

Towards Attractive Experiences

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Abstract

Purpose

The main purpose of this paper is to develop the concept of commercial experiences, helping providers to satisfy their customers' needs and expectations.

Approach

Theories describing the concept of Commercial Experiences are analyzed through a quality perspective. The analysis was made through the Kano Model (Kano et. al. 1984), to build more knowledge about the customer's need and expectations.

Findings

The authors identify that focus on providing attributes of attractive quality can be a fundamental condition when providing commercial experiences. The paper raises the question for further discussion and future research to build more knowledge about the proposal that a commercial experience needs to contain attributes of attractive quality to actually fulfill the elements of a satisfying experience to the customer.

Value

This paper increases the understanding of providing commercial experiences and points out the need to work with attributes of attractive quality.

Introduction

There is an increasing demand of offers that provide the customer with a memorable experience today. More often we find companies through websites providing a smorgasbord of offers themed as “body & soul”, “adventure & excitement”, “recreation & sports”, “lifestyle & culture”, “food & beverages” etc. promoted as experiences. Along is the growing industry of products enabling customer experiences, i.e. computer games giving the customer an opportunity to transform into different characters and travel through various places. The customer is through the experience building a unique personal identity based on its participation and is searching for a personal growth or self-actualization (Gelter, 2006). Within this growing field of business opportunities of the so called “experience economy”, there is a need for deeper knowledge along with a great potential for development. To survive in the new economy, businesses must provide customers with memorable customer experiences (Kale, 2009). Understanding how to create and shape consumer experiences has become particularly important (Kale, 2009), (Pine & Gilmore, 1999), (Woodruff, 1997).

The key ingredients of a commercial experience are pointed out as being personally relevant to the customer and containing elements of novelty, surprise, learning and engagement (Poulsson & Kale, 2004) all leading to a memorable experience to the customer. Experiences can be defined as “an engaging act of co-creation between a provider and a consumer, wherein the consumer perceives value in the encounter and in the subsequent memory of that encounter” (ibid). If this is what more and more people are searching for and willing to pay for, what does it take to do provide successful experiences to the customer?

Some of the questions that initiated this paper were; How can a provider of commercial experiences surprise their customers? What does it take to not only provide a traditional service but instead challenge the market, providing something extraordinary and unique? What is it that the customer wants when consuming commercial experiences? Looking for ways to develop the existing theories of commercial experiences the Kano Model developed by Kano (N Kano, Seraku, Takahashi, & Tsuji, 1984) has been used as a way to build more knowledge about the experience offer. The model divides perceived quality into five dimensions and discusses quality attributes in relation to customer satisfaction. Several indications were found pointing at the importance of providing the customer with attractive quality attributes in order to grant the customer an experience. This might be of extra importance when it comes to succeed with commercial experiences. Only providing one-dimensional quality fulfilling the performance seems insufficient and not in the vicinity of the definitions of an experience.

The way that commercial experiences many times are described is here related to the levels of quality in the Kano Model to further understand the type of offer. The main purpose of this paper is to develop the concept of commercial experiences, helping providers to satisfy their customers’ needs. This has raised the question that a commercial experience must consist of attractive quality attributes; otherwise it is not an experience? The paper opposes further discussions and development of the descriptions of commercial experiences to fully answer the question.

Describing Commercial Experiences

Commercial experiences are claimed to be part of a new economy, diverse from traditional industry and mass-production, an economy given labels such as “experience economy”, “creative industry”, “network society” or “dream society”, where our dreams can be fulfilled (Jensen, 1999), (Pine & Gilmore, 1999), (O. Löfgren, 2003), and (O'Dell & Billing, 2005). “Experiences have become the hottest commodities the market has to offer” (O'Dell & Billing, 2005).

