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Events and Loyalty Formation: The Role of Satisfaction, Felt Community, Emotional Experience, and Frequency of Use

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1 Introduction

Mass events (e.g., music festivals, sport events) are attractive to both customers and enterprises. For example, Europe's market leader in the ticketing field, Eventim, sells more than 70 million tickets for more than 100,000 events annually (Eventim 2009). In 2007, U.S. event producers in the field of performing arts and spectator sports received revenues of almost \$80 billion dollars, a growth rate of 33 percent in five years (US Census Bureau, 2009). From a theoretical viewpoint, service provision in the event field is of interest because such services mainly address two consumption metaphors, namely consuming as experience and consuming as play (Holt, 1995). Drawing on these two elements, we refer to such events as collective hedonic services (Ng/Russell-Bennett/Dagger 2007).

Since collective hedonic services have unique characteristics, it is crucial to understand what determines loyalty intentions of consumers attending those events. In general, prior research repeatedly identified satisfaction as a major antecedent of loyalty (Luo/Homburg, 2007). However, the specific characteristic of collective hedonic services - namely being both collective and hedonic - implies social and hedonic effects that go beyond the merely individual influence of satisfaction. A fundamental element of collective hedonic services is that customer interaction becomes central for the consumption experience (Deighton, 1992; Holt, 1995). Arnould/Price (1993, p. 34) have shown that users of collective hedonic services develop "feelings of linkage, belonging, of group devotion to a transcendent goal" during the course of the experience. Recently, this phenomenon has gained increased interest in the context of brand communities (e.g., Algesheimer/Dholakia/Herrmann 2005; Carlson/Suter/Brown 2008; Muñiz/O'Guinn 2001; Schau/Muñiz/Arnould 2009). We contend that there are characteristics of brand communities that can be transferred to collective hedonic services. Building on prior work by Carlson et al. (2008), we argue that a psychological sense of community might become an important driver of loyalty toward the event provider. Similarly, generated emotional experiences are expected to increase the willingness to repatronize the event in the future (Chaudhuri/Holbrook 2001; Fiore/Jin/Kim 2005; White/Yu 2005). That is, meaning may be created beyond individual customer satisfaction with the event.

The goal of the present article is to investigate the relative impact of individual satisfaction, feelings of connectedness among consumers, and emotional experience on loyalty intentions toward using collective hedonic services. It contributes to literature

on the satisfaction-loyalty link by including social value arising from a psychological sense of community. Previous research on this topic tended to overemphasize the individual perspective, leaving room for improving current models. In addition to this static perspective, we incorporate frequency of (prior) use of the event to investigate interactions with the variables mentioned above. For example, the influence of customer satisfaction on loyalty may be higher when people attend an event for the first time. In repeated consumption situations this impact may be reduced due to adaptation processes (Nelson/Meyvis 2008).

2 Theoretical Background and Development of Hypotheses

Value co-creation based on felt community is especially likely in collective hedonic consumption situations. Collective hedonic services are services that are delivered and consumed simultaneously by a larger number of consumers at one point in time, in one location and for the purpose of pleasure and enjoyment (Ng/Russell-Bennett/Dagger 2007). Examples include spectator sports, performing arts, theater, collective pleasure travel, and concert events. The role of the audience in co-producing the service experience is a vital component of collective hedonic services (Ng/Russell-Bennett/Dagger 2007; Urich 2007). Collective hedonic services address two consumption metaphors, namely consuming as experience and consuming as play (Holt 1995). While consuming as experience refers to hedonic consumption examining consumers' emotional reactions to consumption objects (Holbrook/Hirschman 1982), consuming as play refers to using consumption objects as resources to interact with fellow consumers (Holt 1995). Collective hedonic services bear two characteristics relevant to this research. First, the collective nature increases the likelihood of value co-creation based on consumer interaction. Second, the hedonic nature of an event implies positive emotional experiences among attendees (Pralhad 2004). Both consumer interaction and emotional experience are expected to impact on event loyalty, in addition to overall satisfaction. We elaborate on this next.

