Measuring the experience of branded food products

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Experience and Guest Journey
ABSTRACT

Experience in relation to products and services enjoys attention, both in the service industry and in the academic world. The concept of Experience is of all times and can be dated back to the American Educational Philosopher John Dewey (1938) who described ‘Experience’ as a process of doing and undergoing. This research contributes to the operationalisation of Experience, in particular the Experience of Branded Food Products.

A preliminary model is presented, based on literature review (Thijssen & Peelen, 2007). This model enables the measurement of human experiences with aspects of sensory perception, doing and undergoing, emotions, meaning, brand identity, and brand image. From this model a questionnaire is developed in order to answer the research question ‘What is the experience of branded food products among dance and culture lovers?’ Findings of the quantitative field study (N=525) add to our knowledge on the supply side of experience. Furthermore, the findings provide implications and recommendations for the improvement of branded product/service experience in this particular case and the positioning of the branded product experience towards the target group of dance and culture lovers.

Key words: product/service experience, experience measurement, branded food products, experience valuation
Introduction

Experience in relation to products and services enjoys attention, both in the service industry and in the academic world. The concept of ‘experience’ is of all times and can be dated back to the American Educational Philosopher John Dewey (1938) who described ‘experience’ as a process of doing and undergoing. This research contributes to the understanding of ‘experience’, more in particular the experience of branded food products.

The questions raised in this study concern the experience of branded food products: what are relevant aspects of experience? How can the experience of products/services be measured? What new insights can improve the experience of branded food products? This study reports on the formation and application of a preliminary research model (Thijssen & Peelen, 2007) with aspects as sensory perception, doing, undergoing, emotions, brand identity and brand image.

In section 2 relevant aspects of experience from literature are discussed. In section 3 the research method is described and in section 4 the results are reported. Finally in section 5 implications and recommendations are discussed.

Aspects of experience from literature

In ‘The Experience Economy, A New Perspective’ (Boswijk, Thijssen & Peelen, 2007) the authors describe the experience process as follows: sensory perception → experience in one context → experience in more than one context → sense making. The intensity of aspects like sensory perception, emotion, experience, and sense making can be considered as measures for meaningful experiences.

Based on literature research (Cornelis, 1988; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Dewey, 1938; Keleman, 1974; Laing, 1967; Snel, 2004) Boswijk, Thijssen & Peelen (2007) generated a number of experience aspects as presented in Table 1. An on-line questionnaire, based on these aspects, was presented to Internet gamers (N=325) of the Sportlife Arctic Game in 2005 (Thijssen, Peelen & Bink, 2005). That first study indicated that it is possible to measure experiences based on questions derived from 11 aspects of a meaningful experience.

### Table 1 Experience Aspects (Boswijk, Thijssen & Peelen, 2005)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MEANINGFUL EXPERIENCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. All five senses are engaged</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Heightened concentration and focus</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. One’s sense of time is altered</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. One is touched emotionally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The process is unique for the individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. There is contact with the ‘raw stuff’, the real thing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. One both does and undergoes something</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. There is an element of playfulness (flow)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. One has the feeling of being in control of the situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. There is a balance between the challenge and one’s own capacities</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. There is a clear goal</td>
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</table>
**Operational definition of meaningful experiences**

Based on the literature study meaningful experiences is defined in an operational definition as follows: "A meaningful experience is a process of doing and undergoing, with a clear goal and a balance between the challenge and one’s own capacities, in contact with the ‘raw stuff’, an element of playfulness, all senses engaged, emotionally touched, with heightened concentration and an altered sense of time, feeling in control of the situation.”

Following the literature study, a first field study was carried out (Thijssen, Peelen & Bink, 2005) validating the 11 aspects of a meaningful experience based on The Arctic Game on the Internet. The preliminary research model was confirmed in the first study. In this second experience study into the experience of branded food products during the Mystery Land Dance Festival (2007) both the model en the questionnaire are improved. The ultimate goal of the research is to develop and test an experience research model and questionnaire to measure meaningful experiences as input for the innovation of services.

**Methods**

Since 2005 the research model is ‘under construction’ through exploratory quantitative research on measurement of meaningful experiences. This paper reports on the quantitative research into the creation and experience of branded food concepts as Hot Dog, Pasta Bite and Tosti, offered to visitors of Mystery Land 2007 by a contract catering company. This study concerns the measurement of the product/service experience of branded food products at various stands during the festival. The name of the brand of the providing company is not reported in this article for reasons of confidentiality. The paper therefore refers to the ‘brand’ and not to the company name.

