

UNDERSTANDING CONSUMER RESPONSES TO SPECIAL EVENT ENTERTAINMENT (SEE) IN SHOPPING CENTRES: A CONCEPTUAL MODEL

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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the literature on the use of entertainment in shopping centres and outlines the constructs believed to impact upon consumer's responses to special event entertainment. Special event entertainment (SEE) refers to entertainment events or activities that are offered on an occasional, temporary or discontinued basis in shopping centres. Examples of SEE include school holiday entertainment and fashion shows (Parsons, 2003; Sit, Merrilees, & Birch, 2003). Using SEE, shopping centre management seeks to entice consumer patronage, increase patron traffic or promote the shopping centre brand. Despite the popularity of SEE in shopping centres, very little academic research (e.g. Parsons, 2003; Sit, Merrilees, & Birch, 2003) has either *conceptually* or *empirically* examined how consumers perceive or respond to SEE. This research presents a conceptual model that examines the determinants and outcomes of consumer responses to SEE. In particular, consumer responses to SEE are represented by SEE proneness and overall appreciation of SEE. These SEE responses are proposed to be determined by sensation-seeking tendencies and perceived value of SEE. Eight propositions are presented to explain the relationships of SEE responses with their determinants and outcomes. These relationships will be empirically tested in future research. Research implications of the conceptual model are also presented.

Keyword: shopping centre entertainment, perceived value, promotion proneness

INTRODUCTION

Shopping centres are operating in an increasingly competitive environment that is characterized by excess capacity and declining patrons (Parsons, 2003). That is, shopping centres are not only competing among themselves but also with other shopping channels such as the internet. Various entertainment attributes and events are being integrated into the shopping centre environment to induce consumer patronage and differentiate shopping centre image (Kirkup & Rafiq, 1999). *Special event entertainment* (SEE) is a popular entertainment strategy that is widely used by shopping centre management (Sit, Merrilees, & Birch, 2003). In particular, SEE refers to entertainment events or activities that are offered on an occasional, temporary or

discontinued basis. Examples of SEE include fashion shows, school holiday entertainment and market days (Parsons, 2003; Sit, Merrilees, & Birch, 2003). Using SEE, shopping centre management seeks to increase consumer traffic, encourage duration of stay, and also generate commercial opportunities for retail tenants such as dining out a café or browsing at a specialty outlet (Parsons, 2003).

Despite the popularity of SEE in shopping centres, very little academic research (e.g. Parsons, 2003; Sit, Merrilees, & Birch, 2003) has examined how consumers perceive or respond to such entertainment strategy in the shopping centre environment. To address this gap in the literature, this study presents a conceptual model that aims to understand the determinants and outcomes of consumer responses to SEE. Such understanding is worthwhile because it will: (1) serve a valuable input to effective shopping centre marketing; and (2) extend our knowledge on the role of hedonic consumption in shopping centres.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Three areas of investigation are reviewed to understand consumer responses to SEE; shopping centre image, sales promotion and hedonic consumption.

Shopping centre image. Previous research on shopping centre image has primarily focused on the ‘big four’ dimensions, namely *merchandise mix*, *accessibility*, *service* and *atmospheric* (Dennis, Marsland, & Cockett, 2001; Frasquet, Gil, & Molla, 2001; Reynolds, Ganesh, & Luckett, 2002; Wong, Lu, & Yuan, 2001). The dominance of research about the ‘big four’ has neglected the dimension of *shopping centre entertainment*, which is also believed to be significant to shopping centre image (Sit, Merrilees, & Birch, 2003). Further, shopping centre entertainment is postulated to comprise three categories, namely specialty entertainment, food entertainment and SEE (Sit, Merrilees, & Birch, 2003). A key distinction between these entertainment categories is their length of operation in the shopping centre. Unlike SEE, *specialty entertainment* and *food entertainment* generally contribute to the permanent tenant mix of a shopping centre (Barreto & Konarski, 1996). That is, specialty entertainment includes movie theatres and video arcades, and food entertainment involves a range of eateries, cafés or restaurants.