Loyalty in the sense of retention is a cornerstone of customer relationship management (Gustafsson/Johnson/Roos 2005). We understand brand loyalty in this study as "a deeply held commitment to rebuy or repatronize a preferred product/service consistently in the future" (Oliver 1999, p. 34). Customer satisfaction has been defined as "an evaluative summary of (direct) consumption experience, based on the discrepancy between prior expectation and the actual performance perceived after consumption" (Suh/Yi 2006, p. 146). Research on collective hedonic services such as

sport events (Caro/García 2007; Madrigal 2003) and different forms of festivals (Baker/Crompton 2000; Lee/Lee/Lee/Babin 2008; Yuan/Jang 2007) shows customer satisfaction's impact on loyalty applies to a broad range of service providers. Thus, our first hypothesis is as follows:

H1: The higher a customer's overall satisfaction with the collective hedonic service, the higher is his or her loyalty toward the service provider.

As previously mentioned, the value of collective hedonic services depends to a strong degree on the presence and participation of many other consumers (Deighton 1992; Holt 1995; Uhrich 2007). It is therefore likely that feelings of attachment and connectedness between consumers (i.e., psychological sense of community) positively affect their loyalty toward the service provider that staged the experience for the community. In support of this view, Carlson et al. (2008) show that connectivity between visitors of a theme park influences commitment, purchase intention and word-of-mouth. According to Homburg/Wieseke/Hoyer (2009), social identity theory and self-categorization theory offer three explanations. First, through loyal behavior consumers demonstrate their affiliation with the community, which in turn strengthens their social identity and self-esteem. Second, members of a specific social category strive to raise the status of the group to which they belong. Hence, loyal behavior can be viewed as way to help the group. Third, identification with a social category is related to positive emotions (Ashmore/Deaux/McLaughlin-Volpe 2004). If consumers defected, they would not benefit from the hedonic value anymore. Consequently, identification with the group will increase the likelihood of future participation (Carlson et al. 2008). This leads to the following hypothesis.

H2: The higher a customer's psychological sense of community while consuming collective hedonic services, the higher is his or her loyalty toward the service provider.

In case of hedonic offerings, the emotional experience during consumption is also expected to influence loyalty intentions, in addition to overall satisfaction. Dick/Basu (1994) have proposed that loyalty should be greater under conditions of more positive emotional experience. Thus, brands or services that make consumers "happy" or "joyful" should prompt greater loyalty. A number of studies lend support on this notion (Chaudhuri/Holbrook 2001; Fiore et al. 2005; Lee et al. 2008; White/Yu 2005). Consequently, we propose that positive emotional experiences during consumption increase intentions to repatronize the service in the future.

H3: The more positive a customer's emotional experience while consuming collective hedonic services, the higher is his or her loyalty toward the service provider.

Hypotheses H1 to H3 imply stable and linear effects on loyalty for all consumers of the collective hedonic service. However, consideration of consumers' prior experience challenges this assumption. As Rust/Oliver (2000) note, delighting the customer "raises the bar" of customer expectations with possible negative consequences regarding future consumption. Prior research suggests that affective intensity can either decrease (i.e., adaptation) or increase (i.e., sensitization) over the course of an experience (Nelson/Meyvis 2008). We argue that these effects are also likely to occur in repeat consumption. For example, users of a collective hedonic service adapt to all those characteristics that overwhelmed and satisfied them during first use. This adaptation process seems to be the norm in many situations and domains (Nelson/Meyvis 2008). In this light, overall satisfaction can become a hygiene factor to loyalty. According to Herzberg (1959), this would mean that low levels of satisfaction lower loyalty intentions. High levels, however, do not alter loyalty intentions. Instead, habit strength might lead consumers to repatronize the service (Eagly/Chaiken 1993); possibly because it is common practice within the community. That is, loyalty intentions of persons with more prior experiences should be less influenced by satisfaction, relative to first-time attendees. Consequently, overall satisfaction may become a less relevant predictor of loyalty. Supporting this view, Garbarino/Johnson (1999) demonstrate that the frequency of theater visits moderates the impact of satisfaction on loyalty. For the low relational customers (i.e., occasional subscribers) satisfaction was the most important determinant of loyalty intentions. For the high relational customers (i.e., consistent subscribers) satisfaction does not impact on loyalty.