In the research memorable food moments are measured in relation to brand responses (as proposition awareness and brand image, the intention for repeat purchase and the brand attitude). The brand thereby aims to attract a younger target group and position the brand top of mind at moments of purchase and to promote repeat purchase.

The brand’s mission is to provide the contract catering company with branded food products to enhance the customer experience in order to increase sales and profits.

**Objectives of the research**

The objectives of the research are to provide insight in the relations between experience aspects of branded food products and brand response through quantitative research. Thereby it will be possible to further develop and test the research model and questionnaire for measurement of meaningful experiences.
Research model, design and execution

The study is an ad hoc quantitative research, using the Internet for data collection. Special invitation cards are printed and presented to buyers of the branded food products and non buyers inviting respondents to use the link to the questionnaire soon after the festival.

Target group and sample

The target group comprises visitors of the Mystery Land Festival August 25th, 2007. The selection of a day and evening event was made because of the spread of various food moments during that day.

The intended sample of respondents having enjoyed the branded food experience is 3 x N=300. In addition a sample of N=300 non-buyers who did see the stand. In total a sample of N=1200. Later in this article it is reported what went wrong as the response was limited to N=525.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire comprised of closed questions, half open questions and item questions (7 items each). The time to complete the questionnaire is estimated between 5 and 10 minutes. The construction of the questionnaire reflects logical chronological order of the branded food experience: from seeing the stand, buying the product, consuming the product, undergoing the product and setting, using senses, generating emotions and finally the intention for repeat purchase, the willingness to recommend the product and the brand image. Questions are directly linked to the 11 aspects of a meaningful experience as presented in table 1.
Figure 2
Questionnaire – Limited Overview

Category: Seen/purchased
Did you see one of the following stands at Mystery land?
Which one of the following products did you buy?
How did you get in touch with < Hot Dog/ Pasta Bite/ Tosti>?

Category: Doing
Process of doing (urge for food, see, find, order, wait, eat, taste, enjoy, together with others, remember).

Scales: not at all applicable (---), little applicable (--), somewhat applicable (+/-), strongly applicable (+), very strongly applicable (++)

Category: Undergoing
Visibility of the stand, attractiveness of the stand, hygiene, clear presentation of food proposition, friendly service, speedy service, price-quality level, professional and hygienic preparation of the food, the taste of the food, the attractiveness and usefulness of the packaging of the food, the possibility for waste disposal.

Scales: very bad (---), bad (--), neither bad, nor good (+/-), good (+), very good) ++), do not know/non applicable

Category: Senses
See, hear, taste, smell, touch.
To what extent are the following senses aroused during the consumption of < Hot Dog/ Pasta Bite/ Tosti>?

Scales: not at all (---), a little (--), average (+/-), to a great extent (+), to a very great extent (++)

Category: Emotions
Pleasure, anger, detest, sadness, surprise, fear, contempt.

To what extent were the following emotions applicable during consumption of < Hot Dog/ Pasta Bite/ Tosti>?

Scales: not at all (---), a little (--), Average (+/-), to a great extent (+), to a very great extent (++)

Category: Purchase intent
In the case that you would buy < dependent on product purchases: Hot Dog/Pasta Bite/Tosti>, to what extent would you purchase < Hot Dog/ Pasta Bite/ Tosti>?

Scales: certainly, probably, may be, probably not, certainly not
Category: Recommendation probability

What is the probability of recommending < Hot Dog/ Pasta Bite/ Tosti> to others?

Scales: certainly, probably, may be, probably not, certainly not

Category: Appreciation of the product 1–10

If you were to appreciate < Hot Dog/Pasta Bite/ Tosti> in total what figure between 1–10 would you give?

Category: Brand experience

The following questions address the overall brand experience, irrespective of the branded products consumed

Sub category: brand awareness and buyer/ non-buyer

.1 Did you know the brand before Mystery Land?
.2 Have you purchased products of the brand before?

Answer: yes, no

Category: Brand appreciation 1–10

If you were to appreciate the brand in total what figure between 1–10 would you give?

Category: Brand image

A number of people were asked to describe the brand. Below you will find a number of aspects these people mentioned. Would you state which aspects fit the brand according to you?

