

# Attitudes of Polish Consumers Toward Experiential Marketing

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## Abstract

**Purpose:** The experience economy is a concept that can be defined as a new way of perceiving the market offer of an enterprise, focusing on the customer experience. Enterprises, both in the production and service industries, are becoming similar to one another on a massive scale, which makes it increasingly difficult to stand out. The response to this can be to offer the consumer an unforgettable experience related to a product or service provided by a company.

**Methodology:** This study analysed the results of qualitative research on the attitudes and opinions of Polish consumers on experience marketing.

**Results/findings:** The results showed that participants of the study were prepared to transition from the economy based on products or services to an economy based on experiences at a moderate level. They declared a willingness to participate in experiences offered by companies but at the same time focus on the cost and utility of them.

**Keywords:** experience marketing, shopping behaviour, experience economy, Poland, focus group interviews

**JEL:** M31

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## Introduction

Consumer shopping behaviour can be defined as “the behaviour of households and individuals buying goods and services for their own needs” (Kotler, 2004, p. 601). The term “consumer” is used with relation to individuals who buy goods and services for their own satisfaction. There are two types of entities: individual and institutional. Individual customers buy goods and services for their own needs. Thus, goods are bought for a personal use. However in the organizations, it is profit that matters as they have to buy products, equipment and services to operate. (Kotler, 2004, p. 601). What the organizations buy and how, where, when and in what amounts depend on the individual personal perceptions of the offer, the social and cultural background as well as on the family cycle, beliefs, values, motivation, personality, social class and other factors, both endogenous and exogenous (Janaki and Premila, 2012, p. 170–171).

Therefore, the marketer’s role is attempting to understand the diverse needs of consumers and their various behaviours that requires in-depth examination of their motivations, both internal and external. With this information, marketing plans of the market participants will be purposefully built. The marketing activity starts with the moment of realization of the human needs and its outcome is visible at the moment of achieving the buyer’s satisfaction (Gordon, 1987).

Thus, the importance of understanding consumer shopping behaviour has become the key issue from the retailer’s point of view. Much research on consumer shopping behaviour was limited to having been carried out by producers of consumer goods. Currently, it is the retailers that see the need to gather the knowledge on customers’ purchasing processes to influence their shopping decisions more effectively. This study aimed to identify determinants of economic development experience in Poland, based on qualitative research derived from the raw data.

## Literature review

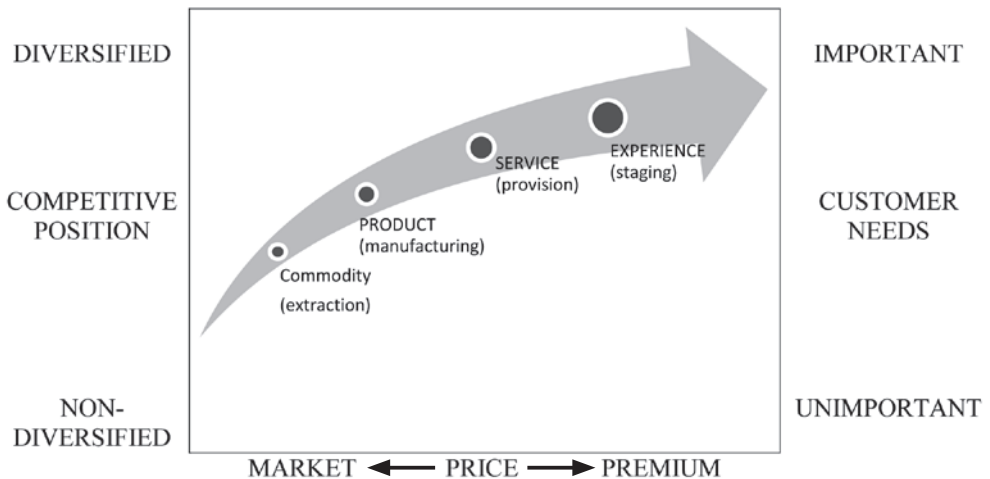
### The experience economy

Over the last few decades, there have been enormous changes in social, economic and cultural life, which had effects on the production and commercial offers prepared by entrepreneurs. Simple commodities were replaced by more processed products. To help out the customer, an additional service was attached to a good to make the offer stand out among the competition and make the buyer notice it. Thus, the experience economy (Pine and Gilmore, 2011) emerged as shown in Figure 1.

