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Consumption Experience: Past, Present and Future

Introduction

Many concepts have been presented in the marketing field as possible breakpoints able to lead to radical shifts and a redesign of the theoretical frameworks of the discipline. However, despite the proliferation of discourses announcing the emergence of a new landscape for marketing apt to revitalize the discipline (Cova and Cova, 2009), only a few of those concepts ultimately hold such promises.

Undoubtedly, this is not the case for the concept of ‘consumption experience’, as conceptualized by Holbrook and Hirschman in their seminal article ‘The experiential aspects of consumption: consumer fantasies, feelings and fun’, published in 1982 in the *Journal of Consumer Research*. Beyond the growing interest in this concept from academics (see Figure 1), the concept of consumption experience has led to three fundamental changes. First, it has motivated marketing scholars to redesign theoretical frameworks. Second, it has spurred a renewal of methodological tools. Third, the concept has advocated for new managerial approaches toward the consumer. Notwithstanding the (legitimate) criticisms that have accompanied this revolution (Ritzer, 1999; Carù and Cova, 2003; Denegri-Knott and Zwick, 2012), there is no denial that even 35 years after their work, Holbrook and Hirschman’s concept is still explored by marketing scholars and applied by practitioners.

The aims of this special issue are thus to compile an inventory of extant research on the notion of consumption experience and to present propositions for future research on the topic. Such an inventory is necessary because consumers are increasingly exhibiting a desire for experiences, even from mundane service offerings. Beyond this quest for experiences, many changes that have occurred in the environment since Holbrook and Hirschman’s notion of

experience in 1982 motivate the need for such an inventory. Digital and social media (Kapoor *et al.*, 2017), collaborative consumption and the sharing economy all represent sources of changes in the ways consumers live the consumption experience (Hamari *et al.*, 2016). Furthermore, sustainability represents another important trend that affects every aspect of consumption, including its experiential component (Ulusoy, 2016). Changes have also occurred in retailing and consumer services, with new forms of store environments and the massive development of self-service technology (Grewal *et al.*, 2017a). Thus, the following question remains to be addressed: what are the major trends in marketing research on the theme of experience?

To provide relevant answers to this question, this special issue presents a selection of works that bring reflections on consumption experience and is organized as follows: first, this article takes a retrospective look at the origin of the concept of consumption experience and identifies the theoretical, methodological and managerial disruptions in marketing that it has prompted. Second, the article proposes a critical view of consumption experience by identifying and examining its various conceptualizations, some of which are potentially biased and even ideological. Third, the article suggests future avenues for research on the consumption experience from both macro- ('zoom-out') and micro-analytic ('zoom-in') perspectives. Finally, the conclusion lists the articles selected in this special issue and describes how they echo reflections that have been or need to be initiated on consumption experience.

Retrospective look at consumption experience

In the marketing literature, the introduction of the concept of consumer experience was a major (r)evolution on the theoretical, methodological and managerial levels. The aim of this first section is to take a retrospective look at these different disruptions that can be

considered the foundations of current major trends in marketing research, such as consumer culture theory (CCT) or the service-dominant logic.

Theoretical disruptions

Holbrook and Hirschman's (1982) notion of consumption experience stems partly from the limitations of cognitive frameworks that served as the dominant models to explain consumer behavior until the 1980s. These information-processing models describe consumer behavior as the process of collecting and processing information to select the most satisfactory option for a decision problem (Bettman, 1979). When consumers are confronted with a problem of choice, they seek, acquire and process the information that leads them to an affective judgment and then a decision. This sequence, in turn, led to one of the first complete explanations of the consumer decision-making process with the widely recognized cognition–affect–behavior model (Engel *et al.*, 1978; Bettman, 1979). However, one of the main weaknesses of this model lies in the limited attention given to emotions. Specifically, affective states here are only considered a preference or a residue of cognitive activities. In response to this model, some authors (e.g. Sheth, 1979; Zajonc and Markus, 1982) began questioning the sequence of cognitive and affective states and brought evidence to the notion that in many circumstances, affective reactions precede the cognitive process. A real step was made when Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) proposed an alternative model to understand consumer behavior through an experiential lens—namely, the thought–emotion–activity–value model. In this sequential model, thought refers to dreams, imagination and fantasy; emotion includes all forms of feelings, sensations, expressive behaviors and physiological responses; activity includes all physical and mental events; and value refers to the final evaluative judgment.