Answers: boring, thoroughly, surprising, dynamic, authentic, modern, pure, open, honest, strong, positive/optimistic, none of these aspects.

Category: Brand attitude

Which statements below are most applicable to you?

1. I have never seen or heard products of the brand
2. I know products of the brand by name but no details
3. I know the products of the brand but is is not likely I would purchase them
4. I know the products of the brand and would like to try them
5. I purchase products of the brand every once in a while
6. I purchase products of the brand regularly
7. I purchase products of the brand most of the time/always
8. I have purchased products of the brand some time ago, but nowadays I seldom buy them

Category: General background characteristics

- Sex
- Age
− Education  
− Profession  
− Region  
− Shopper \(\rightarrow\) Are you in your household responsible for the daily shopping?

**Analysis**

The analysis consists of factor –, correlation- and regression analysis to disclose the relationships between the branded food experience and the brand responses and implications for improving the experience.

**Results**

The research nearly failed due to the fact that employees of the Catering Company appeared too busy selling food products (in total 60,000 visitors to the event) to hand out the invitation cards to participate in the research, actively to buyers of the products. 8000 invitation cards were distributed on the grounds by the researchers themselves and on the cars in the parking area. It could be predicted during that day that the response would be low, as compared to the intended response of \(N=1200\). On the Monday following the event the link of the questionnaire was presented to members of the consumer panel of the Event Company (\(N=6.500\)). In this way the response was improved to the level of \(N=525\). Approximately 700 respondents less than intended. The results can therefore only be considered as an indication and not as strongly reliable.

Below the main findings of the research are reported:

- The scores of the branded concepts are relatively high on appreciation, buying intent and likelihood to recommend to others. In particular for the Pasta Bite. The Hot Dog was evaluated least, but also this branded product was appreciated reasonably well.

- The experience of the consumption of branded food products, in particular the aspect of enjoyment and taste experience are of great influence on appreciation, buying intent and likelihood to recommend to others. The influence of the branded product experience on the brand is weak. Also brand attitude aspects are not convincing. There are however indications that the branded food experience has a slight influence (positive or negative) on the brand image. In particular in the case of the respondents that showed a very high or very low appreciation of the branded product experience.

- To find out if the investment of the *brand* to participate in Mystery Land could be justified an additional cost benefit analysis was carried out as compared to other channels of communications such as television commercials. The cost per contact minute at the event are lower than the cost per minute of television and the effect of active brand engagement during several minutes enjoying the branded food products is considered higher that the passive engagement in television. Thus indicating that this is a good investment, in particular considering the younger target group.

*Interpretation of the research model and underlying factors*

- In figure 3 and 4 two models are presented: the first model is based on the measurement of
individual items. The second model is based on the underlying factors (see also figure 5 for the composition of factors).

- It appears from these models that there is a strong relationship between the branded food experience on the one side and the total appreciation, buying intent and likelihood to recommend to others. The most influential aspects are the enjoyment of the food (pleasure/taste) and the price/quality relationship. Furthermore, ‘sensory perception’ and the aspects ‘attractive choice’ and ‘surprise’ are of lesser influence.
- There is a weak relationship between the branded food experience and the effects on the brand; this relationship however, is less strong than the relationship between the branded food experience, the total appreciation, buying intent and likelihood to recommend to others.

Figure 3
Model Based on Individual Items

Figure 4
Model Based on Underlying Factors
The aspects of the product experience (consumption, price/quality, negative emotions, sensory perception, food preparation, handy packaging) have a significant effect on the effects of the product experience (65%). Also shown is the relationship between the product experience and the brand experience (respectively 14% and 11%).

In the tables below the underlying factors are presented:

### Table 2
**Factor 1: Food**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Factor loading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>Enjoyed</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>Delicious taste</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>Attractive choice</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.13</td>
<td>Positive memory</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>Tasting</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>Pleasure</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>Surprising</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.10–19</td>
<td>Taste</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cronbach’s α 0.89

### Table 3
**Factor 2: Negative emotions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Factor loading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>Sadness</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>Fear</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>Detest</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>Contempt</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cronbach’s α 0.9

### Table 4
**Factor 3: Preparation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Factor loading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>Extent of hygienic preparation of the food</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>Hygiene in the stand</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>Competence with respect to food preparation</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>Attractiveness of packaging</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cronbach’s α 0.78
Table 5
Factor 4: Service

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Factor loading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>Speed of service</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.11</td>
<td>Speedy service</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>Friendliness of service</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cronbach’s α 0.79

The owner of the brand insists on confidentiality regarding the details of the intended brand image. For this reason general results in respect of brand values as perceived by buyers and non-buyers of the branded food products are presented. This input presents an opportunity for the brand to reconsider brand identity and the desired image for the younger targets groups, especially during events such as Mystery Land.