Csikszentmihalyi (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) describes the optimal experience as “when we feel a sense of exhilaration, a deep sense of enjoyment that is long cherished and that becomes a landmark in memory for what life should be like”. Mossberg (Mossberg, 2003) describes that experiences should include an element of surprise, of getting something extra and unexpected, a “wow-feeling” and the Lapland Centre of Expertise for the Experience Industry” (Tarssanen & Kylänen, 2005) and (Kylänen, 2006) describes the experience as “multisensoral, memorable, positive and a comprehensive emotional experience that can lead to personal change in a subject person”. The definition of commercial experiences proposed by (Poulsen & Kale, 2004) in the context of marketing is “an engaging act of co-creation between a provider and a consumer, wherein the consumer perceives value in the encounter and in the subsequent memory of that encounter”. Further, the authors describe an experience as proving meaningful utility; it should be perceived as personally relevant and includes elements of novelty, surprise, learning and engagement (ibid).

Pine & Gilmore (1999), authors of the best-seller “The experience economy” gives no clear definition of what a commercial experience really is, only a vague description of the business of working to provide a commercial experience, saying that experiences are inherently personal, and that they are “memorable, rich in sensations created only in the mind of an individual who has been engaged on an emotional, physical, intellectual, or even spiritual level”. “Personal” in the way that no two people can have the exact same experience, (Pine & Gilmore, 1999).

For a commercial experience to result in strong emotions as being memorable, novel, and strongly engaging theories concerning patterns of use in emotional language have been studied by (Lilja, Eriksson, & Ingelsson, 2007). Two independent factors that support the description of strong emotions and affection were found (e.g (Feldman, 1995); (Larsen & Diener, 1992); (Russell, 1979) and (Russell, Weiss, & Mendelsohn, 1989). The two factors can be described as positive and negative affect, or pleasantness and activation (D. Watson & Clark, 1997). This can be used in order to illustrate intense human emotions (David Watson & Tellegen, 1985) that are desired in commercial experiences. Strong engagement appears as a critical driver of both high positive and negative affect resulting in feelings of arousal, astonishment and/or surprise. The strong positive emotion excited can for instance be seen as a combination of pleasantness and surprise. To actually get your customer excited requires something more than the average offering.

The Kano Model or Theory of Attractive Quality

Early on, a separation of quality was described as objective quality “an objective reality independent of the existence of man” and subjective quality “a subjective reality where we think and feel or sense as a result of the objective reality” (Shewhart, 1931). This separation has later inspired to the development of describing quality in different dimensions leading to a better understanding of i.e. customer satisfaction. A theory presented by Kano (N Kano, et al., 1984) referred to as “*The theory of Attractive Quality*” or the “*Kano Model*” describes quality from a two-dimensional perspective, see Figure 1. The model is said to provide an understanding of how customers evaluate an offering (Bergman & Klefsjö, 2003). The model explains how the relationship between degree of sufficiency of a given quality attribute and customer satisfaction with that quality attribute can be classified into five dimensions of perceived quality (M. Löfgren & Witell, 2008). Must-be quality, one-dimensional quality, attractive quality, indifferent quality and reverse quality. Must-be quality, is given by attributes that are taken for granted when fulfilled, but result in customer dissatisfaction when not fulfilled (N Kano, et al., 1984). It fulfills the basic needs of the customer and are attributes rarely outspoken by the customer since they are taken for granted. The one-dimensional quality result in customer satisfaction when fulfilled and result in dissatisfaction when not fulfilled (ibid). These attributes are recognized as outspoken by the customer and can be studied through i.e. interviews or questionnaires. Attractive quality provide satisfaction when fully achieved but does not lead to customer dissatisfaction when not fulfilled since it consists of unexpected attributes to the customer. These quality attributes are often unspoken by customers and are sometimes referred to as attributes of surprise or delight (M. Löfgren & Witell, 2008). Indifferent quality are attributes that result in neither satisfaction nor dissatisfaction, not fulfilling any needs for the customer. Reverse quality are attributes that in a high degree of achievement result in dissatisfaction and a low degree of achievement results in customer satisfaction (N Kano, et al., 1984). According to Kano (Noriaki Kano, 2001) the result of customer satisfaction does change over time, meaning that an attribute resulting in attractive quality at first may later when expected by the customer only result in one-dimensional quality.