Holbrook and Hirschman's experiential model prompted three major theoretical evolutions. First, it underscored the existence of primary processes of fantasies, feelings and fun (what Holbrook and Hirschman called the 'Three Fs'), thus rebalancing consumer behavior research from a purely functional and utilitarian perspective of consumption to a perspective emphasizing the existence of hedonistic values. Consumers are therefore regarded not only as seeking the utility the attributes of a product or service provide but also as being interested in living hedonic experiences. Nevertheless, such an experiential approach does not neglect cognitive processes; rather, it considers those processes unconscious and thus integrated within the imagination and dreams. This first evolution formed the basis of an extremely rich literature on the utilitarian versus hedonic orientation of consumption (e.g. Babin *et al.*, 1994; Voss *et al.*, 2003). Second, the experiential model led to a shift from a research focusing primarily on consumers' buying decisions to research centered on consumption *per se*. Rather than examining sets of variables that can influence search and information processing, the marketing literature has turned to the study of consumer practices, product–consumer interactions and the meanings associated with products (Holt, 1995; Arnould *et al.*, 2002). A long-term consequence of this re-orientation has been a switch in the study of consumption outcomes, from an initial focus on satisfaction viewed, as a result, as consumer–product interaction to a focus on the emotions consumers experience (Havlena and Holbrook, 1986). Third, while information-processing models consider information an important driver of behavior, the experiential model rather favors internal factors (Bourgeon and Filser, 1995), such as variety (McAlister and Pessemier, 1982) or sensory stimulation seeking (Raju, 1980). The literature thus now recognizes the subjectivity of consumers and their ability to orient their consumption according to their own desires and emotions. These various developments have led to a wide body of research on consumption experience, growing continuously until today, as Figure 1 depicts.

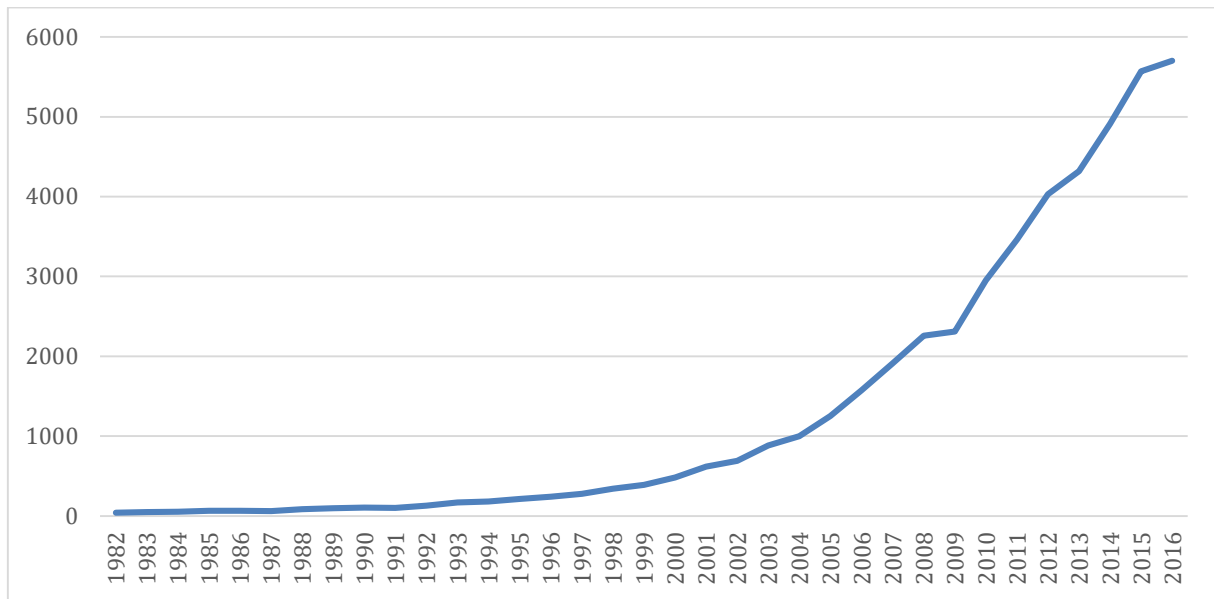


Figure 1. References to ‘consumer experience’ or ‘consumption experience’ in the literature since 1982 (source: Google Scholar)

Following this extremely prolific literature, some authors have tried to propose integrative models. For example, the dynamic model of affective response (Cohen and Areni, 1991), the consciousness emotion value model (Holbrook, 1986), and, more recently, the experiential decision model (Kwortnik and Ross, 2007) all aim to provide a more integrated view of the literature, thus introducing a vision in three phases. The first phase involves the antecedents of experience, or the individual and environmental elements that drive consumption. The second refers to the content of the experience *per se*, or what consumers think, feel and do during the act of consumption. The third encompasses the consequences of the experience, at both the individual and inter-individual levels.