In recent years, consumers have undergone transformation from passive buyers and became active players stimulating and creating **new consumption experiences** through active participation in the process of partner marketing.

The empirical paradigm related to shopping behaviour shows consumption in the holistic context as symbolic meanings, hedonistic (emotional) reactions and feeling pleasure (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1986). Following this view, theorists have agreed that human experience and shopping impulses should be interpreted as the consequences of their cognitive systems based on the interactions between them and their environment. This means that individuals responding to particular experiences form or even embody certain cognitive contexts and act according to them.

**Figure 1.** Customizing the market offer



Source: Pine and Gilmore (2011, p. 34).

All of this eventually leads to shopping. Thus, the most important thing is to recognize the conceptual basis combining contextual behaviours and then to form empirical and conceptual tools and measures to determine a role that particular factors play in the shopping behaviour (Bashar, Ahmad and Wasiq, 2013).

Over the years, experiences have come to be regarded as personal occurrences, often with emotional significance and caused by stimuli provided by companies (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982b). Today, experience is considered an integral part of human functioning, which is *“built through numerous experiences, in which the consumer is immersed”* (Firat and Dholakia, 1998, p. 96). The consumption of experiences has thus

become the subject of scientists' research, especially the components building consumer experiences, such as the cognitive and hedonistic aspects in consumption, which were previously disregarded (Addis and Holbrook, 2001).

Research in the area of consumer shopping behaviour and attitudes largely relate to rational decision-making models. There are also new trends emerging (Holt, 1997; Tang et al., 2013) that take into account different meanings and the value of feelings and emotional experience as influencing a wide range of consumer attitudes. These include the idea of service quality (Chebat et al., 1995), loyalty to the product (Tsai, 2001), idea of a real provision of services (Gountas et al., 2007), customer satisfaction (Giardini and Frese, 2008; Kaltcheva and Parasuraman, 2009) and future intentions (Martin et al., 2008).

Two dimensions can be identified in which consumption takes place. The first is the structure of consumption activity (from the individual interaction with the object of consumption to the interaction with other individuals) and the second is the consumption purpose (autotelic or instrumental). This in turn leads to distinguishing four types of consumption in which it appears in the following ways (Holt, 1997):

- Experience – subjective emotional reaction towards objects of consumption;
- Classification – manifested in perception of objects of consumption as carriers of cultural and personal meanings;
- Integration – desire of consumers so the consumed object becomes part of their identity and possesses symbolic meaning;
- Play – where the aim is interactive consumption itself.

In addition, it was noted that the experience of consumption is not only limited to the market offer. As emphasized by Caru and Cova (2003b), the experiences can take place in four areas (Edgell et al., 1997):

- Experiences resulting from family ties;
- Experiences gained from relations within the community;
- Civic experiences as a result of the relationship with the state;
- Experiences resulting from the exchange taking place in the market.

This means that the marketing approach to experiences is limited to only one of their dimensions (consumer experience with the enterprise and other consumers). What is more, if one assumes that marketing is based on an exchange, then in a situation where the exchange doesn't happen (e.g. free provision of goods or services), one is not dealing with the consumer experiences because they are excluded from the market (Caru and Cova, 2003).

Representing the marketing approach to experiences, Pine and Gilmore (1999), considered the fathers of the concept of experience economy, and Schmitt (1999) are convinced that experience is now the basis for the market offer, which allows meeting the needs and preferences of today's consumer and developing a competitive advantage. In the subject literature is found three definitions of experience (Ismail et al., 2011):

- Based on being **holistic**, focusing on the human being (and not just his/her role as a consumer) and all the interactions that occur with the enterprise (LaSalle and Britton, 2003), i.e., “the customer experience originates from a set of interactions between a customer and a product, a company, or part of its organization, which provoke a reaction. This experience is strictly individual and implies the customer’s involvement at different levels (rational, emotional, sensorial, physical and spiritual)” (Gentile, Spiller and Noci, 2007, p. 397);
- Based on **unforgettable experiences** (assuming the key role of an enterprise, which stages the experiences for the consumer), e.g., “experiences are events that engage individuals in a personal way” (Pine and Gilmore, 1999);
- Based on **co-creation** in which enterprises offer the platform of goods and services, based on which consumers can create their own unique experiences (Pralhad and Ramaswamy, 2004), i.e., “emotions provoked, sensations felt, knowledge gained and skills acquired through active involvement with the firm pre, during and post consumption” (Ismail et al., 2011, p. 208).

