

Experience marketing from a teaching and learning perspective

Abstract

The current paper aims to examine how business schools can utilize concepts from experience marketing in the teaching practice. The theoretical framework of this study is derived from holistic human and learning theories. The paper compares the educational and experience production models. The methodology involves interpretive research and sensory ethnography. The empirical research material has been collected within the years 2013 to 2016 and consist of learning diaries and project presentations. The study proposes insight into students' learning experiences gained in master program course at Tallinn School Business and Governance. The problem-based, active, experiential teaching method helps MA students to increase their competitiveness. Moreover, the efficient and advantageous course helps students to develop and design their business ideas and acquire collaboration skills. On the other side, the paper discusses teaching experiences. The learning of the experience design takes place only in the co-creation and through interactions between two eager partners. Without bearing in mind the learners' needs and motivation, the learning experience cannot be designed.

Key words: experience marketing, teaching experience, learning experience, project learning, experiential learning, service and product design, sensory ethnography

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Introduction and objective

Continuing globalisation, networking, digitalisation and market saturation are the processes that should take into consideration in marketing communication and consumer behaviour. The new consumer-oriented marketing guides the focus of marketing practitioners and academic researchers on the consumer-brand engagement and value co-creation through the experience marketing.

In the marketing literature the idea that consumers are looking for memorable experiences is well established. Experiences are memorable events (Pine and Gilmore 1999) and in order to leave a memory trace, they must take place outside the daily routine (Sundbo and Sørensen 2013). Thus, memorable experience is something unusual standing out from the rest. Experiences are provoked by stimuli; they may occur as a result of online and offline activities; they may be evoked by products, packaging, communication, in-store actions, engineer work, salespeople, after-sale service; and events (Schmitt 2010, Jensen 2013).

Experience are considered part of the marketing activities which focuses on the character of product of service (Sundbo and Sørensen 2013) and which may have experiential value for the consumer. Marketing communications can establish the brand in memory, create a brand image, engage consumers both on-line and off-line, and create experiences (Keller 2009). Experience marketing can generate emotions to the customers by making entertainment, by enabling to escape from the reality, by educating, and providing customers' aesthetic objects or places to see (Pine and Gilmore 1999). Experience marketing can deliver sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioural and relational value (Tynan and McKechnie, 2009). Experience marketing is usually broadly defined as any

form of consumer-focused marketing activity that creates a connection to consumers. All this increases the competitiveness of an enterprise.

Little is known how business schools can utilize concepts from experience marketing in the teaching practice. The experiential learning approach in the educational settings is not a novel in the academic literature. For instance, to name just a few, Cooper, Bottomley and Gordon (2004) discuss an experiential learning approach to entrepreneurship education. Leppiman and Puustinen-Niemelä (2004) introduce Estonian and Finnish social work students' joy of learning in multicultural project.

This paper extends our previous research (Leppiman and Riivits-Arkonuso 2016, Leppiman and Kukk 2017) and presents a teaching case study from a successful course in experience marketing aiming to answer the two research questions: How to teach experience marketing and how the students reflect their learning experience? The paper opens by discussing the experiences and experiencing that is the theoretical basis of the current research. The remainder of the paper is devoted to finding the similarities between of the logic how the experience production and the process of experiential learning are built up. Next, the results are reported followed the empirical findings. Finally, discussion elaborates contribution, theoretical and practical implications of this study.