Given that the shopping centre industry is shifting from the service economy to the experience economy (Pine & Gilmore, 1999), shopping centre entertainment is becoming an integral part of shopping centre marketing. That is, shopping centres have evolved from being primarily retail outlets for acquiring goods and services to sophisticated leisure venues which provide entertaining social experiences (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Thus, shopping centre entertainment including SEE is being integrated into the shopping centre environment to ‘add value’ to the total shopping experience of consumers (Parsons, 2003). Despite the popularity and significance of SEE, very few academic studies (Parsons, 2003; Sit, Merrilees, & Birch, 2003) have examined the concept of SEE and how consumers perceive SEE. Hence, further research on SEE is needed to extend our knowledge of shopping centre image and the concept of shopping centre entertainment specifically.

Sales promotion. SEE could be characterized as a type of sales promotion in the shopping centre environment (Parsons, 2003). That is, SEE can be considered a promotional strategy by shopping centre management to entice consumer patronage,

increase visit or encourage spending at their shopping centres (Parsons, 2003). In the shopping centre environment, sales promotion is conceived to comprise two main categories, price-based promotions and entertainment-based promotions (Parsons, 2003). In particular, *price-based promotions* take the form of mall-wide sales, discount once a minimum purchase value is reached, gift-with-purchase, or gift-voucher once a minimum purchase is reached (Parsons, 2003). Conversely, *entertainment-based promotions* (non-price promotions) include contests or sweepstakes or special events like stage shows, musicians, fashion shows and market days (Parsons, 2003). Thus, SEE can be characterised as entertainment-based sales promotions in terms of characteristics, intention and possibly even outcomes (consumer responses) (Sit, Merrilees, & Birch, 2003).

A review of the sales promotion literature reveals that past and current studies have primarily focused on price-based promotions for consumable packaged products. That is, coupons and price deals or discounts for grocery products like instant coffees and laundry detergents (e.g. Gupta & Cooper, 1992; Heilman, Nakamoto, & Rao, 2002; Lichtenstein, Burton, & Netemeyer, 1997; Wakefield & Barnes, 1996). Very few studies (Parsons, 2003) have examined the notion of sales promotion in the shopping centre environment, either price- or entertainment-based promotion. Indeed, very little is known about the perceptions or characteristics of consumers responding to entertainment-based promotion or SEE in the shopping centre despite a continual investment by centre managers in SEE. Hence, further research on consumer responses to entertainment-based promotion including SEE in the shopping centre is necessary. This research would provide valuable information to shopping centre marketers by determining if SEE is an effective shopping centre marketing tool and what it can and should be used for.