H4: The influence of overall satisfaction on loyalty will decrease when frequency of use increases.

However, sensitization is also possible. For example, high-quality wines may bring full enjoyment only after a certain experience or expertise (Nelson/Meyvis 2008). Likewise, feelings of connectedness might be appreciated even more over the course of the experience. In brand communities, social network practices have been shown to become more important when one dips into the community (Schau et al. 2009). Thus, sensitization might lead to an increasing impact on loyalty. However, habit strength may also drive loyalty intentions. It is even possible that the absolute level of

psychological sense of community increases due to sensitization but its impact on loyalty is reduced because of adaptation to the feeling per se. We are aware of no prior discussion on this subject and therefore argue that sensitization counterbalances adaptation and habit strength; thus, there is only minimal, if any, effect of frequency of use on the relationship between psychological sense of community and loyalty.

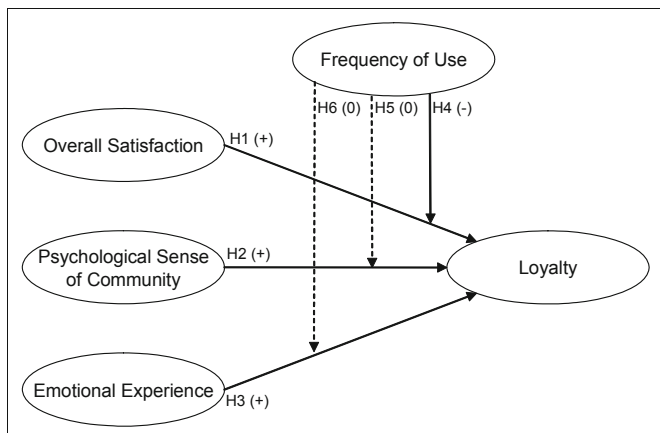
H5: The influence of psychological sense of community on loyalty will neither increase nor decrease when frequency of use increases.

The same reasoning holds with regard to emotional experience. Prior research demonstrates that adaptation to emotional experiences is very slow (Nicolao/Irwin/Goodman 2009). In addition, emotions mostly occur spontaneously and, therefore, are independent of prior experiences. Consequently, we do not expect any effect of frequency of use.

H6: The influence of emotional experience on loyalty will neither increase nor decrease when frequency of use increases.

Figure 1 summarizes the hypotheses and displays the conceptual model.

Figure 1: Conceptual Model



Note: (+): expected positive effect; (-): expected negative effect; (0): expected null effect

3 Method

As the subject of investigation we chose Europe's biggest hip hop festival (i.e., Splash!). The festival in southeastern Germany was identified as an appropriate event for hypothesis testing through a pretest the year before the current study was undertaken. Event attendees ($N = 444$) were asked which motives were especially important for attending the festival. Results showed that experiencing positive emotions as well as socializing with other visitors was among the main motives expressed by attendees. In addition, hip hop culture is characterized by strong communal spirit (Arthur 2006) which allows for the possibility of psychological sense of community. We collected data on-site using a self-administered questionnaire during the last day of the 3-day festival. The exclusion of incomplete questionnaires resulted in a final sample of 409 visitors with a mean age of 21.5 years ($SD = 3.08$). Two thirds of the respondents are male, which reflects the distribution of the visitors at hip hop festivals. Nearly half of the attendees (45%) had never attended the event before while the remained had attended twice (19%), three or more times (36%).