Theoretical framework

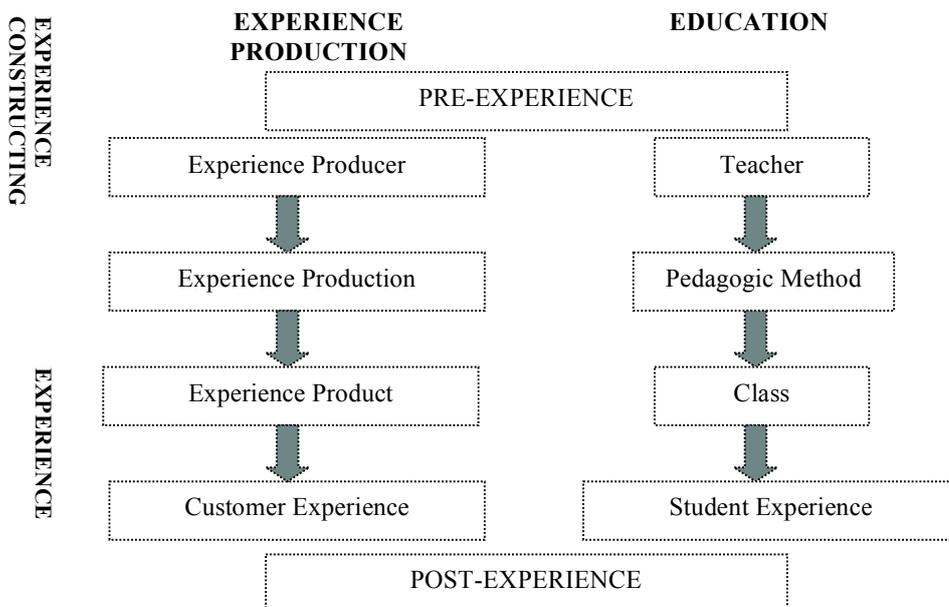
The concepts of experiences, experiencing, experience offering and production have sprouted from holistic human- and learning theories. "Learning is a process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience." (Kolb 1984, 38). The experiential learning model proposed by Kolb includes a cyclical four-mode learning process that

embraces the concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization and active experimentation. Concrete experience is feeling the experience of activity (FEEL). Reflective observation (WATCH) involves observing others or forming opinions concerning one's personal experience. Abstract conceptualization (THINK) means the forming theories to reveal views. Active experimentation (ACT) is using theories to solve problems and to make decisions.

In the experiential learning theory can be seen overlapping the different types of experiences that marketers can create for customers. By Schmitt (1999) are such the created experiences: sensory (SENSE), affective (FEEL), cognitive (THINK); physical experiences, behaviours and lifestyles (ACT), and experiences that follow from relating to a reference group (RELATE). Experience production manages four levels - the producer, the production, the offering, and the outcome, that is the experience (Sundbo and Damer 2008, Gelter 2010).

Gelter (2010) sees the parallelism on the logic how the experience production and the process of experiential learning are built up (Figure 1). Experience producer corresponds to the teacher, the experience production process with the teaching process and the experience product with the classroom activity. The customers engage in the purchased experience product with a pre-experience and leave the experience with memories and feelings. The students attend their lesson with a pre-understanding of the subject and leave the learning experiences with new knowledge and understanding.

Figure 1 Adapted experience production and educational models, *sources:* Sundbo and Damer (2008), Gelter (2010).



Experience evaluation depends on recipients' expectations, stimuli appearing from interactions with provider, and moments of contacts. Whether an experience is provoked depends on the state of the individuals "mental readiness and the specific situation" (Sundbo and Sørensen 2013, 4).

Experience production in Experience Marketing course

Experience Marketing is a master program course that combines theoretical and practical dimensions of the subject. To deliver essential knowledge, skills and attitudes and ensure the transfer of learning into students' practice, the course facilitators at Tallinn School of Business and Governance elaborated a set of teaching tools and techniques. The course helps the students to develop and design their business ideas into a viable experiential products or services.

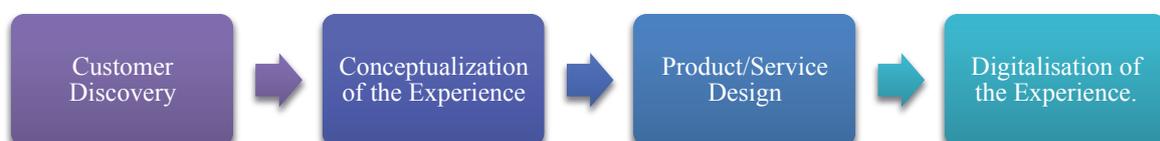
The aim of the Experience Marketing course is the co-creation of value for the students and the potential customers through meaningful experiences. As a whole, the course includes different educational activities: traditional lectures introducing the experience marketing concepts, seminars, reading assignments, fieldwork and sensory ethnography, and reflection on what the participants have learned from the course by keeping a learning diary in an essay form.