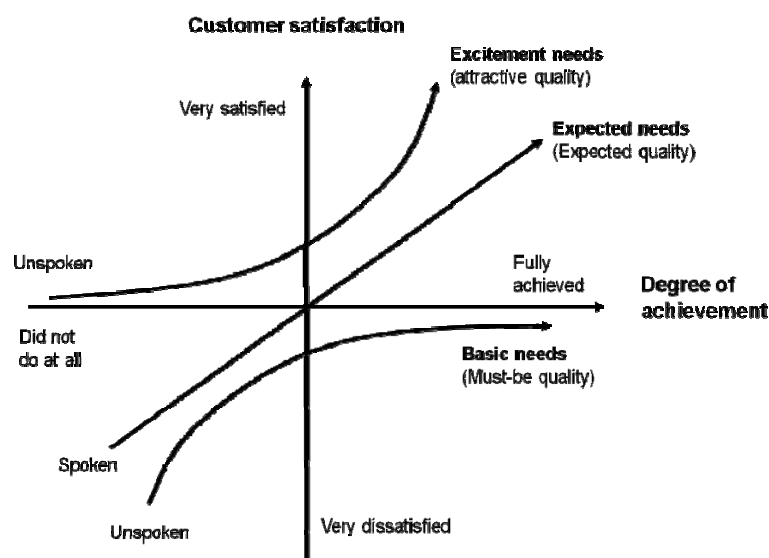


Figure 1. The Kano-model describing two dimensional quality (developed from Kano et al., 1984).

The benefits of the theory of attractive quality is that it includes a methodology which makes it possible to classify attributes based on the customer perceptions, and that this can be done without using non-linear modeling of service attributes (Nilsson-Witell & Fundin, 2005).

Comparing experiences with the Kano Model

It is less complicated to improve the quality of attributes that are outspoken and expected by the customer and aim at fulfilling the performance needs of one-dimensional quality than to find out the unspoken customer expectations and also develop new and innovative ideas to surprise the customer. This requires a greater effort and a deeper knowledge about the customer, and also withholds a large potential of increased business opportunities. This situation can fit any type of business but might be of greater significance when providing commercial experiences. In order to better understand and learn more about the area of experiences a comparison has been done between some of the key elements of experiences and the dimensions of perceived quality according to the Kano Model (N Kano, et al., 1984). Several connections to the dimension of attractive quality were found.

Arguments for the importance of Attractive Quality in Commercial Experiences

From OK to WOW

Customers are searching for something extraordinary separate from their every day experience, something to touch their emotional feelings and senses. Mossberg (Mossberg, 2003) describes that experiences include an element of surprise and the feeling of getting something extra and unexpected, leading to a “WOW-feeling”. An experience separated from an ordinary offering only reaching the level of OK. Comparing to the Kano Model the degree of attributes leading to a WOW-feeling matches a high level of fulfillment and also a high level of customer satisfaction, not leaving the customer just satisfied/OK. This seems to require something more than only must-be quality and one-dimensional quality, fulfilling the expected customer needs. This calls for something extra, providing attributes that are unexpected and unspoken by the customer, who matches the level of attractive quality attributes in the Kano Model.

Surprise and Novelty

Surprise is pointed out by i.e. (Poulsson & Kale, 2004), (Mossberg, 2003) and (Pine & Gilmore, 1999) as an important element of a commercial experience. Surprise can be described as providing something unexpected often leading to feelings of arouse and astonishment. Surprise is within the field of psychology described as a feeling leading to a strong engagement (David Watson & Tellegen, 1985). Surprise can be described as the opposite of facing something expected and familiar. When consuming experiences customers often have a difficulty describing what they really are expecting, they want something unexpected. Providing quality attributes that lead to surprise and astonishment require according to Kano attributes that are unexpected and most likely unspoken by the customer and are the ones in the dimension of attractive quality.

Novelty is a base for learning new things and growing as a person (Lilja, et al., 2007). If you go on experiencing the same things over and over, things will always turn out as expected, and what new and novel is there then to learn? (ibid). The element of novel means novel to the customers' prior experience and not novel to the world. This is a challenge for producer of

experiences, they must constantly change or add new elements that keep their offerings new, exciting, interesting and worth paying money for in order for the customer to coming back to experiencing all over again (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Customers are therefore not likely to revisit to experience the same offer since something new is needed to fulfill the element of novelty, even if very satisfied the first time. Developing new ideas and improving the offer must therefore be of great importance as a commercial experience provider. The use of methods for New Product Development (NPD) is therefore needed in order to be competitive. According to Kano product development should employ different methods when addressing “must-be” and “attractive” quality elements (N Kano, et al., 1984). The element of novelty also fits the dimension of requiring attractive quality, developing new and unexpected attributes novel to the customer.