These types of definitions were reflected in the continuum of experiences as proposed by Caru and Cova (2007). On one side of the continuum, there are experiences independently created by consumers; on the other side, there are experiences staged by enterprises, while in the middle, there are experiences jointly created by consumers and companies. Moving of the market offer from the staged experiences to those created independently by consumers reflects the evolution of the concept of the experience economy (Boswijk et al., 2007).

Based on these reflections on the experience definition, one can make a list of key features that experience within the marketing meaning should have. Thus, an ideal experience should be (Dziewanowska, 2015):

- Unforgettable, remaining in the consumer memory for a long time (Pine and Gilmore, 1999),
- Unique and unusual (LaSalle and Britton, 2003),
- Engaging all consumer senses (Schmitt, 1999),

- Deliberately planned by the enterprise and focusing on the consumer, who is engaged through social and physical interaction (Carbone and Haeckel, 1994; Pine and Gilmore, 1999; Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004),
- Subjective, as each consumer decides about the level of engagement and then estimates its results,
- Inducing strong and positive emotions (Gentile et al., 2007; Ismail et al., 2011; Shaw and Ivens, 2002)<sup>2</sup>.

To sum up, it can be concluded that the use of the described variables by enterprises can facilitate communication between the customer and the company. This will result in more accurate preparation of the offer, whose use will be more enjoyable for the customer. In this way, the experience economy is developing on the market. However, one question arises: **is the consumer ready to participate in the concept of the shopping service presented in such a way?** This question is of greater significance under Polish conditions where the whole matter is in the initial phase of market development. Hence, the presented topic has become the subject of this study, the results of which are further described.

## Methodology

The study was carried out in July 2013. Five focus group interviews (FGI) were conducted: 3 classic and 2 natural. The focus group interviews were carried out by specialised moderators who supervised the course of discussions, directing them according to a planned scenario and helping the group to reach conclusions. The course of group discussion was registered in audio-visual form and the basis for the interpretation of results was in-depth analysis of the interviews.

The research problem determined at this stage of research was: ***What is the attitude of the Polish consumer to participation in the experience economy?*** Consequently, three research objectives were determined for the study:

- To examine the general attitudes toward shopping;
- To investigate what consumers think about the examples of companies using experience marketing techniques;
- To explore prospects for development of experiential marketing in Poland in consumers' opinions.

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<sup>2</sup> More about experience economy in: Kacprzak, Dziewanowska and Skorek (2015).

All participants were from cities of over 500,000 inhabitants because in big cities, there was greater access to commercial outlets using tools from the area of experience marketing, and their typical incomes exceeded PLN 1,000 net. Due to the research topic, members of households with incomes below PLN 500 net were excluded from the study.

A detailed list of demographic metric data for the participants is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** List of metric data of FGI participants

Code	Type of research group	Age	Sex	Education	Professional situation
P1	Mix	40–65	M	Higher	Working: forestry mechanization specialist
P2	Mix	18–30	M	Secondary	University student
P3	Mix	40–65	F	Higher	Working-secretary
P4	Mix	40–65	M	Higher	Working:aircraftsman
P5	Mix	40–65	F	Secondary	Working:administrative specialist
P6	Mix	18–30	F	Higher	Working: physiotherapist
P7	MD	18–30	F	Secondary	University student
P8	MD	18–30	M	Higher	Working: logistics specialist
P9	MD	18–30	F	Secondary	Working-barmaid
P10	MD	18–30	F	Secondary	Working:administrative specialist
P11	MD	18–30	F	Secondary	Working:administrative specialist
P12	MD	18–30	M	Higher	Physiotherapist
P13	MF	18–30	M	Secondary	Working:administrative specialist
P14	MF	18–30	F	Secondary	Receptionist
P15	MF	18–30	F	Higher	Working in a real estate office
P16	MF	18–30	F	Secondary	Working:IT specialist
P17	MF	18–30	F	Secondary	Working:assistant accountant
P18	MF	18–30	M	Secondary	Working:client advisor
P19	SD	40–65	F	Secondary	Working:graphic designer
P20	SD	40–65	M	Higher	Working:telecommunications engineer
P21	SD	40–65	M	Higher	Working: construction engineer