Figure 5
Brand image
Recommendations and discussion

On the basis of the above findings the following recommendations can be generated for the owner of the brand:

- The branded food concepts can be improved on details. So can the aspect of ‘surprise’ be enforced through applying more creativity in the product presentation in the stands (form, size, height, image and visibility). The aspect of ‘surprise’ is of influence in the appreciation of the experience, and in the case of the Hot Dog does not score very high. In the context of an open air event, an improvement in the aspect of ‘surprise’ can increase the values of the experience and increase the number of buyers.

- It is recommended to critically review the relationship between price and quality. The score on this aspect is average, but does influence the appreciation of the branded product experience and behavioural intentions. The relative low score on price/quality seems to be influenced more by price than by product quality.

- The brand identity and the brand image do not coincide. This presents an opportunity for the brand to better position itself for the target group of younger visitors to events like Mystery Land.

Weak scores as secondary points for improvement are:

- The packaging of the Hot Dog
- Professionalism of the food preparation of the Pasta Bite and Tosti
- The provisions for waste disposal
- The speed of ordering and service in case of the Tosti

With some reservations it is recommended to increase the number of stands for Pasta Bite on one of the following events, as the product is highly appreciated, but is presented in just one stand. The number of buyers of Pasta Bite in the research population is too limited to draw reliable conclusions as yet.

Summary

The questions raised in this study in relation to the branded product experience are: what are relevant aspects of meaningful experiences? How can the branded product experiences be measured? What knowledge derived from the research can be applied to improve the branded product experience?

The first question concerning relevant aspects of meaningful experiences is dealt with through a literature study. Eleven relevant aspects of meaningful experiences are generated and presented in this article. These form the basis for the research model and the questionnaire as applied in this research.

The second question concerning measuring branded food experiences is tested in two quantitative studies (Arctic Game and Branded Food Products). The model and the questionnaire provide detailed insight in the branded product experience and the effects. The relationship between product experience and overall brand experience is not clearly confirmed in this study.
The third question dealing with the application of fresh knowledge to improve the branded product experience is answered in a positive manner in this study. The research results provide adequate input to generate suggestions for improvement of the branded product experience and the positioning of the brand in relation to a younger target group at events such as Mystery Land.

Reflection

This is the second research with the objective to enhance the measurement of meaningful experiences. In this study the measurement of the branded food product experience and its effects appears to be adequate. However, the relationship between the branded product experience, the effects thereof and the effects on the overall brand are more problematic. No significant correlation is found. Possibly the assumption that the effect would be ex-post is incorrect. The reverse is perhaps more plausible: the very strong and renowned brand image, may have ex-ante a positive effect on the product experience. So far this has not been measured.

The objective of the study was to conduct reliable research with a sample of N=1200 to be able to present valid results, also on the product level and between buyers and non-buyers. As described in this article the sample in this study is limited to N=525 and as a consequence the results are indicative. In the future alternative methods for data collection will be applied to ensure the desired sample, through for instance face to face interviews.

The Saxion University Knowledge Centre Hospitality Business will conduct a series of experience field studies in a variety of contexts, in order to enhance the model further and improve the questionnaire. The effort to seek better research methods for measuring sensory perception and emotions is ongoing. One of the options is to show 7 basic emotions in the form of pictures, whereby the respondent chooses the picture that best fits the emotion. Also offering the questionnaire face to face in the field will be tested to ensure the desired response and sample size. That way the research will be less dependent on the willingness of the respondents to log in later onto the Internet.

This research measured aspects of the branded food experience. The findings of the research do provide the owners of the brand important and detailed insights into the actual experience. In this way, improvement on specific aspects is possible. In this second study it appeared possible to improve the research model and the questionnaire. It is anticipated that the following series of studies will actively contribute towards the improvement of methods of measuring meaningful experiences.

References