Another kind of disruption emerged from the introduction of the consumption experience concept, especially the recognition of consumers as individuals able to act on their experiences (Cova and Cova, 2009). In line with the subjectivity of the individual emphasized by the experiential model, the literature suggests here that it is not enough to create

sophisticated experiential contexts; the consumer must also engage and interact with them. In this perspective, individuals are not regarded as passive but as searching for meanings and being fully involved in their consumption activity. This view puts the interaction between the consumer and the product at the core of the experiential paradigm, as proposed by Kwortnik and Ross (2007), who consider the consumption experience a pleasurable and meaningful interaction of the consumer with the product. This reasoning of the consumer as an active individual was the first step toward the ‘prosumer’ figure (Cova and Cova, 2009; Ritzer and Jurgenson, 2010), in which the consumer brings own resources and skills to co-create value with the company, as suggested by the service-dominant logic (Vargo and Lusch, 2008).

Methodological renewals

The various theoretical disruptions introduced by the development of the notion of consumption experience have also been accompanied by a methodological renewal in the tools used by marketing scholars. While quantitative approaches have also been used in the experiential field (e.g. Novak *et al.*, 2000; Brakus *et al.*, 2009; Pijls *et al.*, 2017), the notion of consumption experience has fostered a significant expansion of qualitative approaches (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1992) through interpretative and semiotic methods (Mick, 1986). Researchers have employed a multitude of methodologies to understand and characterize consumer experiences. These methods entail ethnographic approaches, whereby researchers rely on participant observation and interviews, and involve the immersion of the researcher within a context of consumption to understand what is at play (Arnould and Price, 1993; Maclaran and Brown, 2005). Another method is netnography, or the immersion of the researcher within a virtual community to better apprehend online experiences (Kozinets, 2002). Introspections, involving a return of individuals on themselves and on what they have experienced and lived, have also been used (Wallendorf and Brucks, 1993; Holbrook, 2006d).

Some tools, such as life narratives and consumer diaries (Roederer, 2012), or visual approaches through images and videos (Peñaloza, 1998; Belk and Kozinets, 2005; Belk *et al.*, 2017) have also been used more often since the introduction of the experiential paradigm. What these different qualitative approaches have made possible is an in-depth identification of the elements structuring the consumption experience, what consumers experience during consumption and what they derive from this activity on a personal level. From a more general perspective, these new methodological approaches enlarged the toolbox of marketing research and generated a non-superficial consumer orientation (Badot *et al.*, 2009).

With the emergence of the CCT, a deep understanding of the cultural context in which consumers are embedded is required to better appraise their relationship with markets and companies (Askegaard and Linnet, 2011). Individuals use consumption as a tool for social integration but also for the construction of their identities. Focusing on the cultural and social dimensions of consumption, CCT thus represents an additional step in the complexification of the act of purchase after the recognition of emotions by Holbrook and Hirschman (1982). Although the link between CCT and qualitative methodologies is not systematic (Arnould and Thompson, 2005), the understanding of experiential, sociological and cultural aspects of consumption usually requires the use of depth interviews, ethnographic methods or netnography, all tools whose democratization in the marketing literature has been a result of the experiential model.

Consumption experience: a powerful framework for managers

From a practitioner perspective, the notion of consumption experience also had a strong impact on the way companies conceive their offers. The experiential paradigm thus represents one of the few paradigms in marketing that offer real implications for managers (Schmitt, 1999a, 1999b, Brakus *et al.*, 2009). This managerial power of the experiential

model was highlighted by Pine and Gilmore (1998), who declared that consumers live in ‘the Experience Economy’ after having lived in an agrarian, an industrial and a service economy. This power can be measured through the number of different areas the concept has affected, but also transformed, including branding, retailing and communication. Indeed, the emergence of the notion of experience has provided an answer to companies wishing to build an offer with non-functional dimensions. In producing a strong and memorable experience, companies are better able to face the competition in the markets, to differentiate from the ‘Big Middle’ (Levy *et al.*, 2005)—generalized competition concentrated around the same positioning—and, ultimately, to attain customer loyalty through a re-enchanted offering. While not all companies must stage experiences to be profitable, as meaningfully highlighted by the authors of the economy of experience themselves (Pine and Gilmore, 1998, 1999), the consumption experience concept has led managers to reflect on the global positioning of their brands (Filser, 2002), their product designs and their communications (Schmitt, 1999a).