P22	SD	40–65	F	Higher	Working:production manager
P23	SD	40–65	F	Secondary	Working:administrative specialist
P24	SD	40–65	F	Higher	Working:HR specialist
P25	SF	40–65	F	Higher	Working:HR specialist
P26	SF	40–65	F	Higher	Working:insurance analyst
P27	SF	40–65	M	Secondary	Working:cleaning specialist
P28	SF	40–65	M	Secondary	Working: tourism specialist
P29	SF	40–65	F	Higher	Working:complaint handling specialist

\*Mix – mixed group; MD – younger group in a house; MF – younger group in the focus study room; SD – an older group in a house; SF – an older group in the focus study room.

Source: own research.

The first part of the interview scenario covered the feelings evoked during shopping. Its aim was to check to what extent the participants derived pleasure from the shopping process and to examine feelings related to their most and least pleasant shopping experiences. The objective of the second part of the scenario was to explore their attitudes towards the examples of the companies using experience marketing techniques and whether it was a phenomenon that arouses their enthusiasm or their suspicion, i.e., would they want to participate in it?

In the research, three presentations were used to give examples of using the experience marketing: the M&M's World store in Las Vegas, USA, The Mexican restaurant in Warsaw, Poland and the Guinness Storehouse in Doblin, Ireland.

- 1) M&M's World<sup>3</sup> store has glass tubes filled with colourful M&M's candies and souvenirs, such as trinkets with the image of favourite M&M's characters. The store offers the opportunity to create your own personalized M&Ms in a special machine. For those who cannot or don't want to go to Las Vegas, M&M's offers the same possibilities online.
- 2) The Mexican restaurant<sup>4</sup> is a Polish franchise network with a characteristic Mexican design. The restaurant staffs wear special clothes imitating traditional Mexican outfits. Inside the restaurant are dance and music performances as

<sup>3</sup> See photos on: <https://www.mmsworld.com/>

<sup>4</sup> See photos on: <http://www.mexican.pl/>



well as bartender shows. Customers can have a mugshot taken if they make a particular order.

- 3) Guinness Storehouse<sup>5</sup> is a production site for the legendary Irish beer. Every visitor is shown the detailed process of production. Then visitors go to a room where they can learn how to properly pour a perfect pint of Guinness and taste it. If you pass a test checking your beer-pouring skills, you can receive a special certificate documenting your qualifications.

The aforementioned presentations were shown to the research participants with comments on the photos so that everyone had the same level of knowledge about the examined offers associated with the marketing experiences.

The last part of the research was to determine whether, in the participants' opinions, the marketing of experiences has a future in Poland.

## Findings

### General attitudes toward shopping

The first issue was related to the question about **feelings during shopping and the attitude towards doing it**. The respondents' answers showed many possible feelings, from "I love shopping" through a moderate affection or not having any feelings to an animosity towards shopping.

"Positive. I'm never mad that I have to go shopping. It's a pleasure. Any shopping: cosmetics, clothes, groceries" (P7).

"I don't feel any emotions, I just enter a shop, buy and "see ya", as they say" (P16).

"I don't like shopping. I never have any money. I generally hate shopping" (P24).

In the second phase of this part, the respondents were asked to comment on the **kind of shopping that gives them sheer pleasure or towards which they feel aversion**. Their answers were classified according to the following categories:

- Type of things bought;
- Place of shopping;
- Company in which shopping is done.

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<sup>5</sup> See photos on: <http://www.guinness-storehouse.com>

“I, e.g. don't like doing grocery shopping because I always put too much into the cart and then I have to get rid of it” (P3).

“Contrary to the prevailing stereotypes, I somehow don't like shopping for clothes” (P6).

