Guest editorial

Understanding experiential consumption: theoretical advancement and practical implication

Extant literature has revealed differences in hedonic and utilitarian consumption, in terms of consumption needs, motives, goals, values, emotions and benefit seeking (Chitturi *et al.*, 2007; Jiang and Wang, 2006; Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982; Dhar and Wertenbroch, 2000; Wang *et al.*, 2000). However, there are limited studies that focus on experiential approach of decision-making, including leisure, recreation, entertainment and luxury consumption experience. The distinction of hedonic vs utilitarian consumption will help to predict and explain the different impacts of affect in consumer satisfaction (Batra and Ahtola, 1991).

In leisure/hedonic consumption where the primitive motives are to have sensory experiences of aesthetic, sensual, pleasure, fantasy and fun or feel other desired arousal experiences such as excitement and thrill, instead of the task being fulfilled. Consumer affect also significantly influence conspicuous consumption of luxury or high end brands in which hedonic experience is vital to decision-making (Huang and Wang, 2018). While perceived quality is often considered a rational judgment, it can be influenced by affective response or feelings in hedonic consumption as well. As such, besides a functional quality, there can be affect-quality (Russell, 1980) or emotional-induced quality (Darden and Babin, 1994), which are evaluated based on affective expectations or hedonic needs. For instance, in consumer decision-making hierarchy, affective heuristics are often used when consumption goal or expectation is driven by hedonic rather than instrumental motives (Pham, 1998). Affective responses, such as pleasure and arousal can be important outcomes that consumers use to assess perceived quality which elicit satisfaction/ dissatisfaction based on whether expected affective goals are met (Jiang and Wang, 2006). In addition, consumer affective involvement in brand experience create value for consumer engagement in brand community or brand fandom (Wang, 2020), which leads devoted and often fanatic consumer behavior, eventually enhancing the heightened brand equity and brand sacralization (Wang *et al.*, 2018, 2019).

Given the importance of consumer affect and experience in consumption process in consumer perception, motivation, attitude and product evaluation and decision-making, this special issue is to extend the research scope and advance knowledge development in consumer decision-making process. The research scope covers all stages of consumer decision-making process, from pre-consumption needs, information search attributes and determinant criteria, choice and selection, to consumption and post-consumption experience and behavior (quality evaluation and satisfaction, loyalty and word-of-mouth). This special issue covers a wide range of interesting topics that investigate experiential consumption through different theoretical approaches and methodologies.

Consumer satisfaction is often resulted from consumption experience that meets or not meets their prior expectation or consumption goal. In particular, consumer would anticipate different experiences for utilitarian and hedonic services and such different goals would have different impact on product/service satisfaction. Wang and Jiang explore consumers' consumption goals in three different service contexts, i.e., a primarily pleasure-seeking hedonic service context, a primarily arousal-seeking hedonic service context and a utilitarian (non-affect-seeking) service context. Their empirical studies show that the primary affective consumption goal determines which specific affect can directly influence satisfaction. Other desirable non-primary affect influences satisfaction through the mediation of perceived service quality. The study provides several insights for service providers and retailers to

recognize that that consumer' primary consumption goals may vary in different service contexts, for different consumers, and even at different usage situations.

Affect in consumption process also influence consumer product evaluation. In their empirical study, Wu, Cai and He examine how incidental emotions interact with brand concepts that are represented as human values to influence consumers' attitude toward brands. The results from their experimental studies reveal that that the motivational congruency between incidental emotions and brand concepts leads to favorable consumer responses toward the targeted brand by inducing an experience of fluency. However, such effect only emerges among consumers with a high construal-level. As a result, their study provides a new insight about the effect of brand concept represented as human values by identifying the role of situational factors (incidental emotions) and personal factors (chronic construal level).

Luxury products mostly satisfy consumer hedonic needs such as self-expression and social status. For instance, luxury brands bring hedonic experience to consumers since a brand often expresses symbolic value that associates consumer identity. In their study, Li, Guo, Zhang and Sun inspect the effect of conspicuous consumption on brand attitudes in the context of luxury brands market in China. Results from two experimental studies show that self-brand association mediates the relationship between social class and conspicuous consumption. Moreover, the negative effect on self-brand association of observing conspicuous brand usage varies by social classes. Such findings have important implications for luxury brand management, and provides rich insights into consumers' motivations that lead to distinctive luxury consumption behaviors.

How a product presents luxury experience to consumer will also impact consumer brand attitudes. With fast development of technology, augmented reality has emerged as a novel communication tool adding virtual computer-generated information to a viewer's real life. In their four experiments Cui, Xu, Zhang and Yang particularly look into the effect of augmented reality technology on consumers' experience. The results reveal that self-referencing reality simulation mediates the effect of AR-technology on consumers' product attitude, and the effect is attenuated when the consumers hold quality beliefs rather than taste beliefs or when the product is a luxury brand. Consequently, the authors suggest that managers should develop and adopt AR technology when presenting their products in front of consumers, which can improve consumers' product attitude. Besides, emphasizing the taste of target products rather than quality will strengthen the positive effect of AR technology on product attitude.