Regarding branding, as well as communication, it has become no surprise to face brands that saliently position themselves around the notion of experience (Filser, 2002). In this regard, Milligan and Smith (2002: xi) provided clear examples of managers of large companies (e.g. Harley-Davidson, Harrah’s, Amazon.com) who share the belief that “the customer experience is what matters and that [human resources], operations, strategy and marketing are interdependent in delivering that experience [...] What we mean by brand, therefore, is not the artificial projection of an image protected by a trademark, but the genuine delivery of a unique experience promised by a brand name”. What this belief implies is a shift in the branding area, where brands may now be considered entities whose goal is mainly to compete to offer the most desirable and memorable experience. An important consequence of such a view is that experience becomes the most important criterion to judge brands.

Experience has also affected branding, due to its ability to strengthen relationships between consumers and brands. The most important and cited analysis of this phenomenon was proposed by Fournier (1988) and is based on relationship theory. The analysis suggests that consumers form relationships with brands that evolve over time and whose quality and stability are influenced by marketing actions. An important insight from this research lies in the identification of brand as conveying meanings that create an experience and prompt the development of long-lasting relationships. Experience thus appears to be an outcome of brand usage that depends on the positioning of and meanings conveyed by the brand and that is able to explain why consumers decide to create and maintain a relationship with one or more specific brands.

Another field that has been the subject of deep changes due to the experience notion is retailing, probably the empirical setting in which experience has been the most widely examined and proved particularly influential (e.g. Machleit and Eroglu, 2000; Arnold *et al.*, 2005; Grewal *et al.*, 2009; Puccinelli *et al.*, 2009; Dolbec and Chebat, 2013). Retailers have widely used the experiential approach to propose an extraordinary experience, and this approach has led to the emergence of complex and refined retail environments such as brandscapes, flagship stores and brand museums (Sherry, 1998; Kozinets *et al.*, 2002; Borghini *et al.*, 2009). In this particular field, a striking result is thus the identification of experience as a reason *per se* for consumers to visit stores. The retail stores where atmosphere and mix offer some thematization (Ritzer, 1999) are the most likely to elicit an experience and represent an escape for people who want to find some fun in their everyday lives (Kaltcheva and Weitz, 2006). In this regard, experience seems to be a reason for the emergence of themed flagship brand stores, where people go not only to purchase products but also to experience the brand, company and products (Kozinets *et al.*, 2002; Borghini *et al.*, 2009). Thus, it seems that, as what is observed with brands, experience becomes the criterion that

consumers rely on to decide which stores to visit. The managerial impact of experience may thus be evaluated on its ability to prompt customers to enter the stores that can create an experience. However, while the creation of a memorable experience may be relevant in such places, the risk of offering a too-sophisticated experience can arise when it comes to convenience stores (Bäckström and Johansson, 2006). For the purpose of integrating the functional and symbolic components of retailing, Verhoef *et al.* (2009) proposed a general framework in which consumer experience in a retail environment is the consequence not only of consumers' past experiences but also of several aspects managed by retailers: the social environment, the service interface, the retail atmosphere, the assortment, the price, the retail brand and consumer experiences in alternatives channels (Verhoef *et al.*, 2009).

While the experiential approach has tremendously changed retailing, it has affected other industries as well, including tourism. The reason for such changes due to the experience paradigm in tourism lies in the focus of this industry on the production of memorable experiences (Otto and Richie, 1996; St-James and Taylor, 2004; Tumbat and Belk, 2011). In addition, the experience notion has dramatically affected the field of services, mostly because of the role of the co-created experience between the service provider and the consumer during transactions (Vargo and Lusch, 2008; Zomerdijk and Voss, 2010). The cultural field has also been affected, mostly because of consumers' search for lived experiences or experiences that go beyond utilitarian functions (Bourgeon and Filser, 1995; Oliver *et al.*, 1997). The list of affected fields could also include luxury, because the mere interaction with the product can generate a source of pleasure and gratification (Desmet and Hekkert, 2007; Atwal and Williams, 2017), or even industrial marketing (Hadjikhani and LaPlaca, 2013).

This discussion suggests that the consumption settings in which consumers can live experiences have become common, making consumers desire an experience from even mundane service offerings, such as coffee shops or quick-service restaurants (Kwortnik,

2010). While this spread of experiences across different empirical contexts may be considered healthy and promising for consumers in the quest for delightful and emotion-driven encounters, the question arises whether the proliferation of companies positioning their offers as experiences will turn such experiences into one so-called value-creating strategy that is no longer differentiating. In other words, if consumers can find experience anywhere, in any store, with any brand, during any travel event, how can companies that rely on experiences achieve differentiation? No answer is provided here, but the question is important in an era in which even the most mundane companies struggle to cater to the customer experience.