“I have recently purchased something that gave me an incredible joy”. What was it? You could hear it when I came (laughs). I have bought a new motorbike. You can say that it was a management of experiences (laughs). We should make our dreams come true, so I bought a motorbike that I had seen and liked before. I knew then that I would like to have one like this. (...) I have a device that I had always dreamed of” (P20).

“I cannot imagine shopping with a female friend, with a female colleague, with the whole pack of women like some shop with.” I waded through the... for hours by myself” (P25).

“I shop for groceries because I have to, in local shops, I don't like shopping in supermarkets” (P29).

The next part of the study focused on exceptional shopping memories. **The least pleasant** shopping that the respondents experienced was due to different reasons. As examples, it was the result of the presence of a moody child who made the choice of products difficult, problems with the credit card, trouble finding the car in a big parking lot or with a lack of supplies. Pejorative experiences were characteristic for the sales service. Shop assistants' incompetence and tactless behaviour were mainly quoted.

“I mean banking services are unpleasant for me. Not so much for the service... in Polbank the case of seizing my bank account was dealt with for an hour. The clerk after consulting the branch manager referred me to the helpline. The service was simply poor. An absolute incompetence” (P27).

Instead, the descriptions of **the most pleasant** shopping were, on one hand, recalling rare situations that were long awaited, often related to buying expensive products.

“I once had a situation where I bought quite expensive perfume and I got another one for free. I was shocked” (P4).

Among the respondents' answers on the most pleasant shopping, there were stories related to the individual approach to the client, appreciating long-term cooperation or receiving an unexpected freebie. The respondents also pointed to situations when shop assistants were able to admit to a mistake or show their commitment.

“I really like it when the shop assistant personally recognizes me. Suddenly we receive a discount on a product. It is cool that they recognize us in this shop and we will arrange other things there” (P8).

### **Attitudes towards examples of using marketing of experiences**

The middle part of the described study was based on the three presentations with examples of using the marketing of experiences. The cases of the M&M's World showroom, the brewery of Guinness Storehouse and the chain of The Mexican restaurants were shown. The aim of this phase was to examine attitudes of the participants towards the real examples of the marketing of experiences. Was it a phenomenon that evokes enthusiasm or suspicion? Would they like to participate in it?

The first impression was positive among the participants. After a deeper analysis, the participants' emotions cooled, which resulted in expressions of criticism toward some of the solutions shown related to the marketing of experiences. The opinions differed depending on age, although generally the activity of the Guinness Storehouse brewery was viewed most positively. In the case of M&M's World, the opinions were often positive, referring to it as an attraction for the families with children. The greatest controversy was aroused around the activity of The Mexican restaurant. The comments were both positive and very critical.

After the presentations of experiences there were some very positive reviews:

“The Mexican is fun, they play music and there are other things”. I agree in 100% that it is simply the best (P13).

There were also some neutral opinions:

“In my opinion it is not treated as a place for shopping. In this place you can spend your free time and in this process do some shopping” (P20).

There were also some negative comments:

“This is a one-time place, you don't want to come back because it is boring” (P23).

Respondents are also aware that participating in unique experiences is something the client has to pay for:

“Yes, it is connected with a bit bigger costs, right. Nothing comes for free. You have to bear a greater cost for sure. I suppose that such M&M's cost much more in this factory than a package of M&M's in a shop. It is appealing but unfortunately it is also a catch for clients to leave more money here” (P14).

Almost all respondents expressed their willingness to do shopping in the majority of presented places. They connected attractiveness of these places with the possibility to experience something different and unusual and to obtain personalized souvenirs. Respondents pointed out the different possibilities of using various elements, such as giving the exceptional M&M's candies as a present or “accidentally” spilling them before their friends. Younger respondents pointed to the exceptional atmosphere that accompanies meals in The Mexican, associated with live music and dancers' performances, although there was also some criticism:

“I think the brewery is a great idea, because if each time a new friend joins us and we go out again and again, then at the end there is this pub where we can sit and relax. (laughs). Generally this could be repeated” (P13).

### **Prospects for development of experiential marketing**

In the final part of the research, the respondents were asked about their opinions on the future development of the marketing of experiences in Poland.