The effect of advertising on consumer evaluation is also related to the self-presentation styles. Zeng, Li, Wang and Guo propose that the self-presentation styles of advertising influence consumer self-image, which, in turn, influence purchase intention. Using virtual brands as stimuli in a series of experiments, their study found that consumer self-image mediates the relationship between advertising self-presentation style and purchase intention. Meanwhile, self-enhancing advertising promotes customers' ideal self, which in turn increases their purchase intention for publicly consumed products, whereas self-deprecating advertising solicits customers' real self, which in turn increases their purchase intention for privately consumed products.

Product design is a dynamic factor that triggers customers' experiential value that eventually escalate their satisfaction. Sabir analyzes how design dimensions (i.e. symbolic and functional) create experiential value that influences customer satisfaction based on a survey of smartphone user. The results demonstrate that affect (i.e. pleasure and arousal) fully mediates the relationship between symbolic dimension and satisfaction and partially mediation the relation between functional dimension and satisfaction. Thus, the results provide managerial insights into creating appealing products for consumers to provide them memorable experience by designing their positioning and differentiating strategies in the competitive business environment.

Brand recognition is a fundamental step in the consumer's decision-making journey. However, the role of emotional experiences and their interaction with placement

characteristics on brand recognition has yet to be examined. It is important to know how emotion in advertising influences brand recognition in advertising or product placement. Song, Chan and Wu investigate the interaction effect of placement characteristics and emotional experiences on consumers' recognition of placed brands based on emotional process theory and cognitive capacity theory incorporating placement characteristics, emotional experiences and brand recognition. The results from an experimental study indicated that three placement characteristics (i.e. prominence, serial positions and plot connection) had significant effects on brand recognition. Placement characteristics and emotional experiences also interacted to influence the recognition of placed brands.

The fast technology development has significantly increasing the growth of game industry, in which plays satisfy their needs for fun, entrainment and fantasy. Online game playing is an experiential consumption that involves virtual (on-line) spaces. Team collaboration or confrontation in online game activities is an important mechanism for creating social dynamics among players and increasing players' loyalty to the game. Lou, Zu and Zhu look into the impact of playing motivation on team member selection (TMS) in online games. The findings from a survey of game players show that social motivation and immersion motivation have a significant effect on TMS. Such results thus provide guidelines for online game designers and organizers to enhances consumer experience when motivating players to work in groups.

Online game can also serve other functions that involving participation in various activities through gamification design. Fan, Jiao and Lin explore the influencing mechanism of reward mechanism of virtual customer social responsibility (CSR) game on customer continuance intention to participate in social value co-creation. Based on three scenario simulation experiments, these authors found that gamification design elements of virtual corporate social responsibility game has impacts on continuance intention to participate in social value co-creation. The results also demonstrate that psychological benefit plays a moderating role between game reward mechanism and customers' intention to continuously participation. From managerial perspective, their study provides insights for marketers on the planning and design of CSR strategy.

In the digital age, there is fast growing trend of online stores that has changed consumer shopping behavior. Wu, Wang and Li examine online store characteristics based on perception of overall online store environmental cues. The authors propose that online stores possess both informative and entertaining dimensions. Survey results of Chinese online shoppers showed that the relationship between online store informativeness and entertainment with consumer approach behavior is mediated by pleasure. In addition, hedonic value moderated the effect of informativeness, but not the entertainment, on consumers' approach behaviors.

When consumers are exposed to advertising stimuli, they may feel self-threat under certain situations. Zhao, Song, Jin, Cui and Li examine the influence of perceived control on product preferences of consumers under self-threat. Based on four experimental studies, the authors found that when consumers faced threats, those who have a higher perceived control are more likely to adopt problem-focused coping strategies and show a preference for self-growth goods, which can help them resolve their threats. However, when consumers have a lower perceived control on the threats, they are more likely to adopt emotion-focused coping strategies and show a preference for hedonic goods, which can help them adjust their emotions. Such results shed insight on understanding the factors that affect consumers' preferences for products in self-threat situations, thus contributing to marketing practices.

Cultural identity plays an important role in consumption scape and may also influence product adoption. Wu, Wang and Li develop and validate a measurement scale for the cultural identity framework that examines experience-related cognitions and identifies the positive and negative emotional dimensions of the construct that applies to traditional

Chinese medicine consumers in China. The results generate a cultural identity scale, including cognitive, emotional and behavioral dimensions. The authors conclude that government should incorporate cultural identity to undertake globalization projects to enhance the image and scientific status of traditional Chinese medicine.

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Further reading

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