Toward a critical view of consumption experience

Although the consumption experience has become a cornerstone of the marketing literature for academics and practitioners, this success is not without risks for the development of a scientific and non-ideological view of experience (Carù and Cova, 2003). The aim of this second section is to examine the theoretical risks associated with a biased conceptualization of the consumption experience. As Figure 1 shows, hundreds of academic articles have been written in an effort to explain consumer experience and its related responses. The main conclusion of decades of research in branding, retailing and advertising comes down to the notion that providing consumers with a consumption or shopping experience is a robust predictor of loyalty. Even the popular press is replete with stories on the impact of consumer experience on consumer shopping behavior. Thus, experience has emerged as one of only a handful of key building blocks in marketing theory, as well as practice in which the eras of retailing and branding have emphasized customer experience as a measuring stick of consumers' overall response to marketing stimuli.

This importance of experience in both marketing theory and practice makes clear the need for its precise conceptualization. Given the number of articles (for reviews, see

Holbrook, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c; Grewal *et al.*, 2009) and books (e.g. Pine and Gilmore, 1999; Schmitt, 1999c; Shaw and Ivens, 2002; Smith and Wheeler, 2002; LaSalle and Britton, 2003) dedicated to experience in marketing, one might wonder what more could be said about consumer experience from a theoretical standpoint. Yet experience diagnostic is often restricted by problems with its conceptualization. Specifically, at least two issues related to the conceptualization of experience in the literature can be identified. First, given the consistency of the findings related to the positive effects of experience, it is surprising to note the heterogeneity among the conceptualizations researchers use to describe experience. While some researchers describe experience as an affective state, others define it as cognitive, and still others suggest a multi-dimensional conceptualization of experience that includes both cognitions and emotions. Second—partially as a consequence of the first problem and probably the most confusing—are cases in which the same term ‘experience’ is used to refer to very different constructs. This lack of clarity on experience has been costly to its study in theoretical, empirical and practical terms. We discuss these two issues next.

A mixture of conceptualizations of experience

The experiential approach initiated by Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) focuses on the ‘Three Fs’. With feelings and fun referring respectively to (1) the multifaceted array of emotions that accompany consumption situations and (2) the enjoyment of activities, the experiential view of consumption was initially regarded as one that clearly and heavily weighs the influence of affective states in consumption or shopping decisions. However, Holbrook and Hirschman themselves recognized that an experience cannot only be affective in nature and that the prevailing information-processing perspective could still explain much of buyer behavior. Indeed, they recognized the need of not fully abandoning the view of the consumer as a rational human being but also as one who responds to emotions when

consuming, shopping or even confronting ads. Specifically, they recognized the inclusion of cognitions in the experience but emphasized that the experiential perspective focuses on cognitive processes that are more subconscious, as opposed to those that are involved in the information-processing perspective and are fully conscious. It is thus in this vein that Verhoef *et al.* (2009: 32) decided to retain in the field of retailing a mixed conceptualization of the experience that involves both cognitions and emotions, with experience defined as something that is “holistic in nature and involve[s] the customer’s cognitive, affective, emotional, social and physical responses to the retailer. This experience is created not only by those factors that the retailer can control (e.g., service interface, retail atmosphere, assortment, price), but also by factors outside of the retailer’s control (e.g., influence of others, purpose of shopping)”.

However, some researchers did not follow this path, instead conceptualizing and measuring experience as either only cognitive or only affective. With respect to the view of experience comprising only cognitions, some authors proposed viewing product experience as something that occurs when consumers interact with products—for example, when they search for, examine and evaluate products (Hoch, 2002; Brakus *et al.*, 2009). With such a definition, where is the notion of experience, at least an experience viewed under the lens of the experiential paradigm? The definition of product experience here seems to offer no more than that from the information-processing view, in which consumers cognitively process products of interest to make a decision.

The research stream dedicated to ‘flow’ (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) retains the same ‘cognitive-only’ view of experience. Investigating how consumers behave when navigating the web, Novak *et al.* (2000) identified experience as a flow only, which refers to a cognitive state experienced during online navigation that is determined by high levels of skill, control, arousal and focused attention. Here, no notion of affective reactions is made; rather, experience on the web only occurs from a wide array of cognitive reactions that, when

combined, lead consumers to the optimal experience, described as flow. What is striking is that even when considering the same setting of navigation on the web, experience can be conceptualized in different ways. For example, in contrast with the ‘cognitive-only’ view of experience as flow, Menon and Kahn (2002) retained an ‘affective-only’ view of experience derived from the two emotions of pleasure and arousal.