Respondents mentioned in their opinions that there were already actions being carried out in Poland in the area of experiential marketing. They mainly referred to services, such as from the hairdressers or beauticians. However, a positive conclusion is that in the respondents' opinions, the experience economy in Poland will continue developing,

“I think there are quite a few places of this type in Poland. But they aren't simply so popular yet or as someone said: maybe not on such a large scale” (P13).

Moreover, the respondents managed to give a few specific examples of experiential marketing they already encountered as presented in Table 2.

The respondents' answers indicated the necessity of changing the activity in the market of trade entities due to huge competition. Easy and fast comparisons of product offers does not facilitate business operation. Hence, there is a space for the usage of elements of the experience economy.

**Table 2.** Enterprises using strategy based on experiences indicated by respondents

Company	Action
Polkomtel	The possibility of testing how the offered products work
Apple	
Ikea	
McDonald	Offering toys to sets.
Disneyland	Creating cartoon fairy-tale atmosphere.
Polish Television	The possibility to visit the production facilities, the purchase of souvenirs.
Brewery in Lwówek Śląski	
Spiz Brewery in Wrocław	
Wedel	The possibility to design a personal birthday cake.
Chain of bars from the period of the People's Republic of Poland	Using souvenirs and creating sentimental atmosphere.

Source: own research.

“I think that any non-cliché activity that will make such shops stand out, irrespective of the industry, will be well perceived. Now anything that is available worldwide, is also available in Poland. There is no problem to buy something. There is an abundance of shops and we try to make shopping most comfortable and least time consuming if all shops are the same. If there is any gift, be it a feeling or an experience, then it will be its plus. This means that this enterprise will gain more customers because it will generally stand out among the others” (P19).

Considering the participants in the experience economy, respondents pointed mainly to people, who are young, brave and not scared of novelties. Families with children as well as modern and mature consumers were also quoted. Age and the attitude to shopping were also considered. According to the respondents, older people will rather avoid experiential marketing techniques.

“Curious young people” (P17).

“Older persons have their habits and old views on something and the advertisements do not convince them” (P7).

“Bored with routine shopping. “Those who have a lot of time” (P19).

## Discussion and managerial implications

The analysis of the conducted research showed that consumers are prepared to transition from the economy based on products or services to the economy based on the experience at a moderate level. The respondents' answers indicated a high amount of materialism. They often didn't notice any additional experiences focusing only on the product functionality and price. However, they showed great approval for actions undertaken within the experience economy and they declared their willingness to participate in this type of consumer activity.

The respondents who took part in FGI foresaw the development of the experience economy, treating it as a form of enterprise promotion and meeting consumers' expectations. They were aware of the usage of elements of the experience economy in their environment. They indicated that success of these actions would be based on a high quality of experiences and an appropriate price strategy. In their opinions, those who are interested in the experience economy are open and curious of the world, paying attention to experiences rather than to material goods. They also pointed to young persons or families with children. The least interest in the experience economy may be with the elderly, the poor, the intellectuals and those who feel superior.

## Limitations and further research

A significant limitation of the study was the applied research method. Qualitative research, including FGI, does not allow for testing on representative samples and generalizing the results to the entire population. Based only on subjective statements of a small group of respondents, the study received information on basic topics that should then be explored through the use of quantitative methods.

Another limitation was the selected examples used in the research of M&M's World, Guinness Storehouse brewery and the chain of The Mexican restaurants. The majority of respondents spoke only on the basis of shown pictures and descriptions, which certainly was not the same as participating in actual experience.

The third limitation was the selection of the research sample that was only of big city inhabitants, which could also influence the partiality of the respondents' opinions.

Another limitation was that during the investigation process, there was no possibility to indicate the behaviour of the buyer against the activities applied on the field of

economy experience according to the three main dimensions of attitudes (cognitive, emotional and behavioural). That should be a very interesting topic for future research.

There is no doubt that the time when the investigation was processed is in the distant past but the findings and results of the research enable future exploration of the subject in the comparative system.

Finally, the recommendation for further research is to explore the topic of attitudes towards experience marketing in Poland with the use of quantitative research methods and a more representative sample.

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