Unspoken Customer Expectations

Experiences can be described as a non routine offer containing something extraordinary (Mossberg, 2003). Many experiences are consumed for the first time and the customer have no prior reference. Comparing with former customers can be difficult since feelings and emotions are subjective and vary between individuals (ibid). The Kano model shows that by satisfying the customers’ basic and expected needs, an organization can achieve expected quality but if a company wants to create attractive quality, to satisfy the “excitement needs”, the customer must be given something extra and unexpected (Bergman & Klefsjö, 2003).

A customer searching for surprise and novelty is likely to have difficulties in expressing what type of attributes that is important in the offer since it has little knowledge of the actual experience. Studies have indicated that it seems difficult for the customer to describe their expectations when it comes to commercial experiences since they are searching for something unexpected, unfamiliar, new and surprising (Eriksson, 2009). As a provider of commercial experiences it is seems necessary to work with and develop attributes of attractive quality to fulfill the unspoken customer expectations.

Memorable for a higher level of Customer Value

While commodities are fungible, goods tangible, services intangible, experiences are addressed as memorable (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Memorable is pointed out as a distinctive and essential characteristic for experiences. In both the definition by Poulsson & Kale from 2004 “*an engaging act of co-creation between a provider and a consumer, wherein the consumer perceives value in the encounter and in the subsequent memory of that encounter*” in Tarssanen & Kylänen, 2005; Kylänen, 2006 “*a multisensoral, memorable, positive and comprehensive emotional experience that can lead to personal change of a subject person*” and by Pine & Gilmore (1999) “*experiences are memorable, rich in sensations created within the customer who have been engaged on emotional, physical, intellectual and even spiritual level*” the element memorable is to be found. It is also stated that a vital competence needed of an experience provider is the one to create memorable events (Mossberg, 2003) and (Mossberg & Johansson, 2006).

According to Pine & Gilmore (Pine & Gilmore, 1999) experiences provide a higher level of customer value than services as they engage customers in an inherently memorable way. A high level of customer value can be connected to reaching a high level of customer satisfaction and delighting the customer. Looking at the Kano Model the attributes of must-be quality and one-dimensional can therefore not be enough for reaching this high level of a higher customer value. The attributes of attractive quality should also be fulfilled to satisfy the

excitement needs of the customer, leading to a higher level of value which can result in the memorable experience requested.

Conclusions and Discussion

Providing the customer with an engaging, educational, highly emotional and most important, memorable experience has become a way of providing the customer with something extra, something separate from our daily routine. Experiences are a type of offer with an increasing customer demand. Offering experiences has become a way of differentiating one company from another in the race towards excellence.

Several of the key elements pointed out in literature that enables commercial experiences indicates on a close connection to the dimension of attractive quality in the Kano Model (N Kano, et al., 1984)). For an experience to be both memorable and novel, containing elements of surprise and leading to feelings of astonishment there can be a conclusion drawn after a comparison to the Kano Model that it is of great importance to offer attributes of attractive quality and fulfill the customers excitement needs. To build a higher level of customer value, not only satisfying basic needs and performance needs also request providing attractive quality, fulfilling the excitement needs, and even yet exceeding them, this is hereby pointed out as of high interest for producers that want to be successful within the experience economy.

This also lead to the interesting questions; does an experience always need to consist of attributes of attractive quality to be an experience, and what is it if the offer fails and only consists of one-dimensional and must-be quality? This is a field that should be further explored to give more certain answers. It also seems to be a challenge within quality science to elaborate reliable and systematic tools and methods supporting providers of commercial experiences but also within other businesses. Many companies that work with customer satisfaction measure only one-dimensional attributes and develop their offerings by correcting problems and identifying areas of improvement. Something that could benefit from also fulfilling attributes of attractive quality and developing new ideas to exceed the unspoken customer expectations.

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