A last issue involves key articles on experience that, despite their value to the experience field, do not even specify what they call ‘experience’. For example, Puccinelli *et al.* (2009) identified seven consumer behavior research domains that influence the customer experience, including (1) goals, schemas, and information processing; (2) memory; (3) involvement; (4) attitudes; (5) affect; (6) atmospherics; and (7) consumer attributions and choices, but did not provide a definition of experience. While such a lack of conceptualization might be acceptable for articles that do not focus on a single concept, it represents a strong limitation for articles that claim they propose a review of the leverages of customer experience management.

The differences in the conceptualizations of experience may be due to the variety of settings in which experiences can arise. For example, experiences can be acquired when consumers shop, buy, and consume products or even when they see ads or browse on websites. This variety of contexts has led to a strong heterogeneity among the constructs researchers use to describe experience, such as brand experience (Brakus *et al.*, 2009), shopping experience (Machleit and Eroglu, 2000; Arnold *et al.*, 2005; Bäckström, 2011), retail brand experience (Khan and Rahman, 2015), service experience (Vazquez *et al.*, 2001), consumption experience (Bäckström and Johansson, 2006; Santoro and Troilo, 2007), and aesthetic experience (Charters and Pettigrew, 2005). Such a variety of definitions for one construct is surprising; moreover, using many different definitions for the same construct may have interfered with the accumulation of research findings. With one term being defined

differently by researchers across different settings, reviewers may conclude that the findings are inconsistent and even contradictory, when instead it is the many definitions used to define experience that are inconsistent and potentially contradictory. We next explore the specific case of the potential overlap between experience and related constructs—notably value.

Experience as a driver of, a response to, or a synonym of value?

In addition to the ambivalence surrounding the nature of experience as being affective, cognitive or a combination of the two, an important but inconsistent body of research that links consumer experience with value has emerged. Such research represents an opportunity for marketers who want to understand how experience can enhance customer loyalty through value. In this regard, multiple researchers have demonstrated the role of experience in customer value (e.g. de Ruyter *et al.*, 1997; Mathwick *et al.*, 2002; Jones *et al.*, 2006; Bonnefoy-Claudet *et al.*, 2015; Terblanche, 2018). This view of experience as a determinant of value creation derives from the foundation of the experiential paradigm, with Holbrook (1999, 2006d) conceptualizing experience as an interactive, relativistic preference that underlies the creation of all customer value.

However, this stream of research linking experience with value becomes problematic when the results conflict. In contrast with research showing an effect of experience on value, some researchers have begun proposing and showing the opposite effect, in which value drives the experience, consequently treating customer value as a phenomenon that enhances customer experience (Sandström *et al.*, 2008; Heinonen *et al.*, 2010).

As with the conceptualization of experience that is sometimes not clear enough, another issue pertaining to research on experience and value is the lack of a conceptual difference between the two concepts. Some researchers do not draw a clear line between experience and value, thus suggesting that they are overlapping, if not identical. In this regard,

Helkkula *et al.*'s (2012) study may be the most representative of this tendency to use the two concepts interchangeably. Their study merges the two concepts into a single concept referred to as 'value in the experience' or 'value that is directly or indirectly experienced by service customers within their phenomenological lifeworld contexts' (p. 61). In that specific case, value is an experience in itself, rather than an outcome of the experience.

This discussion highlights the emergence of research examining the combination of experience and value, in which the two concepts are sometimes so closely intertwined that they are indistinguishable from each other. From a research perspective, the time seems ripe for a more systematic distinction of the two concepts.

The future of consumption experience

Although the concept of consumption experience has generated abundant academic production and is one of the key notions for practitioners, thus introducing ruptures in marketing literature, there are still many potential avenues for further research on the topic. By taking up the metaphor of the 'telescope' (Vargo and Lusch, 2011) to look at a phenomenon, the possible avenues of research to enrich understanding of the consumption experience can be considered a priori from two perspectives: the 'zoom-out' perspective and the 'zoom-in' perspective (Leroy *et al.*, 2013). The zoom-out approach favors a macro-analytical level, and a decontextualized perspective of consumption experience makes it possible to develop a general and unified theoretical framework. By contrast, the zoom-in perspective favors a micro-analytical level and takes into account the idiosyncratic nature of the consumption experience and the characteristics of specific experiential contexts.