Existing measures were used wherever possible. Items drawn from literature were refined through group discussions in order to adapt them to the context. Respondents rated all measures on five-point Likert-type scales (1 = 'totally disagree,' and 5 = 'totally agree'). With regard to loyalty intentions, we utilized three items measuring repatronage intentions (Zeithaml/Berry/Parasuraman 1996). To measure psychological sense of community, we adapted four indicators from Carlson et al. (2008). We used three items to measure overall satisfaction (Gustafsson et al. 2005). Emotional experience was measured using three items adapted from Diener/Suh/Lucas/Smith (1999). These measures had proved useful in a study on stadium atmosphere (Uhrich 2007), which is similar to this context. The means and standard deviations of the items are provided in table 1.

Table 1: Items and Measures

Construct/Item	Mean	SD
Overall satisfaction (Cronbach's alpha = 0.81)		
Very dissatisfied/very satisfied	3.84	0.87
Very bad/very good	3.94	0.77
Falls short of expectations/exceeds expectations	3.80	0.83

Psychological sense of community (Cronbach's alpha = 0.89)		
I feel strong ties to other [festival] guests.	3.29	1.04
Visiting [festival] gives me a sense of community.	3.48	1.12
I feel a sense of being connected to other [festival] guests.	3.19	1.10
A strong feeling of camaraderie exists between me and other people who visit [festival].	3.32	1.18
Emotional experience (Cronbach's alpha = 0.80)		
At [festival] there is a great atmosphere.	4.41	0.77
At [festival] everyone is enthusiastic.	4.07	0.86
At [festival] people are ecstatic.	3.94	0.91
Loyalty (Cronbach's alpha = 0.86)		
I intent to visit [festival] in the future.	4.49	0.83
It is very likely that I will attend [festival] again.	4.44	0.84
I would attend [festival] again even if it was less good once or twice.	4.18	0.99

Table 2 provides the means, standard deviations, and correlations among constructs.

Table 2: Summary Statistics

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
(1) Emotional experience	4.09	0.70	1.00			
(2) Psychological sense of community	3.32	0.96	0.57	1.00		
(3) Overall satisfaction	3.86	0.70	0.44	0.38	1.00	
(4) Loyalty intentions	4.34	0.84	0.48	0.47	0.29	1.00
Note: All correlations are significant at $p < 0.01$.						

We validated our multi-item measures via confirmatory factor analysis. The analysis of this model using LISREL 8 (Jöreskog/Sörbom 2004) indicated a strong degree of fit ($\chi^2(59) = 98.86; p < 0.001; RMSEA = 0.04; SRMR = 0.03; CFI = 0.99; NNFI = 0.99$). In addition, all items displayed strong loadings (ranging from 0.74 to 0.89) on their specified latent constructs. Composite reliabilities (ranging from 0.80 to 0.89) and average variance extracted (ranging from 0.57 to 0.70) show values above suggested thresholds (Fornell/Larcker 1981). Therefore, the measurement model has both high reliability and convergent validity. We assessed the discriminant validity of these measures by employing Fornell/Larcker's (1981) test of shared variance between pairs of latent constructs. The results reveal that that the squared correlations between these

pairs of constructs do not exceed the average variance extracted for any single latent construct. Thus, our measures display adequate discriminant validity.

4 Results

We tested our model via multiple regression analysis (Aiken/West 1991). The dependent variable was loyalty intentions, while the predictor variables were overall satisfaction, psychological sense of community, emotional experience, frequency of use, and their interactions. All respective multi-item measures were averaged to form an index for each construct. Results of the regression analysis appear in table 3. Hypothesis H1 stated that customer satisfaction affects loyalty intentions. As shown in table 2, satisfaction had a positive effect on loyalty ($\beta = 0.19, p < 0.02$), which supports H1. Hypothesis H2 addressed psychological sense of community. In line with our expectations, it had a significant effect on loyalty ($\beta = 0.39, p < 0.01$), supporting H2. According to hypothesis H3, emotional experience had a significant effect on loyalty ($\beta = 0.25, p < 0.001$). Thus, H3 is supported. The set of hypotheses H4, H5, and H6 referred to interactions of the three independent variables with frequency of use. Frequency of use exhibited a significant interaction with satisfaction ($\beta = -0.49, p < 0.04$). Simple slope analysis (Aiken/West 1991) shows that loyalty intentions of attendees with low frequency of use increase with increasing satisfaction. However, there is no such effect for high-frequency customers. This supports H3. Similarly, there is a significant interaction of frequency of use with psychological sense of community ($\beta = -0.49, p < 0.02$). While psychological sense of community positively influences loyalty for low-frequency attendees, the slope is not significant for customers with high frequency of use. This is different than expected which leads to rejection of H5. Last, there is no interaction of frequency of use with emotional experience. Consequently, H6 is supported. Summarizing, five of the six hypotheses are supported. Over one-third ($R^2 = 0.34$) of the variance in the loyalty intention outcome variable is explained by the model.