The course includes active learning and working on a project to promote student involvement. Active learning is frequently contrasted to the traditional lecture where students are the passive information recipients (Prince 2004). Working in the project enables the students to use their academic knowledge, skills and likewise to learn teamwork (Leppiman and Puustinen-Niemelä 2006).

The main task to be performed during the course is to design a viable experiential product or service and develop a communication and digitalisation strategies for it. Experience design is a outstanding approach to design that has wider boundaries than traditional design and that strives for creating experiences beyond just products or services, concerned with invoking and creating an environment that connects on an emotional or value level to the customer (AIGA, <http://www.aiga.org>). Particular attention is paid to the experiential dimension of value, striving to design impactful, meaningful experience for the customer.

The learning process of the course is designed according to the four stages of experience design: Customer Discovery, Conceptualization of the Experience, Product/Service Design, and Digitalisation of the Experience (Figure 2). Each section includes its own set of tools that enhance the learning process and make it more engaging and useful to the students. Strong emphasis is also laid on co-creation techniques that allow the delivery of useful, usable, and potentially profitable value to the beneficiaries of the service.

Figure 2 Sections of the Experience Marketing course, source: Leppiman and Kukk (2017).



To obtain consumer market insights and develop customer-oriented strategies, students are introduced to interpretative research method and techniques. Interpretive research, ethnographic research in particular, is based on studying people in their natural environments and situations (Moisander and Valtonen 2011). To get an experience of conducting a mini-scale ethnographic fieldwork, the students go to the field. They take notes, videos and pictures in the settings within they see the potential customers for their “experience product” design. They observe actions, interactions and conversations, eye contact, and body language. The visual materials are combined with interviews and conversations. The students pay attention to the sights, sounds, touches, tastes, and smells. Such sensory ethnography enables to empirically investigate the senses in action in the immediate settings (Valtonen, Markuksela and Moisander 2010).

The student teams report the findings from the fieldwork and utilize the data for designing and validating the experience product/service. Based on the results of that the task of developing the communication strategy is conducted. As the last stage of experience design students develop a strategy of digitalisation of various components of the experience, aiming to create a solution that is not only desirable and enjoyable by the customer, but also sustainable business wise.

Results and discussion

Next, we provide insight into students’ learning experiences. We use the model presented in the Figure 1 as the analytical tool to examine the empirical data – learning diaries and the group assignments within the years 2013-2016. During this time almost 200 students participated in the experience marketing course. Working in the groups they presented 28 projects for

product/service design and worked out the communication strategy.

These diaries and reports were read by two authors of this paper in parallel. The actual analysis was born in dialogue.

Pre-experience

Before beginning the course were the students asked to describe how they understand the concept of experience marketing. The following categories were found. The common denominator for the first category would be **tabula rasa**. The students reported that they do know not very much about topics covered in the course which they have taken to their study plan. The most typical answer was the relating the experience marketing with creating the emotions.

We name the second category **marketing mind-set**. Such students usually already work in the marketing area. They use the marketing vocabulary talking about *a differentiation strategy, focus on the customer, achieving the competitive advantage, value creation, added value, out-of-box mind-set*. We name the third category **experiential** since the students described their personal experiences that they noticed and remembered in tourism, entertainment, events, restaurants or marketing online and offline campaigns. *Unique, distinctive, memorable, surprising, more than expected, and trust* were the most mentioned keywords.

Tarssanen and Kylänen (2007) determine individuality, authenticity, story, multisensory perception, contrast, and interaction as the components that can create the preconditions for a meaningful experience. Leppiman (2010) says that an experience is the existential and rational reality experienced by the consumer him/herself.

When compare the theories and concepts of the experience marketing to the business

students' knowledge before starting the course it can be said that they understand the core of the experience marketing.

Experience production (design)

Experience production in the teaching of experience marketing class context comprises four phases. First, the **observation-** the phase, that means doing the sensory ethnography in the field. This phase is within four years liked by the students very much. They determined the potential target group and described the customer profile. They admitted that initially was the going to the field scary in some extent. It means the step-out of the comfort-zone. Reflecting the learning experiences, they emphasized how valuable skill is putting oneself in the customer's setting, doing what the customers do and adopting customers' beliefs.