A zoom-out perspective

From a zoom-out perspective, and going back to Holbrook and Hirschman's (1982) approach, the question of formalization and an empirical test of a general model of consumption experience emerge as a first potential to stimulate fields of investigation. Several integrated models of decision making have been applied to experiential products (Holbrook, 1986; Cohen and Areni, 1991; Kwortnik and Ross, 2007). However, the concept of consumption experience calls for an extension of these models beyond the mere context of decision making through, for example, an integration of the phases of purchasing and consuming a product (Gallarza *et al.*, 2011). In addition, an overview of the literature indicates that empirical tests remain partial, with research focusing on the validation of specific relationships between concepts in these models (Kwortnik and Ross, 2007). As a consequence, these tests imperfectly render the depth, complexity and conceptual richness of the models. Even if this research issue raises important methodological challenges in testing an integrated model with complex processes (ranging from decision making to use and consumption), it also raises many interests. One is in developing a global vision of the consumer trajectory from decision making to consumer experience evaluation; another is analyzing the interaction between the different phases or clarifying the place of each concept (similar to the value concept) within these integrating models.

In parallel, further research on the different phases that make up the consumption experience is required to consolidate and enrich the existing integrating models. Arnould *et al.* (2002) consider consumption experience a process of four sequences: anticipation of the experience, purchasing of the experience, consumption of the experience and memory of the experience. Both the purchasing and consumption of experience have been the objects of most research on experience, leaving the phases on anticipation and memory less formalized. The anticipation of experience refers to the fantasy and the planning of the experience. This particular phase has received only limited attention so far (Seregina, 2014). Future research

could provide considerable value by analyzing the anticipation of the experience and, more specifically, the pre-experiential value derived from the fantasy and imagination of the experience. The way consumers anticipate and imagine the possible scenarios of their consumption experience could reveal fruitful information to researchers and practitioners, as would investigation of the articulation of this activity, the experience and the post-experience evaluation.

The specific phase of memory refers to the memorable aspect of the consumption experience. Although the concept of memory has been investigated in marketing (Marcoux, 2017), its articulation with the concept of consumption experience raises several questions, because it refers not to the immediate consequences of the experience (i.e., emotions, delight, satisfaction and value) but to the long-term effects. This research avenue, which appraises the strength of the link between the consumption experience and its memory, could be promising. Investigation of the means (e.g., resources, skills, practices) consumers mobilize to facilitate their retention of past experiences and the tools companies and brands use to facilitate this memory also represent an exciting avenue for further research.

Beyond an experience's capacity to be memorable to consumers, can the consumption experience provide a general feeling of fulfillment and thereby participate in consumers' overall quality of life? To generate insights, researchers could examine the link between consumption experience and well-being (Anderson *et al.*, 2013). They could also examine whether consumption experiences can generate collective rather than individual well-being and the potential stronger impact of extraordinary experiences on consumer well-being.

A zoom-in perspective

In contrast with the zoom-out approach, other potential future issues could favor a zoom-in perspective on consumption experience by examining specific experiential contexts

that raise new theoretical and methodological challenges. In this perspective, the retailing context has always been a suitable field for scholars (Grewal *et al.*, 2017a). Recent retailing strategies constitute an important source of renewal around the consumption experience. For example, multi-, cross- and omnichannel strategies, which combine physical and virtual channels, have led to the emergence of hybrid shopping experiences. The consumer is supposed to navigate easily and effortlessly between real and virtual shopping spaces (Verhoef *et al.*, 2015). In this context, the consumption experiences could be threefold: *brick & press*, *click & collect* or *research online/purchase offline*. This fragmented context raises the question of the conceptualization of the cross-channel shopping experience. Consumers' likelihood to engage in these multiple experiences also deserves attention (Grewal *et al.*, 2017b), as does the question whether such hybrid omnichannel experiences lead to value destruction (Neslin *et al.*, 2006).

In retailing environments, the hybridization of the consumption experience could take other forms. Some retailers no longer propose just playful and multi-sensory experiences that engage consumers in brand-related entertainment (Dion and Borraz, 2015); to refresh and extend their strategies, some also now incorporate artistic (Vukadin *et al.*, 2016) or educational (Chaney *et al.*, 2016) elements into the store environment. The dilution of the commercial function of the store prompted by the change in place through artistic and educational components distorts the shopping experience. This dilution questions the nature and structure of the consumption experience, redefining stores as third spaces (Oldenburg, 2001) and brands as cultural entrepreneurs (Holt, 2002).