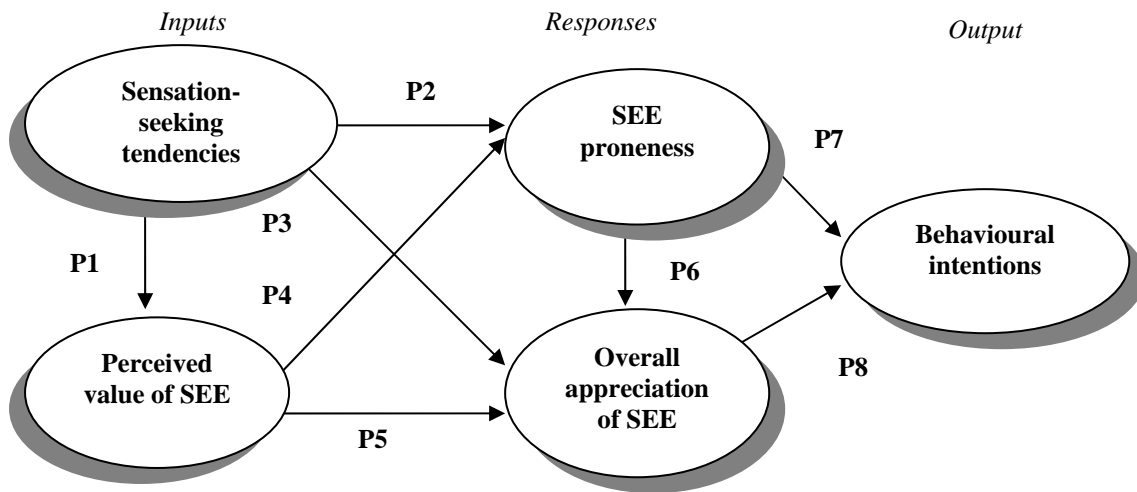
Hedonic consumption. SEE consumption is considered a form of hedonic consumption in this study. That is, as entertainment-based promotion, the offering of SEE is deemed to add 'entertainment' value to the total shopping experience of consumers (Parsons, 2003). Therefore, consumer appraisal of SEE should focus on experiential or emotional values like excitement, fun or novelty, as opposed to functional or instrumental values like convenience (Babin, Darden, & Griffin, 1994). A review of the retailing literature reveals that previous studies of consumer's perceived value of shopping centres in general have focused on shopping contexts *beyond* SEE such as *mall patronage* (Bloch, Ridgway, & Dawson, 1994; Shim & Eastlick, 1998), *fashion shopping* (Evans, Christiansen, & Gill, 1996; Taylor & Cosenza, 2002), and *browsing* (Bloch & Richins, 1983). In an investigation of consumer responses to SEE it is important to focus on experiential and hedonic consumption constructs and not contextualize consumer's responses based on utilitarian shopping motives.

KEY CONSTRUCTS OF CONCEPTUAL MODEL

The conceptual model consists of five key constructs, namely sensation-seeking tendency, perceived value of SEE, overall appreciation of SEE, SEE proneness and mall patronage intention, as depicted in Figure 1. In particular, consumer responses to SEE are characterised by their overall appreciation of SEE and SEE proneness. Further, consumer responses to SEE are proposed to be influenced by their sensation-seeking tendency and perceived value of SEE. Behavioural intention represents an important end to the conceptual model because shopping centre managers need to

understand how consumers respond to SEE and their subsequent behaviours, in order to utilize it effectively as a marketing tool (Wakefield & Barnes, 1996).

Figure 1: A Conceptual Model of Consumer Responses to SEE



Source: adapted from (Wakefield & Barnes, 1996)

SEE proneness. SEE proneness represents a behavioural response that measures the consumer tendency to use SEE information as a criterion for decision making in shopping centre patronage (Wakefield & Barnes, 1996). This construct is sourced from the concept of *promotion proneness* (Wakefield & Barnes, 1996). Examples of operational items for SEE proneness include ‘SEE play a big part in my choice to attend a shopping centre’, ‘if there is a SEE I like, I just to go that shopping centre instead of another one’ and ‘SEE influences when I visit more than how much I visit the shopping centre’ (Wakefield & Barnes, 1996).

In this study, consumer proneness to shopping centre entertainment is related to SEE specifically rather than being conceptualised at a general promotion preference level. This is consistent with the sales promotion literature (e.g. Lichtenstein, Netemeyer, & Burton, 1990), asserting that the construct of sales promotion proneness was best conceptualised at a promotion-type specific level such as coupon proneness or rebate proneness. Moreover, shopping centre entertainment is constituted of three entertainment categories, namely SEE, specialty entertainment and food entertainment (Sit, Merrilees, & Birch, 2003). Thus, conceptualising consumer proneness to shopping centre entertainment at a general level is ambiguous and less applicable to this study.

Overall appreciation of SEE. Overall appreciation of SEE represents an affective response and it is a common measurement of consumer reactions to sales promotions like premium-based promotions (e.g. d'Astous & Jacob, 2002; d'Astous & Landreville, 2003; d'Astous, Legoux, & Colbert, 2004). Examples of measurement items for this construct include ‘SEE pleases me’, ‘SEE is of quality’, ‘SEE interests me’, ‘SEE gives a good image to the shopping centre’, and ‘SEE is favourable’ (d'Astous, Legoux, & Colbert, 2004).