The second phase is the **conceptualization the experience product/service**. To gain a deeper insight into their customers, students used tools and techniques of Design Thinking and Service Design (Mager 2004, Maffei, Mager and Sangiorgi 2005). For example through the course they created an empathy map (Ferreira, Silva, Oliveira and Conte 2015), defined jobs-to-be-done (Christensen, Johnson and Horn 2010) and filled out the value proposition canvas (Osterwalder, Pigneur, Bernarda and Smith 2014, Leppiman 2013/2016).

The third stage is the elaboration **the communication strategy**. One of the most successful outputs of the series of experience marketing courses might consider the involvement the students to the preparation the marketing spring conferences organized by faculty at the business school. The conferences were titled "Experience Design in Marketing" (2016), "From Consuming to Marketing Experiences" (2015), "Experiences in Marketing – Marketing in Experiences" (2014), and "Changing Consumer in the Changing Marketing" (2013). The task was to find new target groups, which would be the participants in

these conferences, to develop messages that would speak effectively to the target group and work out a communication plan. The scope of the target groups was wide, from start-ups to mechatronics students. Fourth, and final, stage is defining a **digitalisation strategy**, to enrich and expand the experience for the consumer as well as make it more profitable for the business, enabling scalability of the experience.

The students highly appreciate the fact that every year, some of them belonging to a group called "the best" get the opportunity to present the results of their project work at the spring conference.

Experience and post-experience

The experiential learning engages the concept "a sense of achievement" (Hall 1988). If an individual is being challenged, he or she has to make an effort. If the goal has been reached, the self-esteem improves; a sense of achievement is being experienced. An individual develops a new identity. The motivation to accept even bigger challenges and to use the resources to succeed improves as well (Leppiman, Riivits-Arkonsuo and Kaljund 2013). Such learning method applies to the business students who are highly motivated and success oriented.

Conclusions and implications

Creating and teaching the experience marketing course offers an excellent opportunity to learn together with students. Since this marketing domain is developing rapidly, the lecturers themselves should be involved in a continuous learning process. Learning together with the students is an authentic experience regarding understanding how students perceive their learning experiences. Things that were new and surprising (customer research) for some students were a daily routine for others. A personal experience is always

subjective (Leppiman 2010). There is a challenge when using an individual approach with students, considering their previous work experience and exposure to the project.

The second crucial point is the teacher's ability to invoke eagerness and enthusiasm. If teachers are ready for new challenges and contribute time to learners, the learners reciprocate. The students experienced production through a particular project. They gained the courage and inspiration for planning the increase of their competitiveness.

The third finding that such project learning revealed is the fact that the business students have a strong desire to succeed. Having been titled "the best team" and selected for presenting the experience design ideas in the annual marketing conference, organized by the business school, encouraged them to surpass themselves.

After completing the course, some of the students decided that experience marketing would be the topic of their master's thesis. The student feedback underlines the highly practical value of this course. Students choose to work on actual business projects or the companies that they are employed at, or collaborate with other organisations that are interested in adding an experiential dimension to their business. Moreover, some of them provided the feedback how the knowledge acquired from the course helped them to organize campaigns for their business.

The experience design thinking mind-set and design demonstrated an excellent methodological match to teach marketing subjects in general and Experience Marketing course in particular (Kukk and Leppiman 2016). The most important finding relating to this study is that the both parties - teachers and learners - should have experience in co-creation (Kukk, Leppiman and Pohjola 2014). It cannot be

designed without considering the learners' need and motivation. The teacher creates the environment for learning being the inspirer. The teaching experience consists widely of the learning experience. By teaching, we learn, and by learning, we teach. The learning experience occurs in the cooperation between the two enthusiastic partners.

Learning and teaching experiences shared in this paper can point the way toward curriculum development and improvement.

[Limitations and further research](#)

The current study has its limitations that suggest opportunities for further research. The empirical material collected within the years 2012-2016 was planned for the design and development the experience marketing course. Further studies need to be conducted considering the ascertainment the reasons of forming experiences and systematization the phases in the experiential learning exploiting the ethnography and the others qualitative methods and experience design tools.

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