Table 3: Regression Analysis

Independent variable	β	t	p
Overall satisfaction	0.19	2.42	0.016
Psychological sense of community	0.39	5.32	0.009
Emotional experience	0.25	3.34	0.001
Frequency	0.84	3.24	0.001
Satisfaction x frequency	-0.49	-2.16	0.031
Psychological sense of community x frequency	-0.49	-2.35	0.019
Emotional experience x frequency	.27	0.84	0.404
Note: Dependent variable = loyalty intentions. Adjusted $R^2 = 0.34$, $F = 31.11$, $p < 0.001$. Beta coefficients are standardized.			

5 Discussion and Implications

In order to better understand loyalty drivers in collective hedonic services, our main research goal was to examine the relative impact of customer satisfaction, psychological sense of community, and emotional experience in explaining loyalty intentions. In addition, these effects were studied in relation to frequency of the event's attendance in earlier years, which allowed investigating the dynamic development within the interrelationships.

Our empirical study shows that feelings of connectedness among event attendees (i.e., psychological sense of community) exert a significant impact on their behavioral intentions. This indicates that a social view (i.e., feelings of connectedness among consumers) contributes to our understanding of what drives loyalty in the context of collective hedonic services. Emotional experience exerts a strong influence on loyalty and appears not to be affected by adaptation in repeat consumption. This is in line with the fact that collective hedonic services are partly consumed for hedonic reasons (Ng et al. 2007; Holbrook/Hirschman 1982; Holt 1995; Lee et al. 2008) and research showing that adaptation to emotional experiences is very slow (Nicolao et al. 2009). Results also show that the classic antecedent of loyalty, customer satisfaction, may vary in explanatory power when evaluating collective hedonic service experiences, depending on frequency of prior use. Similarly, this affects psychological sense of community. It appears that sensitization does not fully compensate for adaptation and habit strength. Summarizing, the present research demonstrates that considering both social value and hedonic value in addition to common value indicators (i.e., satisfaction) is important with regard to loyalty effects in collective hedonic services.

However, when direct experience increases (i.e., high frequency of use) satisfaction and psychological sense of community decrease in explanatory power while emotions are still able to predict loyalty intentions to the same degree.

As a major implication resulting from the present research, providers of collective hedonic services may want to make sure to foster psychological sense of community. If they manage to evoke feelings of connectedness among service users, they will be rewarded with higher loyalty. In contrast, focusing solely on “hard” service components intended to raise customer satisfaction may be too narrow. This does not mean that satisfaction is irrelevant. However, we argue that its importance may be offset for certain service types. Creating an environment that fosters the psychological sense of community will in turn be rewarded by customers. To achieve this, companies may offer opportunities for consumers to engage in community practices. As our results and prior research (e.g., Schau et al. 2009) show, this is not only for the benefit of consumers but for the company itself. Providing event attendees with more opportunities to engage in community practices might also help to overcome the drop in explanatory power of social value when frequency of use is high.

Like most research, this study is not without limitations. We analyzed consumers (i.e., hip hop fans) who are especially prone to show feelings of community (Arthur 2006). Replications in different settings would expand understanding of the complex processes involved. For example, future research could investigate different services such as sport events. Incorporation of additional loyalty drivers like social norms or knowledge (Algesheimer et al. 2005) can help assess the robustness of our results.

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