Sensation-seeking tendency. Sensation-seeking tendency reflects a consumer's personality trait to seek for diverse, novel or exciting sensations through SEE consumption (Zuckerman, 1979). The construct of sensation seeking is grounded in the notion that humans have optimum stimulation levels (OSL) and they will seek stimuli or activities that help maintaining such levels of arousal (Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 1992). In the psychology literature (Zuckerman, 1979), the definition of sensation-seeking tendency commonly consists of two components: the need for diverse, novel and complex sensations; and the willingness to take physical and social risks for such sensations. This indicates that risk taking is a major component of the sensation-seeking tendency (Zuckerman, 1979). This is because individuals high in sensation seeking tendencies seek high risk activities such as reckless driving, alcohol use, smoking and use of illicit drugs (see Hoyle, Stephenson, Palmgreen, Lorch, & Donohew, 2002).

However, the component of risk taking is less relevant to SEE consumption in this study. This is because SEE can be considered a leisure activity that offers minimal physical and social risks as opposed to other high risk activities like reckless driving or alcohol use. Thus, consumers responding to SEE could not be driven its risk factors but the diverse and novel experiences offered by SEE. Thus, the component of risk taking is less relevant to conceptualising sensation-seeking tendency in this study. The similar approach was also used by Wakefield & Barnes (1996) in conceptualising variety-seeking tendency in their investigation of sales promotion for a leisure service.

Sensation-seeking tendency is a valuable construct to our understanding of consumer responses to SEE because it highlights individual psychological differences relative to SEE. The construct will be measured by the Brief Sensation Seeking Scale (BSSS) (Hoyle et al., 2002). In particular, the BSSS consists of four subscales: *experience seeking* (the desire to seek for new experiences), *boredom susceptibility* (the tendency to become restless and the need for the unpredictable), *thrill and adventure seeking* (the desire for excitement and adventure), and *disinhibition* (the tendency to ignore societal inhibitions) (Hoyle et al., 2002). The BSSS has been reported to be valid and reliable in other contexts like holiday preferences (Eachus, 2004).

Perceived value of SEE. Perceived value of SEE represents consumer appraisal of the experiential or affective benefits derived from SEE (Hirschman, 1984). In particular, consumer perceived value of SEE is proposed to be hedonic rather than utilitarian oriented. This is because consumers who respond to SEE are expected to seek entertainment for emotional benefits like social interaction, playfulness and exploration *beyond* functional benefits like convenience or purchase efficiency (Babin, Darden, & Griffin, 1994).

Previous research (e.g. Zeithaml, 1988) has asserted that the conceptualisation of perceived value is highly personal and idiosyncratic because the meanings of perceived value may vary among research contexts. However, past studies (McDougall & Levesque, 2000; Patterson & Spreng, 1997; Tam, 2004; Wakefield & Barnes, 1996) have commonly examined perceived value from an *economic utility perspective*, which emphasises the acquisition and transaction utility offered by a product (Lichtenstein, Netemeyer, & Burton, 1990). That is, perceived value has commonly been related to low price, whatever a consumer wants in a product, the

quality a consumer gets for the price he or she pays, or what a consumer gets for what he or she gives (see Zeithaml, 1988).

Despite the wide applicability of the economic utility perspective, it is deemed to be less applicable to understand consumer perceived value of SEE. SEE consumption is a form of hedonic consumption, and therefore its focus should be on experiential or affective benefits beyond economic utilitarian benefits (Babin, Darden, & Griffin, 1994). Therefore, in this study, consumer perceived value of SEE is conceptualised from an *experiential perspective* (Holbrook, 1994).

