeking shoppers. Some researchers have posited that consummation of consumption motives provides the rewarding properties of internal states, involving position emotion (Deci, 1975; Holbrook, Chestnut, Oliva and Greenleaf, 1984; Oliver, 1997; Tauber, 1972). In this study, most interviewees reported their overall satisfaction as ordinary, which suggest a match between consumption motives and emotive experiences. For example, interviewees who had socialisation as the motive and reported ordinary overall satisfaction were those experiencing emotions congruency. That is, interviewees experienced 'as expected' social feelings in terms of relaxed, less crowded and excited. Similarly, emotions congruency emerged when interviewees with escape motive experiencing 'as expected' escapism feelings in terms of free, stimulated and interested, and thus ordinary overall satisfaction was reported. This study also found that pleasure was deemed to be the fundamental emotion of overall satisfaction. On the other hand, few interviewees reported extraordinary overall satisfaction implying the occurrence of higher emotions congruency. That is, interviewees experienced 'better than expected' feelings of social and escapism. Despite that there were insufficient cases to be conclusive on this point, there is an indication that both primary and secondary motives of shoppers will need to be exceeded by positive emotions in order to induce greater overall satisfaction.

Managerial Implications

This study indicatively suggests that consumption motives of shoppers should be congruent with their emotions in order to achieve overall satisfaction. In order to create greater overall satisfaction, shopping centre management may consider designing entertainment that elicits stronger positive emotions to exceed the consumption motives of entertainment-seeking shoppers. That is, management may bundle a variety of entertainments (movies, dining and lucky draws) into one promotion package in order to generate a sense of *unexpectedness*, which may lead to delight or greater satisfaction. The in-depth interviews revealed that many interviewees consumed entertainment at a shopping centre on a regular basis, and thus they have an ordinary attitude to the consumption. As one interviewee said 'it was ordinary as I have visited the shopping centre many times. I knew what to expect. No particular incidents happened to make it better or worse than expected.' This may imply a lack of excitement and novelty in a shopping centre as a whole. Thus, in order to create greater satisfaction, management may consider offering a sense of excitement or novelty through special event

entertainment such as mini concerts or treasure-hunt competition. Indeed, the exciting entertainment experience could serve as a means of image differentiation between competing shopping centres.

Limitations and Future Research

Like all exploratory research, there are number of limitations involved with this study. The findings of this research are indicative due to the small convenience university sample. Thus, future research should replicate these findings by using a larger number and other samples. Moreover, future studies adopting quantitative approach would be valuable to provide statistical predictions in building on the emotions-congruency model.

This study may provide a starting point for the exploration of emotions congruency concerning shoppers' overall satisfaction. This paper suggests that the greater the congruency between consumption motives and shoppers' emotions (evoked by entertainment), the more favourable the evaluation, and thus the greater the overall satisfaction. A majority of the interview responses seem to conform to the emotions congruency theoretical model. This indicates that the emotions congruency model can be promising and deserving further research development. However, there are small ambiguous responses that less corresponded to the model. Therefore, further revision of the model is required. Preliminary analysis of the misfit responses suggests more explicit research on multiple consumption motives and emotional consequences.

There may also be a scope to examine other influences such as the role of telepresence in the shopping centre environment. Telepresence refers to the compelling sense of being present in a mediated environment (Kim and Biocca, 1997; Steuer, 1992). That is, it is a mental state in which a user feels physically present within a synthetic environment. Similar to a computer-mediated environment, the shopping centre is a fabricated or simulated sensory environment (Barbatsis, 1999). That is, shopping centres are carefully designed and constructed, both interior and exterior, in order to stimulate shopping experiences. In particular, shopping centres are environmentally controlled in terms of temperature, lighting and background music (Levy and Weitz, 1998). All these environmental stimuli may trigger shoppers' perceptions of being present in another place that is distinct from the physical environment outside shopping centres. Indeed, telepresence might be used as a surrogate indicator of shoppers' immersions in entertainment consumption. That is, the greater the sense of telepresence, the greater intensity of emotions, which might in turn influence emotions congruency and thus overall satisfaction.

Conclusion

This study provides a starting point for the exploration of the consumption experience of entertainment-seeking shoppers. Rather than focusing on expectations and perceived performance of entertainment per se, shopping centre management should also understand and manage shoppers' motives and feelings about their entertainment consumption in order to generate greater satisfaction.

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