The retailing context is not the only field affected by the question of the hybridization of the experience. The arts sector has also witnessed the emergence of the hybridization of consumption experience, as illustrated by places such as 'museoparks' (Mencarelli and Pulh, 2012), brand museums (Hollenbeck *et al.*, 2008) and exhibitions shows dedicated to brands

(Rodner and Preece, 2015). However, recent trends in the arts and cultural sector also raise the question of standardization of experience. While arts organizations historically evolve in prototype markets in which the creation of experiences is unique by definition (Colbert and St-James, 2014), the uncertainty generated by the launch of new cultural products becomes a powerful factor of imitation and leads to the emergence of reproductive conformity. This is the case, for example, when museums try to duplicate their presence in different geographic areas just like the Louvre or the Guggenheim (Kotler *et al.*, 2008). This phenomenon has also occurred in the movie industry, which is now developing sequels on a massive scale (Obst, 2014). This trend is more generally the case in cultural industries in which a similar experiential product is offered on multiple media platforms, or transmedia sequels (Brougère, 2013). This tendency leads to questions about the effects of such standardization on the consumption experience and, especially, on the possibility of satiation and even disenchantment (Denegri-Knott and Zwick, 2012).

Finally, the computer games industry is a promising area to renew the theoretical framework on consumption experience. Games have become an established line of the entertainment industry and are now an undeniable (sub-)culture of consumption. Their importance surpasses this industry in a strict sense because an increasingly gamification movement deals with products, services and organizational practices (Hamari *et al.*, 2017). Although virtual experiences lived while playing video games have been explored (Hamari and Keronen, 2017), many questions deserve clarification, especially from a representation and embodiment standpoint. First, video games lead to the duplication of the representation of the self in the digital world. When moving in the virtual world, the player must build an identity and often experiment with his or her individual identity through contact with a community (Sung *et al.*, 2011). This phenomenon leads to questions about the identity strategies consumers use in these virtual experiences, the construction of an extended self and

the possibility of a plural identity during digital experiences (Belk, 2013). Second, although virtual experiences may have been perceived as completely disembodied in the past, they now promote an embodiment through the use of a virtual body or even a real body thanks to the use of virtual reality (Boyd and Koles, 2017). This movement then questions the individual power to mobilize this body during a digital experience and the capacity of the body to make engagement and immersion, which are at the heart of a virtual experience, easier. Though not exhaustive, these avenues of research on the consumption experience, which are part of the zoom-out or zoom-in perspective, show that the consumption experience is still a particularly fruitful field for scholarship in marketing, even 35 years after Holbrook and Hirschman's (1982) seminal article.

Conclusion

As is emphasized throughout this article, the notion of the consumption experience has profoundly transformed marketing research, giving rise to a considerable number of studies. However, this article also highlights the many directions that remain to be explored, as illustrated by the selection of articles for this special issue.

The team of guest editors has the pleasure and honor of counting in this special issue an essay written by Morris Holbrook, one of the two pioneering authors at the origin of the consumption experience concept. Through introspection, Holbrook discusses the origins, developments and also the future of the concept of consumption experience that he himself introduced. This article offers a subjective perspective, complementary to the re-contextualization of the notion proposed herein.

Although the notion of escapism is intrinsically linked to consumer experience, it has always remained in the background. Cova, Caru and Cayla start from this observation and

propose a theoretical stance that offers a new conceptualization of escapism through different forms of escape: mundane, restorative, Turnerian and war-like.

Adopting a methodological lens in her article, Braz Becker discusses the importance and relevance of three different methods (phenomenological interviews, event-based approaches and diary methods) that are under-employed in marketing research but can be useful to examine consumer experiences.

Kwon and Kwon's study focuses on a contemporary consumer phenomenon: the selfie. In identifying the roles of consumers in the selfie experience, the authors identify several values, whether collaboratively or individually created, that individuals can derive from such an activity.

Finally, as suggested in this research agenda, several articles examine specific experiential contexts, including retailing, tourism and the arts. Nichols and Flint's article deals with retailing and examines consumers' shopping experiences from a competitive perspective. Contrary to what might be expected, they suggest that competition among consumers can create social bonds rather than division. Massa and Bédé investigate the field of tourism, more specifically a kind of experience little studied in the literature: the winery experience. Using netnography, they suggest that the winery experience is based on hedonic, economic, social and legacy values. Touzani *et al.* also examine tourism through off-track travelers. Through interviews and ethnography, they reveal how these consumers transform their unusual trips into an event through discovery, social and identity dimensions. Roederer and Filser's article focuses on museums. Evaluating the ZKM Museum in Karlsruhe, they propose a re-conceptualization of the museum experience as a mix of performance, stochastic and liberatory episodes.

As part of this special issue, all these articles contribute to a better understanding of the consumer experience concept from a theoretical, methodological and managerial

standpoint. Thanks to them, this special issue demonstrates that the concept remains just as powerful and relevant (if not more so) as it was when first introduced more than 35 years ago.

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