A review of the retailing literature (e.g. Chandon, Wansink, & Laurent, 2000; Holbrook, 1994; Mathwick, Malhotra, & Rigdon, 2001; Sheth, Newman, & Gross, 1990; Sweeney & Soutar, 2001) identifies four experiential values that may be relevant to SEE consumption. They are entertainment value, escapism value, exploration value, and social value. In particular, *entertainment value* involves the experiences of both active play and reactive aesthetic offered by SEE (Chandon, Wansink, & Laurent, 2000; Mathwick, Malhotra, & Rigdon, 2001). For example, a karaoke singing contest is intrinsically fun to watch or to participate in. Unlike the entertainment value, *escapism value* refers to the experience of relieving boredom or getting away from the demands of daily errands (Mathwick, Malhotra, & Rigdon, 2001). That is, SEE which is interesting or engaging allows consumers to temporarily forget their daily responsibilities or alleviate their boredom. Moreover, SEE represents an economical avenue for escapism because it is generally offered free of charge to consumers.

Exploration value relates to the experience of arousing curiosity, seeking novelty and/or satisfying a desire for knowledge (Chandon, Wansink, & Laurent, 2000). For example, a reptile show can be novel and educational to consumers. *Social value* involves the experience of interacting with other people like family members, friends or other people sharing similar interests (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001). For example, school holiday entertainment is generally offered to encourage family consumers to have fun with their children at the shopping centre.

Behavioural intentions. A behavioural intention refers to a stated likelihood to engage in particular shopping centre behaviours (Oliver, 1997). In particular, this study focuses on the likelihood of consumers increasing the number of visits to a particular shopping centre and increasing the duration of time spent on each visit.

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN KEY CONSTRUCTS

Eight propositions are presented to discuss the relationships among the five key constructs, namely sensation-seeking tendency, perceived value of SEE, overall appreciation of SEE, SEE proneness, and behavioural intentions.

Sensation-seeking tendencies and perceived value of SEE. Higher sensation seekers should feel more enthusiastic or venturesome in entertainment seeking than lower sensation seekers. Thus, higher sensation seekers are expected to find SEE more attractive and thus have greater emphasis on its perceived value. For example, a study by (Galloway, 2002) found that high sensation seekers placed higher importance on most facilities and services in national parks than lower sensation seekers. Therefore:

Proposition 1: There is a positive relationship between sensation-seeking tendencies of consumers and their perceived value of SEE.

Sensation-seeking tendencies and SEE proneness. High sensation seekers are deemed to be more enthusiastic about entertainment seeking, and thus are more inclined to respond to SEE than low sensation seekers (Hirschman, 1984). For example, consumers with high boredom susceptibility will be more responsive to SEE than those with low boredom susceptibility. This proposition is supported by previous studies (e.g. Galloway, 2002; Wakefield & Barnes, 1996). In particular, Wakefield & Barnes (1996) found that individuals with higher variety-seeking tendencies were more prone to partake in promotional events at a baseball match than those with lower variety-seeking tendencies. Consistently, Galloway (2002) found that high sensation seekers were more inclined to camp at national parks than low sensation seekers. This leads to:

Proposition 2: There is a positive relationship between sensation-seeking tendency and SEE proneness.

Sensation-seeking tendencies and overall appreciation of SEE. Consistent with Proposition 2, high sensation seekers are expected to be more satisfied with SEE than low sensation seekers. That is, high sensation seekers should appreciate the entertaining aspects of SEE in adding value to their total shopping experiences more than low sensation seekers. Thus:

Proposition 3: There is a positive relationship between sensation-seeking tendencies of consumers and their overall appreciation of SEE.

Perceived value of SEE and SEE proneness. Very few studies (e.g. Wakefield & Barnes, 1996) have examined the direct effect of perceived value on promotion proneness. In particular, a study by (Wakefield & Barnes, 1996) found that perceived value (value for money) of a baseball match had a direct negative effect on consumer proneness relative to promotional events. However, this can be due to the incongruity between the utilitarian nature of perceived value and the hedonic nature of promotional events (the Dynamite Lady).

In this study, perceived value of SEE will be measured from the experiential perspective (Holbrook, 1994). Given the hedonic nature of entertainment consumption (Sit, Merrilees, & Birch, 2003), experiential value of SEE is expected to have a positive effect on SEE. That is, consumers should be more prone to engage in SEE if it is perceived to offer greater experiential value like entertainment value, and vice versa. This leads to:

Proposition 4: There is a positive relationship between perceived value of SEE and SEE proneness.

Perceived value and overall appreciation of SEE. A review of the sales promotion literature (e.g. d'Astous & Jacob, 2002) reveals that consumer appreciation of a premium-based promotion is directly and positively influenced by their perceived value of the premium. Consistently, consumers are expected to express greater

appreciation of SEE if it is perceived to offer greater experiential value like social value. Therefore:

Proposition 5: There is a positive relationship between consumer perceived value and their overall appreciation of SEE.

SEE proneness and overall appreciation of SEE. SEE proneness of consumers is expected to have an impact on their overall appreciation of the entertainment category. For example, a study by Garreston and Clow (1999) revealed that high coupon-prone and deal-prone consumers gained a stronger sense of achievement by purchasing products on specials and thus were more content with coupon or deal promotions. Consistently, d'Astous & Jacob (2002) found that high deal-prone consumers were more appreciative of premium-based promotion than low deal-prone consumers. Consequently, high SEE-prone consumers are expected to express greater appreciation of SEE than low SEE-prone consumers. Therefore:

Proposition 6: There is positive relationship SEE proneness and overall appreciation of SEE

SEE proneness and behavioural intentions. High SEE-prone consumers are deemed to find SEE more appealing than low SEE-prone consumers. Thus, during the occurrence of SEE, high SEE-prone consumers are likely to visit more often or stay longer at a shopping centre. This proposition is supported by previous studies on promotion proneness (e.g. Bawa & Srinivasan, 1997). For example, Bawa and Srinivasan (1997) found that coupon redemption behaviours of consumers were positively related to their coupon proneness. That is, high coupon-prone consumers were more likely to use their coupons in a product purchase their low coupon-prone counterparts. Hence:

Proposition 7: There is a positive relationship between SEE proneness and behavioural intention.

Overall appreciation of SEE and behavioural intentions. Consumers who express greater enjoyment with SEE are likely to visit a shopping centre more often or stay longer at a shopping centre. Consistently, a study by Ward and Hill (1991) suggested that consumers were inclined to repeat or spend more time participating in a promotional game if they enjoyed the game. Therefore:

Proposition 8: There is positive relationship between consumer satisfaction with SEE and their behavioural intentions.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This study provides a starting point to understanding consumer responses to SEE in the shopping centre environment. Moreover, a conceptual model is presented to examine the determinants and outcomes of consumer responses to SEE. In particular, the conceptual model is constituted of five key constructs, namely sensation-seeking tendencies, perceived value o SEE, SEE proneness, overall appreciation of SEE, and behavioural intentions. Consumer responses to SEE are characterised by SEE proneness and overall appreciation of SEE. These SEE responses are proposed to be determined by sensation-seeking tendencies of consumers (a consumer variable) and

perceived value of SEE (an environmental variable). Moreover, consumer responses to SEE are proposed to have an effect on their subsequent behaviours such as patronage frequency or duration of stay. Eight propositions are presented to explain the relationships among these five constructs. These propositions will be examined using a quantitative methodology such as a mall intercept survey across a number of regional shopping centres in Australia. Shopping centre patrons will be randomly and systematically sampled. Structural equation modelling will be conducted to examine the fitness of the conceptual model.

One implication of the conceptual model is that consumer responses to SEE may vary depending on their level of involvement with entertainment seeking. That is, the conceptual model is deemed to be more relevant to targeting 'pro-entertainment' as opposed to 'anti-entertainment' shoppers (Sit, Merrilees, & Birch, 2003). Given that a shopping centre caters to a diversity of shopper segments like the convenience shopper and the entertainment shopper, not all shopper segments are enthusiastic about entertainment seeking (Sit, Merrilees, & Grace, 2003). Thus, any entertainment effort targeted at those 'anti-entertainment' shoppers like the convenience shopper is at best redundant, and at worst counterproductive. Therefore, shopping centre management should consider consumer involvement with entertainment seeking as a key factor when designing SEE strategies.

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